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“CRACK IS CHEAPER!” – ESTABLISHED FANFICTION WRITING TRADITIONS
ON THE EXAMPLE OF ‘CRACKFIC’

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

The thesis in hand takes a look at fanfiction from a literary perspective. It analyses a selection of fanfiction works that fall under the category of ‘crackfic’, in order to see whether or not the specific genre or a trope has developed its own methods and traditions of writing, from which it could be inferred that all fanfiction has developed its own methods and traditions of writing.

A condensed introduction to fanfiction and its studies is given in the introduction and theoretical section of this thesis, in order to see what has been done in the field of fan studies so far. That entails the two categorisations of the waves of fanfiction studies done by Bronwen Thomas and Henry Jenkins. Since the empirical section contains the analysis of certain tropes that stand out in fanfiction, a short theoretical introduction to literary tropes is given as well, consisting of a definition, a proposed theory of origin, and an explanation of relevance to the thesis in hand. That is followed by the explanation of the term ‘crackfic’, a discussion on whether it is a trope or a genre, and how it is similar to various understandings of parody.

The empirical section contains the analysis of 12 works of fanfiction termed ‘crackfic’, from various source texts. There, the works are approached from both a stylistic point of view and a plot-related one. The analysis looks for certain themes, tropes and methods that fanfiction writers have used to create their works. Examples are given from texts and analysed.

In the conclusion, the author of the thesis has offered up further subjects of study concerning fanfiction and a more literary approach.

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INTRODUCTION

‘Fanfiction’, as defined by Brownen Thomas, means “stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a “canon” of works; these fan-created narratives often take the pre-existing storyworld in a new, sometimes bizarre direction” (Thomas 2011: 1). Despite the popular opinion that fanfiction is something that was created by *Star Trek* fans and the Internet, it is a phenomenon that has far deeper and complicated historical roots in literary practices. (Pugh 2005: 25) Various opinions and timelines have been presented, both academic and popular, in order to create a detailed understanding of fanfiction, its characteristics and its full history.

It is difficult to ascertain when exactly fanfiction began as a distinguishable phenomenon. There is no agreed-upon timeline when it comes to what we today would call fanfiction and its development. The recounting of fanfiction history usually starts with numerous examples of literary works that employ many of the same tactics that can be found in today’s fanfiction, and emphasising that the originality of ideas has not always been celebrated in literature but rather the skilful imitation of established models. In the 15th century, Robert Henryson was inspired by Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* when he was writing *The Testament of Cresseid* – he took a character from Chaucer’s narrative and expanded on her storyline, complete with an ending. Natasha Simonova has seen Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* and its continuations by various authors in the 17th century as the text that laid the foundations for contemporary fanfiction. Those continuations – supplements, prefaces, dedications, and commendatory poems – took over Sidney’s characters and settings, continued narratives, filled gaps and even reconceptualised narratives. This type of a *post mortem* adoption of a writer’s work clearly illustrates that the authorial monopoly on narratives and characters has not always been viewed as strictly as it is today. (Simonova 2012: para 1-2) Sir John Vanbrugh’s *The*

Relapse contains characters from Colley Cribber's *Love's Last Shift*. Shakespeare and his contemporaries used previously written text for their plots and characters, as there were long periods of time when familiarity with the text was indispensable for the success of a work of fiction (Pugh 2005: 14).

Naturally we cannot draw parallels between fanfiction and every literary work in history where derivative techniques have been used in its creation. To do so would be far too presumptuous and anachronistic, and it would not take into account the shifting nature of literature. Fanfiction today has come to mean something very specific: "writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings and plots generated by another writer or writers" (Pugh 2005: 25). However, those examples mentioned above and countless others, ranging from Aristotle to George Eliot, can be considered a "prehistory of fanfiction". Over the centuries, the views on the relationships between the author, the source text, the reader, the publisher, etc, have changed, and will continue to change; however, the tradition of writing from an already existing source has prevailed rather consistently, albeit in different variations (Jamison 2013: 26-35). Fanfiction simply seems to be another aspect or variation of that tradition.

In the past, writing from a source could mean a host of different ways of writing: it could have meant using a myth, a historical event, an actual person, a fictional character, adding to an existing collection of works from another author, etc. The possibilities were and still are numerous. Fanfiction differs from that kind of writing by immediately specifying its source text. In addition to the wide-spread custom of adding a disclaimer to one's fanwork in order to reference the original text and its owners, fanfiction is written with the clear knowledge and purpose that the text uses established characters and canon (the official source material and all that it contains – plots, events, etc). It makes no effort to stand separate from the material it derives from; on the contrary, knowledge of that

material is of key importance to engaging with fanfiction. Delving into the intricate world the source text has created with purpose, fanfiction interconnects with it by adding narratives for the readers to consume. While all the different methods of using borrowed concepts in literature has yielded innumerable different kinds of literature with derivative aspects, fanfiction has developed its own clear approach.

The origins and influences of fanfiction will probably be debated for a long time, as the understanding and the legal implications of intellectual property keep changing. Nevertheless, fanfiction is most commonly attributed to the 20th and 21st centuries and the Internet era. Most influential fandom and fanfiction studies have focused significantly on science fiction television, *Star Trek* being the most favoured example due to its popularity, as it has inspired massive amounts of fanfiction, which were initially published in fanzines (magazines written by fans), distributed from person to person at conventions, and eventually posted on the Internet. *Doctor Who* was and still is another television series that has inspired massive amounts of fanfiction, not to mention the ‘profic’ that is sold for money. Beyond science fiction, crime series such as *Starsky and Hutch* and *The Bill* have a long tradition of inspiring fanfiction, as do various Jane Austen and Arthur Conan Doyle works.

Fanfiction starts with the act of engagement with a text, be it a book, a movie, a television show, a video game, or something else that grabs a person’s attention. In this thesis, the focus will be on fanfiction that is based on television series, but most of the theoretical claims made can be attributed to fanfiction based on other texts as well. (Additionally, the word ‘text’ will refer to a variety of source materials in the thesis – movies, books, television shows.) The kind of audience engagement that results in the production of fanfiction is far beyond that of average viewers. When the average viewer watches a television show it is a brief experience: when the episode is over, they move on

to other activities. Fans – as fanfiction authors invariable are that – contemplate what they watched much more deeply. They analyse it from various perspectives: the characters, the narrative of the episode, the overall narrative, the themes, the message, etc. It presents the viewers with endless possibilities, and fanfiction writers do not just analyse what they see or read in their heads, they turn it into additional narratives that they share with other fans freely.

As Lev Grossman said in his foreword for Anne Jamison's book *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over The World*: "Writing and reading fanfiction isn't just something you do; it's a way of thinking critically about the media you consume, of being aware of all the implicit assumptions that a canonical work carries with it, and of considering the possibility that those assumptions might not be the only way things have to be." (Grossman 2012: xiii) Writing fanfiction demands critical thinking – in order to write about a source text, one has to understand and comprehend its many details. People do not write fanfiction merely about the texts they blindly adore. Although enjoyment of a text is a big factor in the production of fanfiction, its authors are also often motivated by the ambiguities, shortcomings and problematic issues in original texts. Fanfiction writers unravel and expand upon the ambiguities, they attempt to explain and fix the shortcomings, and they explore and often try to offer solutions to the problematic issues. People who write or even just read fanfiction demand more from the narratives they consume. They are not content with the one possibility they are presented with in a book or a television show – they believe that the narrative in question could expand into much more, and they attempt to prove it. To quote Jacqueline Lichtenberg: "Irked fans produce fanfic like irritated oysters produce pearls." (Lichtenberg 2013: 98)

What is notable about fanfiction is that there is no limit to it: one single problematic episode may inspire thousands of works of fanfiction, all with different approaches and

solutions to a single problem, whether that problem exists in the narrative or in the telling of the narrative. One single author may even write several works dealing with the same issue in completely opposing ways, as they have no obligation to choose one single solution: they may write ‘fix-its’ that solve the undesirable narrative, ‘alternative universe’ works where they change the setting of the narrative in order to explore the characters through a different prism, they may choose to ignore the issue completely or exaggerate it greatly, and so forth. There is no ‘right’ way in fanfiction, only different approaches. It is like an endless book analysis, only instead of a theoretical discussion, the ideas are actualised in fictional form. That, in turn, is read and reviewed by other readers who may or may not agree with those approaches. This is a significant characteristic when it comes to fanfiction – it is written with an audience in mind.

Sheenagh Pugh, in her book *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* distinguished between two motivations for fanfiction authors: they either want ““more of” their source material or “more from” it” (Pugh 2005: 19). In the first instance, the fan audience simply wants additional stories in the same vein as the source text. For them, the number of narratives that comprise the ‘canon’ is too small and they want to read more of the same stories. In the latter case, the original narrative contains unrealized potential that the audience sees and wishes to explore. There is a desire to see more of the world created and the characters that inhabit the source text. These two concepts are naturally not mutually exclusive and one cannot always distinguish into which category any given work of fanfiction falls, as it is often the mixture of both.

Having moved on from the initial message boards and fanzines before that, fanfiction currently occupies many different spaces on the Internet. There are large archives like Archive of Our Own and Fanfiction.net that contain various fandoms, there are fandom-specific archives, many individuals post fanfiction on their blogs, and so forth. Even social

networking sites, like Facebook and Tumblr, have started to create places for it. The platform of Tumblr, in particular, has facilitated the creation of a new type of fanfiction – short works prompted by photosets or GIFsets (computer graphics ending in .gif format). Such fanfiction is not usually too lengthy, a couple of paragraphs usually, and often by someone other than the creator of the graphics, adding to the collaborative effect. In addition, there are innumerable fanfiction recommendation lists compiled for both larger audiences, for individual fandoms and for sections of fandoms, like for certain characters or pairings; there exist writing events with strict deadlines, and there are even fanfiction writing awards that have significant fan prestige, and although winning does not result in a material prize, it does however result in wider a recognition of talent of writers.

The numerous solutions mean that people around the world have mostly free access to the writings of others on narratives they enjoy on a daily basis. The fanfiction that is not immediately accessible does not require monetary submissions for access, but rather demands recognition by the author, as some writers require knowledge or oversight of those who have access to their works. The amount of fanfiction online currently is staggering: Archive of Our Own has reached the one million works signpost and fanfiction.net has well over three million works (Sendlor 2010: para 9). There are innumerable old and new databases for fanfiction, not to mention the endless flow of new works posted online: both with new and current source texts, for example airing shows, and also with older works as people (re)discover them.

Fanfiction has been approached from many different directions: media studies, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, and so forth. However, literary analysis seems to be a rarer occurrence, although not non-existent. For example, Sheenagh Pugh wrote about fanfiction in a literary context a decade ago, and Kristina Busse is currently working on her book *Fanfiction and Literary Theory*. The small amount of research in that area is not

surprising – fanfiction is evolving at an exponentially growing rate, courtesy of millions of writers, and the academics dealing with fan culture studies have not yet studied every aspect of it. In addition, in most academic circles fanfiction so far is still largely considered to be ‘paraliterature’ (Wershler 2013: 368), meaning it is often dismissed as subliterate, pushed to the margins of recognised literature, even though it resembles the “respectable literature of recognized canon” (Baldick 2008). The number of researchers is growing at a steady rate, though, as fan and fanfiction studies are moving out of the margins of society and academia, and integrating themselves into every aspect of our culture and everyday lives, creating interest in academics and non-academics alike.

It is important to look at fanfiction from a perspective that is not immediately connected with the motivations of fans. ‘Why’ people are writing it is a fascinating subject of study, but ‘what’ becomes relevant on its own as well. Fanfiction is creating a space in literature for itself, whether that space can be called a ‘genre’, a ‘subsection’ or something else. Over the years, it has developed a complex system of categorisation for itself as necessity has demanded. For example, fanfiction has created its own division of genres: angst (stories that deal with heavy and depressing themes), fluff (stories that are very light-hearted and sweet), hurt/comfort (stories that contain the physical and/or emotional trauma of one or more character and the subsequent comforting by another character or characters), drama, humour, supernatural, alternate universe, coda (stories that are tied to a particular episode and continue the narrative from it), and so on. Some aspects have been influenced by previous and contemporary literary traditions, like drama, tragedy and humour, others have evolved as aspects unique to fanfiction, for example fluff and hurt/comfort. Length is calculated on the basis of word and chapter counts, not page numbers. It has also created its own division of size: oneshots (single-chapter stories, generally short), multi-chapter, drabbles (100-word stories, although in fanfiction the exact

word count is not always adhered to), ficlets (short stories slightly longer than drabbles), epics (stories hundreds of thousands of words long, sometimes divided into several separate works of fanfiction – much like book series), and so forth.

Fanfiction simultaneously contains many traditional literary tropes, like ‘the Tragic Hero’ or ‘the Big Reveal’ and has created its own unique ones, for example ‘crossover’ (works that combine two different source works, for instance a story involving the interaction between Sherlock Holmes and Captain James T. Kirk), ‘crackfic’ (works that have over-exaggerated and even ridiculous plot devices or narratives) and ‘Mary Sue’ (the over-idealised original character that is usually a representative of the author themselves), although the nature of the latter has become very contested lately. Even tropes have tropes within themselves: ‘alternate universe’ fanfiction has somewhat traditional forms like ‘coffee shop alternate universe’, ‘high school alternate universe’, ‘apocalypse alternate universe’, etc. where the writers take the characters from the source text and place them in a completely different environment. These tropes make sense to experienced fanfiction readers, even when there is no overlap in terms of fandoms. On the other hand, there are also unique alternate universe stories where the author has created a world that constitutes as an alternate universe in a particular source text. For example, the most popular alternate universe trope in the *Downton Abbey* fandom is ‘modern era’ where the early 20th century characters are placed in the 21st century. The possibilities are endless.

All of this innovation and use of older techniques begs the question why fanfiction is not also analysed in the various ways literature is. The aim of the writer is the same in both instances: to tell a story. Whether or not that story is based in a pre-existing narrative makes little difference. The argument that it is easier to write a narrative in a familiar context than it is to create an original one sounds good in theory, however it is difficult to say that the authors of the original text worked harder than the subsequent fanfiction author

who, in addition to creating a work of fiction, had to fully grasp all the concepts, aims and characters that the original work offered in order to create their fanfiction, and do it in a manner that fanfiction readers would also accept as logical and in compliance with their understanding of the canon of the original text. It is all a matter of perspective. Additionally, the question of style is not that easily dismissed either. While it is definitely true that there is a lot of stylistically limited fanfiction out there, and it will continue to accumulate, there is a lot of stylistically well-written and even innovative works created by fan authors. The argument of the lacking professional editorial oversight has become less important due to self-publishing and alternative publishing methods that continue to gain ground, and fanfiction writers themselves have developed an optional editorial force as well – beta readers.

By now, it is dangerous to claim that all fanfiction is bad indulgent writing, because fan culture is no longer an isolated community that does not have a voice of its own. It can even be said that it is becoming a mainstream phenomenon. That in itself does not naturally ensure quality, but it does demand a more nuanced discussion and analysis. The quality of fanfiction ranges drastically and quality is measured by several factors: character accuracy, plot development, grammar, style, etc. Discovering fanfiction for the first time can be shocking for people because they will invariably be confronted with abundant bad fanfiction, because new readers do not yet know how to navigate within fanfiction communities. The examples of bad quality fanfiction have been more memorable for people when there was little understanding of fan culture and its peculiarities. However, now these kinds of statements cannot be made so easily anymore. Fanfiction, like any other kind of literature fills a spectrum of quality. Naturally there is truly awful fanfiction out there – grammatically, plot-wise, etc. The new writers just learning how to write fiction often start out with less than stellar works. But the opposite end of the spectrum there are

writers who write truly well-written stories, well devised, executed and characterised, and the feedback usually reflects just that, and the only reason they are not receiving recognition from outside fan readers is due to the fact that their work is fanfiction, instead of original fiction.

Despite its long historical roots, fanfiction as we know it today – a new form of digital multimodal literature – is fairly young. It has rules and boundaries but they are flexible and have been constructed by those who actively engage with fanfiction. For outsiders looking in, those rules may seem odd or insufficient, but for the writers and readers of fanfiction they make perfect sense. Fanfiction as a literary genre is an interesting amalgamation of long-practiced literary traditions and new rules that have been created according to necessity and imagination or its writers.

The current thesis will take a closer look at tropes, narrative techniques and stylistic choices in fanfiction, how they relate to established writing traditions in original fiction, and what is unique about them in fanfiction writing practices. I will first give an overview of fanfiction studies in the 20th and 21st centuries: what has been done and by whom, based on the division of waves of study by Henry Jenkins and Bronwen Thomas. I will then look at the narrative device ‘trope’, its possible roots and how it has become a very relevant topic in fan works, in particular. Following that I will look at the individual fanfiction phenomenon ‘crackfic’, and how it relates to ‘parody’ in traditional literature in some of its aspects.

The rationale for this thesis is simple: fanfiction is largely uncharted academically as a form of literature, which is not to say that there is no research done in this area. There have been decades of fanfiction studies that have changed directions with new understandings in fan cultures and their works. However, fandom and fanfiction itself moves at a much faster pace than researchers can follow, therefore fan culture and all of its

aspects can be compared to a large puzzle game with most of its sections still missing. This thesis will try to put together one small section of that puzzle. It will forego the issues of legality, ethics and even quality, since they are irrelevant to the current topic, and they have been and continue to be addressed in scholarship. I will instead attempt to prove that fanfiction can be, in many ways, approached and analysed similarly to original works of fiction. For that, I have chosen a trope that has developed into a genre of fanfiction – crackfic. The humorously named phenomenon is a very popular one among fanfiction writers and readers. *Television Tropes and Idioms* defines it as “any story whose premise and events would be completely implausible in canon. These frequently include bizarre settings and explorations of improbable relationships between characters” (Television Tropes and Idioms 2014: para 1). The definition given immediately creates an oxymoronic situation, as it can be seen as both a trope and a genre, a situation which happens in fanfiction from time to time. It is a genre as it is a category under which a certain type of fanfiction falls. However, it is also a trope as terming a certain work of fanfiction ‘crackfic’, the reader will expect the element of the ridiculous – ‘the crack’, as it is.

The trope is paradoxical in essence: it is the easiest kind of fanfiction to write, but hardest to write well. Crackfic is often confused with the trope of ‘badfic’, which is fanfiction that is extremely poorly written, structured, and/or characterised. (Fanlore 2014: para 1) The main goal of crackfic is: the more ludicrous, the better. However, the appreciation of this trope hinges on how believable the author can make a completely ridiculous premise – for instance, Sherlock Holmes materializing on the bridge of the Starship *Enterprise* and becoming the captain. Like with most of fanfiction tropes and genres, crackfic is a wide premise that has infinite possibilities. It may be a funny story that intentionally compiles clichés on top of each other in an attempt at self-criticism towards

one's fandom and their writing practices, or it may turn its characters into unicorns without any rational canonical explanation. It tends to merge and invert many other tropes.

The thesis in hand will analyse a selection of works of fanfiction categorised as crackfic. When choosing the collection of fanfiction texts, I made the selection among those works where the author themselves designated their work 'crackfic', not the readers. All the works are under 10 000 words in length, and have received feedback from its readers. My hypothesis is that fanfiction, studied here on the example of the 'crackfic', is a subset of literature that has been and is currently evolving, both individually and with the guidance of established literary, as a unique phenomenon, with its own narrative and stylistic methods and tropes.

COMBINING FANFICTION STUDIES, TROPES AND PARODY

1.1. Fanfiction studies

Despite being a relatively new area of research, fanfiction studies have already gone through several waves, each of which differs radically from others. Henry Jenkins and Bronwen Thomas have offered up two slightly varying categorisations for these waves. The first wave, according to Thomas (2011), initially adopted the simplistic view, influenced by Marxism, of fan culture as a powerless entity next to the creators and the corporations that held the rights to the characters and narratives fans appreciated and then wrote about. John Fiske's work on the empowering influence of music popstars on their audiences that makes them more active may be considered to be a strong example of the first wave of studies (Thomson 2011: 3).

Thomas's article puts Henry Jenkins, a prominent fan studies scholar, firmly in the first wave, at least in the case of his earlier works like *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (2006), which was originally published in 1992. In his book, he disagreed with the idea of fans as "cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers" who are submissive to the power hierarchy created by corporations. Instead, he believes fans to be "active producers and manipulators of meaning" – 'poachers' and 'renegades' who use their collective power to create different understandings and reworkings of existing texts. He depicted fans as people who are well aware that they have no legal power of their texts of choice but who believe in the freedom of ideas. (Jenkins 2013: 23)

Jenkins saw fans as people who, instead of passively and fleetingly watching a television show, turned it into a participatory experience. He also stressed that this participatory experience is not only motivated by pure enjoyment but also by frustration. At the time, the relationship that fans had with their texts of choice was tentative at best,

because fans were aware that all the rights of the text of choice belonged to the holders of the copyrights. (Jenkins 2013: 23-24)

For Jenkins “fan writers do not so much reproduce the primary text as they rework and rewrite it, repairing or dismissing unsatisfying aspects, developing interests not sufficiently explored.” (Jenkins 2013: 162) He described 10 strategies that fanfiction writers use for writing stories in connection to television series, although they can easily be used for all fanfiction: ‘recontextualization’ where writers fill in the gaps left by the source text; ‘expanding the series timeline’ where fans build up more detailed backstories for characters that do not contradict the established timeline; ‘refocalization’ of attention to non-central characters and narratives as the fans wish to get a better understanding of them; ‘moral realignment’ where the focus is shifted to the morally ambiguous or lacking characters in order to expand their narratives; ‘genre shifting’ where fanfiction authors choose another genre for their works, for example romance fanfiction in a show that does not feature many romantic plots; ‘crossovers’ where different source texts that have no canonical overlap are put together, for example Sherlock Holmes meets Han Solo; ‘character dislocation’ where characters are put into alternate situations, for example, setting Sherlock Holmes in the modern times; ‘personalization’ where fans insert themselves into narratives as characters, which has always been a contested topic in fan communities; ‘emotional intensification’ where the emotional ramifications of the events of the narratives are brought more assertively into the forefront than in the original text; and ‘eroticization’ where romantic and sexual relations are given more attention (Jenkins 2013: 162-174). These strategies summarise a great portion of the fanfiction corpus, although this division may appear too generalizing at times. Often, several strategies are used simultaneously (which changes them), inverted intentionally, or even ignored completely. Jenkins also pointed out that the reason for engaging in fanfiction is not an

attempt to relive the initial encounter with the source text but rather to explore the narrative it provides in various ways, which in turn expands the storyworld for the fan. (Jenkins 2013: 177)

Looking back on the first wave of fanfiction studies as a unit, it has later been seen as far too generalising and the attempt to dispel the negative image of fans has resulted in their over-glorification. Fans cannot be construed as a unified voice but rather a plethora of voices that have opposing perspectives and opinions on anything and everything, resulting in a massive amount of diverse and conflicting fan writings based on a limited amount of source text. (Thomas 2011: 4) The overly defensive stance of the first wave academics is understandable, as they tried to dispel many unflattering myths about fans, fan culture and practices; however, it oversimplified the nature and activities of fans, and failed to portray the actual idiosyncrasies of this subculture.

However, the viewpoints and opinions of academics became more complex and diversified as the second and third waves of fan studies came into existence. The second and third waves were strong reactions to the first wave of theorists, approving some ideas proposed by them and debunking many others. For example, the second wave theorists, according to Thomas, did not see fans as opposing power hierarchies anymore but rather as contributing to their construction and maintenance while still being at a distinct disadvantage. This wave also was greatly a response to the new media forms that provided fans with more varied and improved ways of communication. The Internet allowed for a much varied and massive dialogue between fans, allowing them to exchange ideas all over the world instantaneously. The works of Cheryl Harris and Mark Jancovich are given as pinnacles of this wave. (Thomas 2011: 4)

In Thomas's third wave, the theorists have developed a much more personal relationship with fan culture and they are consciously aware of it. This wave explored how

fan culture is much more embedded in everyday culture than previously thought – fan engagement is seen as an ongoing experience, rather than isolated portions of someone's time and life. Theorists like Matt Hills (2005) and Jonathan Gray (2003) adopted a more critical view of the fan terminology, studies and practices than the previous and more idealistic studies. This wave also argued against the 'low' and 'high' cultures in fan engagements that placed those who appreciated classical music, for example, culturally above those who appreciated science fiction television. The fan engagement is the same across texts and mediums; it is the text itself that has determined what kinds of appreciation is socially acceptable and what is not. This argument is supported by Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst's continuum model of fan involvement, which argues against the notion that if the audience is not actively involved in the creation or presentation of the text, then they are paying insufficient attention to it. They give the example of theatre audiences who give high attention to the performance in front of them, even though they are viewing it passively from their seats (Abercrombie, Longhurst 1998: 54). Attention is also turned towards tensions among fan communities and 'anti-fans' (people who engage with media as passionately as fans but instead of being united in their appreciation of a particular movie or television show, they oppose it and its ideas). Fan writings other than fanfiction, like meta-texts, are also being brought to the forefront (Thomas 2011: 4-5).

Henry Jenkins's division and analysis of fanfiction studies greatly resemble the waves described by Thomas; however, there are some significant points of divergence. According to Jenkins, the first wave was populated by academics who showed no personal connection to their field of study and who consciously tried to distance themselves from the fan community itself in order to give an academically objective analysis. He considers himself to be of the following generation of academics who have the insider's knowledge

of what being a fan and a part of a fan community entails. Coining the term “aca-fen”, he did not believe that being a fan would in any way diminish the validity of the academic research (Jenkins 2006: 11-12). This statement is supported by many fan academics, for example by Gwen Symonds (2003) who argued that a certain degree of involvement is necessary in fan studies. She gave herself as an example: when she was writing an essay about the communication between the fans and creators of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, her own fan experience was irreplaceable as it gave her the necessary context (Symonds 2003: 3). She highlights the fan culture meta-analysis by Matt Hills (2002) which placed fans and academics on a continuum of response text by providing the terms ‘fan-scholar’ and ‘scholar-fan’. Instead of opposing forces, he proposes that fanfiction studies would greatly benefit from academics and fans who familiarise themselves with each other’s works and viewpoints (Symonds 2003: 6).

Interestingly, in Jenkins’s division of fanfiction studies, he placed himself into the second wave alongside Camille Bacon-Smith, who, among other things, wrote about gender politics in fan cultures (Jenkins 2006: 11). Perhaps the divide between Jenkins’s and Thomas’s ideas of the second wave’s relation to power hierarchies and resulting struggles is due to their different categorisation systems, or maybe it actually shows how fan studies became increasingly complicated as they started to portray the conflicting nature of their field of study.

What makes Jenkins’ distinction between the first and second wave of fan studies slightly contradictory is that he stresses the importance of the second wave academics’ personal involvement in their field of study and places Camille Bacon Smith’s *Enterprising Women* (1992) among them, although in her work she clearly distances herself from fan cultures and assures the reader that her personal investment in the subject is minimal. Her focus was on the female-driven fan community and the genre of

hurt/comfort in fanfiction, which in her opinion was the “emotional heart and secret of fandom”. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse later believed Bacon-Smith’s selection of fan works for her analysis to be too limited to have produced any kind of objective universal results and her refusal to place herself within her field of study to have kept her from fully understanding the community itself (Busse, Hellekson 2006: 18-19).

Jenkins’s third wave of fanfiction studies is rather identical to Thomas’s. He sees the evolution of ‘aca-fens’ and academics with personal connections to fan culture as the main characteristic of the third wave. Agreeing with later analyses of the first wave, he admits to having adopted a slightly too utopian view of fan cultures and believes that the previous waves have built up to the possibility of the existence of academics who do not believe there exists a contradiction in being personally involved and emotionally invested in their field of study. The insider’s knowledge is essential to the multi-faceted analysis of fan practices. The lack of contradiction between professional and personal would prevent the academics of this wave from being overly defensive in their work, as there is no need to dispel unflattering myths, which leaves them free to fully address the problems, contradictions and thus far avoided subjects in fan communities. (Jenkins 2006: 12)

Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse’s book of essays *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* reflects the nature and diversity of the third wave of fan scholars rather well. The essays range from the analysis of the context and function of fanfiction to the textual analysis of fanfiction, from the communal nature of fanfiction writers and readers to the opportunities provided to fan culture by the evolution of technology and the move from fanzines to the Internet (Busse, Hellekson 2006: 25-31).

Abigail Derecho (2006) proposes that instead of defining fanfiction as a derivative form of literature, the analysis of fanfiction would be better served if it were approached as ‘archontic’ literature, a term borrowed from Jacques Derrida referring to an archive of

literature that is constantly expanding, building on pre-existing texts and creating new meanings without violating the boundaries of the source texts. Her rationale is that terming fanfiction as derivative creates negative preconceptions beforehand and relegates fanfiction below the original text, even though the word ‘derivative’ implies the intertextuality that fanfiction is based on. Terming fanfiction as archontic literature, in Derecho’s (2006: 61-77) opinion, would better describe how fanfiction acknowledges the infinite number of possibilities that exist within source texts without creating a hierarchy of importance.

Debora Kaplan (2006) looks at the interpretive play between a few select fanfiction works and their original texts by analysing the narrative techniques fanfiction authors used to develop the characters. By choosing characters that were rather simplistically written in their source works for her analysis, she argues that fan works contain “multiple focalizing perspectives” that allow for various complicated character interpretations (Kaplan 2006: 134-151). Narrative techniques allow fanfiction authors to expand characters in ways that remain both true to the characters as portrayed in the source work and yet more fully developed than the source work allowed for. Due to the contradictory nature of fanfiction, only works that portray their characters as multi-dimensional and meticulously written find approval by their readers. Kaplan argues that the interpretative space fanfiction creates for characters shows that despite fanfiction’s seemingly limiting nature for its authors, it actually allows for a multitude of storytelling.

Sheenagh Pugh’s take on fanfiction as a literary phenomenon can also be placed rather firmly in the third wave of fandom studies. Her book was inspired by and based on her own personal experience in various fanfiction communities and that of other fanfiction writers. She looks at narrative techniques, established genres and tropes in fanfiction, the analytical nature of fanfiction, and so forth. The few attempts to homogenise the peculiarities of fanfiction liken fanfiction to classroom creative writing exercises and

historical examples in the beginning of the book are there only as an introductory technique. She analyses how writing with a canon influences the fanfiction writer and points out that it is not very different from an original fiction author who writes for a series or bases their work on particular mythological or cultural knowledge. In Pugh's opinion, the existence of a canon may both help and restrict the fanfiction writer. On the one hand, it is assurance that the fanfiction readers share the writer's knowledge of the source material, dissolving the need for character or universe introductions (Pugh 2005: 32). The author knows that their readers share their interest in the source material and can therefore make intuitive leaps that their readers will understand. However, on the other hand, she points out that "canon is a framework to write against". (Pugh 2005: 40) The more extensive and detailed the established canon is, the fewer possibilities there are for fan writers to explore. It is the unexplored possibilities that invite further narratives. This idea links back to Kaplan's analysis of narrative techniques used by authors to develop characters more fully in fanfiction. The less a character's potential is realized, the more possibilities it affords for fanfiction authors to create their own interpretations.

Anne Jamison (2013) compiles an overview of many approaches to fanfiction: a timeline of the 'prehistory of fanfiction'; detailed histories of various different media fandoms, like *Buffy*, *The X-Files*, *Harry Potter*, etc, and describes how fanfiction has adapted to the digital era. Her collection also contains interviews with both academics and non-academics as well as the adaptation of fanfiction to publishing.

Darren Weshler (2013), writing on conceptual writing and fanfiction, stresses that the two are very similar in essence and at times conceptual writing would have much to learn from fanfiction. In his opinion, the essential action of both fanfiction and conceptual writing is "the ancient trope of *clinamen*: repetition with a slight difference" (2013: 370). While conceptual writing works on the level of context of something being said, fanfiction

works on the level of what is actually being written on said (Weshler 2013: 370). He also shows the similar origin points of both types of writing – the fringes of literature – and their ambivalent relationships with accepted literary circles; as well as the how the growth of networked digital media has contributed to their respective growths and how both have grown out of interpretive communities.

Naturally, there are many fan academics whose studies cross the lines between the waves previously proposed. There are those whose various works fall into different waves, possibly into even all three. As the field of fan studies and the number of studies continue to grow, the more multi-faceted the studies will become.

This short and far from comprehensive summary of the history of fanfiction and its studies shows the way attitudes towards and understanding of fan culture and its various products have changed over the years. Starting from being viewed as obsessive and harmful to subversive and creative, fan academics have evolved as their understanding of this subculture has grown. Fanfiction has been of special interest to academics and non-academics alike, although there has been significant interest in other fan works as well, like fanvideos and fanart. There have been decades' worth of various studies, their topics varying from ethics, legalities to incentives, psychoanalyses, media studies, etc. Often, as many of the previously mentioned works have shown, different topics have been merged. In the case of the topic of interest for this thesis – literary analysis –, the subject is often mixed with media studies, psychology, etc. Much of the attention has been spent of the 'why' when talking about fan culture and its various products: what has inspired fans to something or what has aided them in doing so. However, the products themselves receive much less scrutiny, since they are often considered to be less that authentic than other fiction.

Still largely being seen as paraliterature, fanfiction does not receive much attention from the angle of textual or literary analysis. However, there seems to be an increasing interest in this line of inquiry as well. Thus far, a lot of the writings have looked at fanfiction in the context of a single particular source text or a few select ones, much like Kaplan (2007) or even Pugh (2005). It is unclear whether or not a larger scale analysis of fanfiction from a literary stand-point is even possible, due to the nature and scope of fanfiction itself. Comparing the different approaches and reactions to a single theme, issue or event in different types of fanfiction might not be possible due to its variety of source texts, which already vary amongst themselves. However, it would be fascinating to try. After decades of evolving, spanning thousands of fandoms and several generations of writers, some favoured frameworks and tropes must have emerged by now – something I will attempt to prove later in this paper.

1.2. Tropes

According to Kristina Busse (2009: para 19), the definition *The Oxford English Dictionary* given for the word ‘trope’ – “a significant or recurrent theme; a motif” (Oxford English Dictionary 2014) – is prevalent in narrative theory where tropes provide the reader with a framework of knowledge about what they are about to read. For instance, when a text, regardless whether it is a book, a movie or fanfiction, is described as containing a ‘will they or won’t they’ trope, the audience that is familiar with the trope will know that that particular work will contain a romantic (sub)plot between characters that revolves around whether or not they will engage in a romantic relationship, which they usually do by the end.

In a popular culture context, ‘trope’ can be seen as “a conceptual figure of speech, a storytelling shorthand for a concept that the audience will recognize and understand

instantly” (Television Tropes and Idioms 2014b: para 2). Tropes may range from genre and characters to plot points and even random occurrences. An example of a character trope example is ‘fourth wall observer’ where a character is aware that he or she is a character. This awareness is seen as madness by other characters which may not be an erroneous observation in the narrative itself. In film, this trope has been used in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* and *Whatever Works*. (Television Tropes and Idioms 2014b: para 2)

According to Kristina Busse (2009: para 32-34), tropes can be likened to clichés, as they are similarly rooted in repetition. However, the repetition is not seen as something negative but rather as something intrinsic to the creation and enjoyment of fiction, especially fanfiction. She traces today’s cultural rejection of repetition, which in discourses about fan writings is used as an argument to prove the inferiority of fanfiction, back to William Wordsworth who privileged the originality of authors. Busse points out that literature consists of the amalgamation of repetition and originality – there cannot be one without the other.

Tropes, unlike clichés, are seen as neutral in terms of value, and are, in fact, extremely necessary to writing and reading fanfiction, as well as reading the source text, because fanfiction relies on “a web of contextualised information” (Busse 2009: para 23). In addition to commonly acknowledged tropes, the fanfiction reader is usually presented with a series of other specifications that apply to a particular work before they even reach the text in the form of headers: genre, length, characters, summary, warnings, disclaimers, etc. (Busse 2009: para 21) Most of these specifications are ‘fandom-neutral’ – they do not pertain to the fanfiction of a particular source text but to fanfiction in general. This creates an understanding for the reader before-hand so they can choose whether or not to continue reading. For example, if the reader is not interested in something with a rating higher than PG-13 or a specific romantic pairing, they can use these specifications to avoid works

containing those. In this sense, fanfiction can be much more reader-friendly in terms of surprises. It does not mean that all suspense is removed – plots points are not revealed – but rather it allows the reader to attempt to choose what kind of a narrative they want to read. A good example of this is the warning of ‘character death’ – it has become a well-established tradition in fanfiction that the author mentions if a main character dies in their story. On larger archive sites, these specifications are searchable, if the authors have added specifications, making the sites more reader-friendly. Fanfiction.net applies this as a filter system, LiveJournal and Tumblr have a ‘tagging’ system where these specifications can be either chosen or ignored, and Archive of Our Own utilizes both. Naturally these specifications are not obligatory, however, disclaimers about possibly problematic issues have become signs of a conscientious writer.

Linda Börzsei, analysing the collection of tropes on the website *Television Tropes and Idioms*, traces back the roots of tropes to two distinct theories of the 20th century: Russian Formalism and archetypal literary criticism that emerged in the 1930s. Drawing parallels between tropes and intertextual archetypes proposed by Umberto Eco (1984), Börzsei drew three distinct parallels between narrative tropes and Eco’s intertextual frames – stereotypical situations that come from earlier texts, like a climactic standoff between the Good Guy and the Villain. (Eco 1984: 5). First, both should have a “magical flavour” – it is not something that happens incidentally without meaning. For example, sitting down is not a trope because it is not something that has a specific meaning – everybody does it often without paying special attention to it. Secondly, they should conjure up déjà vu in the reader – when encountering a trope in a certain work, the reader should be reminded of other works that contain the same trope. That repetitive action should never take something away from the experience, however. If it does, it is no longer a trope, but a cliché. Thirdly, tropes or archetypes are not always universal. They are often restricted by time, social

context or even genre (Börzsei 2012: 4). For instance, the ‘groundhog day’ trope is more prevalent in science fiction than it is in period drama.

The clearest origins of contemporary tropes, in Börzsei’s opinion, lie in archetypal literary criticism that came into prominence in the 1930s. It viewed repetitive elements in literature that could not clearly be explained by historical traditions of influences. The many types of archetypes – characters, narrative elements, themes, images – prove the interconnectedness of literature. Individual literary works were studied as parts of the entirety of literary canon. (Börzsei 2012: 6)

Naturally, one Bachelor’s thesis does not make a waterproof theory of origins; however, it does propose an interesting theory of interconnectedness of literary phenomena. Börzsei has come up with a seemingly reasonable connection between two distinct literary theories and a web-based collection of tropes. What makes Börzsei’s hypothesis and claims problematic is the briefness of her analysis. She divides her attention between literary analysis and theorising the way new media with its digital culture may influence literature in the future. While she makes the interesting case that equalising texts by analysing them without making differentiation between them on the basis of their mediums (whether the text is a film, book, video game or fanfiction) is an unavoidable and an enriching consequence of postmodernism, her divided attention to the implication this equalising effect on both literature and new forms of media leaves far too little room for a full analysis.

Nevertheless, tropes help us to see that many writing practices, whether they are narrative-oriented or style-oriented, cross medium borders, which is essential in the production of well-written fanfiction. Additionally, a collaborative effort like *Television Tropes & Idioms* is useful in the effort to ascertain whether some mediums or genres of writing favour certain tropes or even narratives. In the case of a largely unresearched

phenomenon like fanfiction, tropes may be as good as a starting point as any when looking whether fanfiction has developed its own structure of rules, guidelines and traditions.

1.3 Crackfic

Crackfic in fanfiction is a curious phenomenon – there is a certain aspect of exaggeration and intended ridiculousness to it. It often aims to point out common themes, plot holes or character idiosyncrasies in either the original work itself or fanfiction writing practices among particular fandoms. It is often the case that crackfic takes a critical approach to analysis a source text or the fanfiction it generates by picking out common tropes and exaggerating them. For example, if a fandom has developed the tendency to write significant amounts of fan works that overly romanticize and sympathise with a villain that has no actual basis in the original work, then crackfic writers may mirror that tendency by combining the tropes used in such fanfiction in a disproportionate manner plot wise.

The name ‘crackfic’ in fandom was generated from the joking notion that the author must have ingested illegal substances to come up with and write fiction like that. Writing crackfic may at often times be the result of a challenge, due to its outlandish plots and concepts. What constitutes as crackfic in individual fandoms varies greatly: what is crack for crimes dramas and medical series may not be seen as crack to science fiction and fantasy. What constitutes as crackfic in some science fiction texts may not be even close to crackfic in others (Fanlore 2013). For example, for a crime drama, characters having wings, also known as ‘wingfic’, may be extreme suspension of disbelief, but for a text with fantastical elements, for example the television series *Supernatural*, several characters have wings in canon.

From some angles, crackfic can be considered to be both a genre and a trope. It is an entire subsection of fanfiction works, much like angst or fluff is. It spans many different types of narratives. However, it is often discussed similarly to tropes like ‘alternate universe’, as it behaves in a similar manner. The ‘crack’ trope comes into play when talking about specific genres of source texts or even individual fandoms – as previously mentioned, what constitutes as crackfic varies widely. Regardless of whether it is a genre or a trope, crackfic itself exhibits several tropes that seem to be rather distinctive to it, many of which are discussed further down below in this thesis. As already mentioned, ‘wingfic’ is rather frequent, as is ‘mpreg’ where male characters have the ability to bear children. Breaking the fourth wall and metafictionality are rather prevalent in crackfic, especially, since they allow the characters and the text itself to reference to themselves as fictional without contradicting the canon of the source material.

Crackfic often mirrors the characteristics of parody. Over the course of its evolution, parody has held many different meanings and interpretations. In ancient Greece it was defined as comic rewritings and imitations of epic verse works. Aristophanes viewed it as creating comic ‘meta-fictional’ or satiric reworkings of dramatic tragedies. The post-Renaissance period saw many contrasting definitions of parody. Some believed that parody was comic, critical and meta-fictional, exemplifying their definition with *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*. Some understood parody as an inversion of a text that makes it ridiculous in a malignant manner, others believed that it is a criticism of falsity. The late-modern and post-modern definitions of the past 50 years have agreed for the most part that the creation of parody demands critical thinking and understanding of the source material. Michel Foucault saw parody as criticism of reality. (Rose 1993: 280-282)

The post-modern take on parody differs from late-modern interpretations in the sense that it rejects the tendency to reduce parody to either being meta-fictional or comical. The

favoured position of this era of thinkers is that parody is a complex combination of both of those facets, along with their various related forms. Malcolm Bradbury, Umberto Eco and David Lodge saw it as meta-fictional or intertextual with the addition of a comic effect. Malcolm Bradbury has expressed both the meta-fictional/intertextual and the comedic elements of post-modern parody in his fictional and theoretical works. (Rose 1993: 282-283)

Many of these different variations of the definition of parody suggest the different forms crackfic can take. The necessity for understanding the original work is obviously a necessity for writing any kind of fanfiction, not only crackfic. In order to write a derivative text, one has to understand what they are taking on, subverting, criticising or even mocking. Much like parody, crackfic may be humorous and satirical, but that is not always a requirement. The humorous tone of the work may at often times be a side-effect. (Fanlore 2013)

Metafictionality often comes into play in fanfiction, particularly in crackfic. Characters either being aware or becoming aware of their fictional nature seems to be among the favourite plotlines for fanfiction writers. There is a significant amount of fanfiction about actors swapping places with the characters they play and being transported into the fictional world, or simply meeting their fictional counterparts. Other methods of breaking the fourth wall when it comes to characters may include them being written as being aware of their own fictional nature. Their fictionality may be discovered and emphasised by either the characters or by an omniscient narrator, if there is one. Making note of their trademark behaviour and quotations, where the criticism of the falsity may enter, is also a prevalent practice. If a character is considered to be overly unrealistic, for example being accused of being too 'Mary Sue'-like, those attributes might be emphasised and/or questioned. There are also more subtle techniques used in an effort to point out

intertextuality and metafictionality, not only using the voices of the characters but also making subtle and not-so subtle references to the source material in the narrative.

While crackfic may not be the biggest genre or trope in fanfiction, it may very likely be the most demanding in terms of creativity and skill. It demands serious writing about laughable situations without derision. It demands writing critically about the source material without mocking it. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will analyse some common tropes, themes and methods crackfic writers have used while crafting their works.

SOME COMMON THEMES, TROPES AND METHODS IN FANFICTION

2.1 Methodology

This thesis will look at a selection of works of fanfiction that have been categorised as ‘crackfic’ by their authors from the websites Archive of Our Own, Fanfiction.net, A Teaspoon and an Open Mind – a Doctor Who Fan Fiction Archive, and various individual LiveJournal blogs of fanfiction authors. These works were chosen on the basis of their accessibility (the authors posted the texts without any limitations to readership by blocking anonymous readers), the praise given to them by the readers (most of these stories have been included in various ‘recommendation lists’ where fans have collected fanfiction written by others that they have enjoyed and suggest them to others), and their popularity (the works in question have all received significant feedback in various forms: reviews and comments, ‘kudos’ on Archive of Our Own that signify appreciation, and ‘follows’ on Fanfiction.net that signify that the readers would want to be notified if that particular story is ever continued). All the works analysed here are under 10 000 words in length. The original texts they are based on are television series, mainly science fiction: *Stargate: SG-1*, *Stargate: Atlantis*, *Doctor Who*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Torchwood*, *Castle*, *Once Upon a Time*, and a two-part fanfiction series that combines the female characters of several source texts. In my analysis, I will look at their common features and determine what makes those particular works fall under the trope of crackfic, both plot-wise and style-wise. Of course, the commonalities discussed here do not cover all the major commonalities of fanfiction and not even crackfic; there is more to be discovered. Nevertheless, these seem to be some of the more often recurring ones in crackfic in general to the author of the thesis, who has been actively reading fanfiction for nearly a decade.

In order to find common tropes used in these texts, the thesis writer will use the assistance of the website *Television Tropes & Idioms* since it has conveniently named many tropes and genres, and occasionally her own personal experience from continuous contact with fanfiction. The thesis author started her analysis by analysing the texts for tropes and methods that she had encountered repeatedly in fanfiction and crackfic before – references to canon, intertextuality, metafictionality and fantastical elements – all of which were in abundance. That was followed by analysing the texts for additional tropes, methods and themes that existed in several works, despite their different source texts. Finally, some colourful examples of tropes, methods and themes have been mentioned from the selected works, to illustrate the curious nature of fanfiction.

On a technical note, the author of the thesis in hand has numbered works used in this thesis in the list of primary references. Many of these works have been cross-posted on several websites, and some of those authors have used different usernames on those sites. Thus, in order to simplify matters in the following empirical section, only the titles and numbers will be used.

2.2 Plot-driven commonalities

Much like all kinds and genres of writing, fanfiction is characterised by having an endless list of possibilities plot-wise, even though fanfiction is somewhat limited by a pre-existing canon of a source text. Nevertheless, in its particular genres or even in the case of particular source texts, some preferences and tropes become apparent when reading. For example, in the case of source texts where the main characters are any kind of law enforcement personnel, there will invariably be works of fanfiction based on the ‘pretend to be married’ trope where the characters, in order to bring down a sinister plot, pretend to be married, which invariably leads to real romantic entanglements, since the pretend

marriage was a tipping point where they could not hide their romantic feelings towards each other any longer. In science fiction, there will invariably be fanfiction where the characters' behaviour and decisions are influenced by something of alien origin, usually something eaten, drunk or inhaled. Some tropes, themes and methods suit certain source texts or genres of source texts better than they do others.

The analysis of these particular texts revealed a significant reoccurrence of several continuity tropes, fantasy tropes, use of metafictionality and intertextuality, and Internet phenomena. Crackfic tends to rely on popular tropes and even clichés, possibly even more than most other types of fanfiction. As it often veers away from the reality of the world created in the source text, plot-wise, believability-wise or purely by the laws of physics, the writers of crackfic often make the conscious effort to remind the readers that it is still, in fact, based on that particular text. Even though the work of fanfiction might dramatically change the world and its laws set by the canon of the source text, as in *But Where Would They Live* (11), based on *Stargate: Atlantis*, changes the species of the protagonists, it still has to prove that it is using that particular source text as a basis. One simple but effective way is to insert both subtle and obvious references to events that have previously taken place in canon. *Television Tropes and Idioms* has actually named several tropes pertaining to references like these: it is a 'canon call back' when the reference is relevant to the current plot; however, when the reference is simply a passing comment, it is a 'continuity nod'. For instance, *Benevolent Sibling* (5) is wholly based on the *Battlestar Galactica* episode "Final Cut" where a documentary is produced, taking the idea further by using the premise of filming the characters and instead of the villains of the text using it for espionage, as the original episode portrayed it, they are viewing the events as a faux reality television show. There are several references made to plots of previous episodes, characters quote lines or similar facsimiles from the series itself, there are even parts of the

dialogue where character summarise past events, much like a recap of the series up until the point the work is set in the canon of the series. In the case of *Wanted: Human Woman* (9), which has been written for the British science fiction series *Doctor Who*, where many characters are present only for a limited number of seasons, it is clear that it is situated between the third and fourth seasons, as it references to the departure of one main character at the end of the third season and it is clear that the character who appears in the fourth season has not made an appearance yet. In both these instances, it is definitely a continuity call back, since the relevance to the premises and execution of the works are unmistakable. Without those references, the fanfiction texts could be placed anywhere in their respective canons without tethers, which does exist in fanfiction. Even though these texts are not coda works where the aim of the fanfiction is to supplement an episode and finish all incomplete storylines, the works analysed here are dependent on their continuity tropes, since without them those works would lose a significant amount of their interconnectedness to the source text.

Another version of these continuity tropes is the ‘call forward’ which unsurprisingly refers to events yet to happen in canon. *Storybrooke Discovers Fanfiction* (4), which is written about the television series *Once Upon A Time*, does this in a slightly different manner, as it references events that have happened to the characters already and makes similar references to events that have not yet occurred to characters in that particular instance in the canonical timeline. Thus, it provides characters with knowledge of future events, which is caused by breaking down the fourth wall, something discussed more extensively below. The characters discover fanfiction written about themselves that reveal future events for those characters, a trope often used in fanfiction for humorous effect, and those stories involve events they have not experienced yet. This method allows the readers of this kind of fanfiction to pinpoint the exact moment in canon where the story is situated.

Several other works analysed in this thesis contain smaller continuity reference tropes as well, mainly in terms of character placement, since over the course of series, old characters either written out or new ones are written in. Therefore, leaving out certain characters or adding in others sets up a general timeframe for the plot for the fanfiction. Depending on whether or not the fan work's relatedness to a specific event in canon is crucial to the plot, the precision of continuity references varies. Five other works utilize these types of references (3, 6, 7, 10, and 11) with varying degrees of precision.

Even though fanfiction may veer far away from the canon, it still has to be compatible with it to a certain degree, which may be complicated since different audiences already experience the text differently. People prefer certain characters, relationships and narratives over others, and that is visible with both the readers and the writers. Therefore, even though the fanfiction text may make acceptable breaks from the canon, like writing about a relationship that did not exist before, at least in that form, or creating an alternate universe, the writer must still maintain some essential dynamics, in order to make their narrative believable to the readers. For example, in *But Where Would They Live* (11) based on *Stargate: Atlantis*, turns the four human protagonists of the series – two humans from Earth, two from other planets – into various sentient talking life forms that are not sentient in the real world: a unicorn, a rainbow, a breeze and a dolphin. Yet, they all retained many of their characteristics and interpersonal dynamics. The character duos who had more interactions in the source text also had more interaction in the fanfiction text. Even their new forms somewhat corresponded to their positions on the exploration team in the source text – uniquely brilliant and innovative scientist who could solve any problem with no time at all became the unicorn, the peaceful wise warrior became a dolphin who continued to give sage advice to the others and who was in sync with the nature, the volatile yet artistic warrior became the wind who could easily turn into a damaging force, and the team leader

became the rainbow who looked over everybody and who came up with the plan to save the day. Even though the departure from canon may sound ridiculous and implausible, the characters retained their essential features and relationships. Any attempt to change the names of the characters for another four from another source material would fail or would require significant rewriting – the connection to the source canon is tangible.

These types of parallels can be drawn in almost all the works analyses in this paper, except maybe in the case of the crossover fanfiction works (12) and (13), where the characters have not interacted in their source works before, and therefore there exist no previous dynamics. Still, their individual characteristics seem to be present even in these short texts, at least their physical individual specifics are, like facial expressions or behavioural ticks. The voices and behaviour of these familiar characters must be recognisable, or if not, the author must explain that in the narrative, otherwise the readership will not appreciate the work written.

Metafictionality and breaking the fourth wall also seem to be rather prevalent in crackfic, since it allows the writer to change the canonical rules of the fictional universe more than other fanfiction. There are many ways of achieving this, both style-wise and narrative-wise: characters may be aware of their fictional nature from the beginning, characters may become aware of their fictional nature during the course of the narrative, the narrator may make references to it, etc. Some writers use subtle hints to point out the fictional nature of the characters and their lives, others say it outright. All these choices are naturally guided by the plot and the style of the fanfiction itself. For example, in *Wanted: Human Woman* (9), where the protagonist of the series attempts to write a personal add to find a new companion for travelling, the omniscient narrator uses lines like: “Had it been that sort of fanfic, the TARDIS would have smacked her metaphorical head off her own keyboards,” and “His mother, Verity, appeared in his mind and smacked him for blurring

the boundaries of fiction too much,” not only to point out the fictionality of the source text – *Doctor Who* – itself but also to point out the fictionality of the fanfiction written about it. Additionally, it writes the protagonist as self-aware of being a character and the text itself being aware of being a fictional construction. This could be not only considered to be the ‘breaking the fourth wall’ trope but rather the ‘no fourth wall’ trope, since the narrative does not have a revealing moment for its metafictionality. Instead, the absence of the fourth wall is prevalent throughout the text.

The narrative also comments critically on the storylines the series has followed, the limits it has imposed on its characters and the messages it has conveyed over the years, pushing it towards the ‘meta fic’ genre. For example, as the protagonist compiles his advertisement, he struggles with his wording as “he wasn't supposed to be sexist these days. God, things had been so much easier in the old days when everything was in black and white”, referring to the first run of the series from the 1960s to the 1980s, where initially the episodes were in black and white. The protagonist thinks of himself as a character and not as a person. There are also continuous lines where the usual characteristics of many of the female protagonists are summarised and criticised for being too similar, an issue that many of the fans and even the media has discussed rather extensively over the years. These types of comments are usually not inserted into fictional narratives but are rather left for analytical texts, commentaries, reviews, etc.

Characters being aware of their fictional nature in fanfiction does not seem to pose problems very often, at least in the selection of works for this thesis. Except for *Storybrooke Discovers Fanfiction* (4) where the characters are baffled as to why people on the Internet are writing fanfiction about them, and even in that work this creates no existential problems for the characters. In the previously discussed *Doctor Who* story (9), the protagonist had no issues being aware of being a character but rather with what

happens to his storyline. *Fighting Back in Three (or More) Dimensions* (12) and its sequel *The Last Stand of the Morphemes* (13), which have combined the female protagonists from several television and cinematic franchises, have its characters commenting on real life Internet articles that have been written about these characters in particular. The characters seem to be written as completely self-aware of their own existence as fictional constructions, yet having no existential crises concerning that fact, as the following quote from 12 illustrates: “”And what's so wrong about representing an idea?” Helen purses her lips. “A cliché I can understand; they're terrible, absolutely ridiculous things. But an idea? I thought that was part of what being a fictional character was all about?”” The characters discuss a flowchart that was actually posted on the Internet in 2010, where female characters were described in character tropes, as in ‘Team Mom’, ‘Lady of War’, and ‘Wise Crone’. The characters take issue with the distribution of those tropes but have no issue with the underlying fact of their fictional nature. In (13) the characters even comment on how the networks have set rules for the creators of their respective shows and how that affects their ‘lives’. They show both satisfaction and disgruntlement about those various rules, and yet they seem to have no desire to attempt to change the power structures that define their lives as characters. However, they do once again convey significant disgruntlement about the Internet articles they read about themselves.

Intertextuality crops up in crackfic rather often as well. In the two-part series, (12) and (13), mentioned above, the characters discuss real-life Internet articles in a fictional environment about themselves. Also, it is a ‘multiple player crossover, since they combine several fictional universes without favouring any of them. There is no prevalent fictional universe where the stories take place; rather it seems that the characters are transplanted into our real world, as they are aware of their existence and have contact with real-life Internet articles.

Benevolent Sibling (5) involves one group of characters observing another group of characters through a collection of cameras, much like a television show, going as far as giving it a name. The observing characters behave much like the audience of the series itself, commenting on various plot points, rooting for some characters and some relationships, and so forth. The narrative is divided into sections – the observing characters' reactions to what they are seeing, and the characters who they are observing and their actions. Even though the parts concerning the observed characters is written through an omniscient narrator, much like the other sections, the readers still see the fanfiction narrative through the eyes of the observing characters, since their interactions and activities are interspersed throughout the story, colouring the reader's understanding of what happens to all of the characters. The reader might approach both parts of the narrative with equal attention, but the narrative itself is hierarchical, in terms of its characters.

The plot of *A Collection of E-Mails from the SGC Archives (the Wanky Wormhole Remix)* (3) revolves around the fact that some of the protagonists are watching and writing fanfiction about a television series, *Wormhole X-treme!*, that exists within that particular fictional universe and which is a mirror image of the plot and characters of *Stargate: SG-1* itself. The characters argue about the characters of *Wormhole-X-treme!*, the quality of fanfiction being written about it, some actually write fanfiction for it, and passionately discuss what characters should be together or not, bearing in mind that the characters of the television series within the *Stargate* universe are based on the characters of *Stargate SG-1*. This in itself blurs the lines of several layers of fictionality, especially when the characters of *Stargate SG-1* argue about their own fictional counterparts in the fictional series *Wormhole X-treme!*.

In *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (7), based on the television series *Stargate: Atlantis*, includes Elvis Presley and characters from various children's programs, like Mickey

Mouse, Kermit, Miss Piggy. The science fiction series itself told the story of a military and civilian crew finding the lost city of Atlantis in the Pegasus galaxy, where they proceeded to explore planets and civilisations. The fanfiction in question told the story of a world, which had accidentally received television programs from Earth. The locals mistook them for messages from their deities and started worshipping them. In order to solve a hostage situation, the protagonists of the series and the fanfiction had to dress up as various children's program characters, present themselves as those characters convincingly for a culture that had deified them and even appropriate songs to fit their ruse. In order to understand all the references, the reader of (7) should be familiar with those texts referenced in the story, since several explanations of the course events are omitted or shortened in favour of simply referring to the other texts. Additionally, the title of the story is a reference to a movie of the same title, the plot of which is used as a guideline to save the day within the narrative of (7).

Something the author of this thesis did not predict was the recurrent plot device of the use of media and Internet phenomena in this selection. Initially there seemed no resonating cohesion to the application of them; however, considering the likely demographic of the fanfiction authors, these plot devices are not unexpected. It does not even so much concern the idea that a majority of fanfiction writers are under or slightly over twenty years of age, but rather the notion that most fanfiction writers today are consistent Internet users. It is natural that writers of any time period write from the standpoint they are familiar with and about things their lives are filled with; therefore, it is not surprising that fanfiction writers, whose medium for their writing the Internet, attempt to add aspects of it to their works. It is something they are comfortable with and melding fictional universes that may not contain the Internet in the same way in the source text may make an interesting challenge. As exemplified earlier with *A Collection of E-Mails from*

the SGC Archives (the Wanky Wormhole Remix) (3) and also further on in this thesis, the use of email and social media platforms is favoured by many fanfiction authors. These various platforms allow for variety in a genre of writing that in a large percentage uses the traditional prose form. The *Stargate: SG-1* fanwork discussed above uses a compilation of emails traded between various characters, most of them originating from the source work, a couple of them are original characters. *Fighting Back in Three (or More) Dimensions* (12) revolves around a ‘female character flowchart’ to which many characters take offence against, and *The Last Stand of the Morphemes* (13) revolves around an article that named ‘ship names’ – names given to relationships. *Castle Facebook* (8), which is based on the crime drama *Castle* that follows the personal and professional lives of NYPD officers and a famous crime novelist, uses the format of *Facebook* as a medium for storytelling. In *Wanted: Human Woman*, the protagonist attempts to compile a personal advertisement for an Internet website, using contractions and lingo created on the internet, like “BACKSTORY W/EASILY FIXABLE ANGST”.

One unexpected commonality that two of the work of fanfiction in the corpus of this thesis shared was the use of a specific Internet meme, namely ‘lolcats’. The comedic meme was popular a couple of years ago and it is still present in the Internet. It consisted of pictures of kittens where various texts were attached, all written in incorrect English. The meme even received academic attention, as in 2011 a Master’s thesis was written about the linguistic rules that actually governed the language of the meme (Lefler 2011), and in the same year another Master’s dissertation discussed how participatory media has contributed to the popularity of memes like this (Miltner 2011). The use of ‘lolcats’ in fanfiction, especially in *The Saga of Anubis (Or, How Daniel Jackson is Followed By a Kitten)* (6), which is based on *Stargate: SG-1*, and *Trying to Communicate* (10), which is based on the British science fiction series *Torchwood*, seems to be for comedic effect, as the cats have

been written as actual living cats who speak in linguistically incorrect English. It should be noted that both of these shows are science fiction in terms of genre and the possibility of the existence of these animals are attributed to alien influences, which is not outside the realm of possibility within the canons of those particular shows. Nevertheless, these two works require the reader to suspend their disbelief in order to enjoy the work. Even though the genre of the source text has not dismissed the possibility of these narratives, the canon of those sources does not state the possibility either. This common plot device is not specifically characteristic of crackfic but rather an interesting illustration of the nature of crackfic, and in fact all fanfiction. It illustrates that fanfiction writers prefer to limit their limitations – even though they write within a set of rules like the canon, there are no creative restrictions.

As already exemplified above, crackfic can take many forms: some vary slightly from the canon of the source text, and others stretch the readers' ability to suspend their disbelief. When talking about uncanonical but not canonically impossible life forms, then the addition of magical elements into fanfiction works should also be mentioned. If the original work is already science fiction or fantasy, then the magical or fantastical elements are radically different from the ones that exist in that world. Magical creatures seem to be of particular interest to writers. *But Where Would They Live* (11), based on *Stargate Atlantis*, has changed all their protagonists into other forms of life, including a unicorn, without any explanation as to why. *One Day in Cerulean Township* (2), based on *Firefly* that, despite being set in the future and in space, involves no non-human life, depicts unicorns and dragons without any arguments from the characters, even though according to the canon of the text, no such beings exist. This is exactly what crackfic is famous for – making a plot point that is unbelievable and seems impossible to execute and succeeds in convincing the reader of its believability.

2.3 Style-driven commonalities

When analysing the fanfiction texts for any commonalities in style, some similar tropes and methods were also apparent. Although a larger part of the texts were written in the traditional prose form (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), there were three texts that differed. That was not unexpected as crackfic often takes more risks than other types of fanfiction. The use of significant and unique vocabulary and constructions taken from the source text was noticeable, and so was the transference of canonical character traits from the visual medium to the written one.

One significant stylistic aspect in writing fanfiction, not only crackfic, is the mirroring of accents and speech patterns or characters that are present in the source text. It is easier to do in the instances when the source text is consumed in the written form by its readers, like a book or a graphic novel, as there are clear examples written down. There exists a need for translating those idiosyncrasies, as there is no change from one medium to another. However, in the case of films or television series, where mediums do change from the visual to the written, it may require significant skills of observation, access to actual scripts, some linguistic knowledge or contact with people with either of those characteristics, for example other fanfiction writers in the same fandom.

Some source texts require less linguistic knowledge and more meticulous observation of the characters' mannerisms and ways of expressing themselves, in order to accurately transfer the characters in the source material to the characters in the works of fanfiction without changing them. This may mean noticing the style of vocabulary a character favours, their sentence structures and even their pauses. In the case of characters who have signature sayings or mannerisms, the danger lies in the overuse of them in fanfiction by authors who try to mimic the characters in their own work too excessively. In an effort to make the characters instantly recognizable in their own work, they may make

them far too one-dimensional, stressing only their signature behaviour and failing to create multi-dimensionality in them. This danger seems to be less present in crackfic, possibly due to the fact that crackfic tends to play on those exaggerations and uses them with relish, in an effort to be critical, humorous or even both simultaneously.

For example, in *The Saga of Anubis (Or, How Daniel Jackson is Followed By a Kitten)* (6), which is based on the television series *Stargate SG-1* in which the alien character Teal'c is often laconic, serene, repeats the word 'Indeed' and is famous for his silent eyebrow raises, the writer uses those characteristics in order to create humorous moments: "At first Teal'c looks bewildered (eyebrows at position 5). Then he looks angry (eyebrows position 1)." This is accompanied by the use of similar dialogue that is present in the source text itself, for both this character and others, in varying degrees. He is not the focus of this fanfiction and appears only for a limited time, therefore, the author chose to comment only on his more recognisable lines and behaviour. In *Benevolent Sibling* (5), a character who in the original text often spoke in cryptic manner of a divine plan, does so in an exaggerated manner: "Silence is the mirror through which the fractal raindrops of the universe can be glimpsed". Additionally, quotes that appear repeatedly in the source text, uttered by many of the characters with different purposes, are used for humorous effects, in order to emphasise the ridiculous tone and plot of the particular work of fanfiction.

The use of similar dialogue and speaking patterns becomes more complicated when the characters have certain dialects, especially if those are partially realistic and partially fictional. The series *Firefly* made use of both American southern dialects and of Chinese, the combination of which created unique voices for the characters. For example, in *One Day in Cerulean Township* (2) lines like: "Gorrammit. Yer right, Mal," and "You ain't keeping them things" attempt to mimic the speech patterns of cowboy-esque characters. If these lines of dialogue were written in correct General American, without marking the

accents, the characters would most likely sound inauthentic and foreign, as some of the characters are written as rough around the edges and using many colloquialisms, while other characters were presented as very refined and calculated in their speech. The colloquialism-filled lines therefore cannot be written in a correct manner, since the reader would most likely sense a discord between the character they know from the source text and the character as they are presented and characterised in that particular fanfiction. Even lengthy descriptions of their manners of speech would fall short without the support of the dialogue.

The use of fully fictional languages and vocabulary is also a point of importance when writing fanfiction for a source text that makes significant use of them. In the case of texts that are based solely on one single source text, it emphasises the reality of that world: in the case of *Battlestar Galactica* works, like (5), the use of the curse word ‘frak’ and its variations instead of the alternate vocabulary that our English uses is important. In fanfiction that combines several sources, the use of these particular words helps to emphasise the world a particular character came from while uniting several different worlds. For example in *Fighting Back in Three (or More) Dimensions* (12) and its sequel *The Last Stand of the Morphemes* (13) that combine several different source texts, including the science fiction show *Farscape* that, similarly to *Firefly*, used made-up vocabulary to emphasise the alien aspect of the plot and to mask the profanities, the characters’ lines include those particular vocabularies to distinguish their origins from the other characters: “dren”, “frell”, etc. Similarly, the character from *Battlestar Galactica* repeatedly uses the word “frak”. This type of vocabulary is usually used to substitute profanities in order to avoid censorship, especially in science fiction or fantasy. These are usually classified under the ‘unusual euphemism’ trope but the use of them once again falls

under continuity nods. They are not essential to the fanfiction narrative itself; however, they do create a more substantial connection to the source text.

When it comes to style, crackfic is sometimes written in some other form than the usual prose text. This may mean that it is written in verse, in form of newspaper ads or articles, emails, message board posts, etc. For example, the *Stargate SG-1* fanfiction *A Collection of E-Mails from the SGC Archives (the Wanky Wormhole Remix)* (3) consists entirely of email exchanges between several characters. There is no omniscient narrator, which is not odd in itself; however, it does mean that the reader must glean from the emails what has transpired, how the characters have reacted to events, etc. This is essentially pure dialogue. In types of fanfiction like this, the knowledge of canon is extremely important, as the reader must use their knowledge of the fictional universe and characters to ascertain what the characters' emotions and actions are. The reader has to be familiar with the characters' voices as they are to understand whether they are being earnest or sarcastic, serious or humorous, praising or mocking, and so forth. Something said by one character in earnest may have a sarcastic undertone if it were uttered by another character, even if the textual contexts were to be identical.

Another lately popular form of writing crackfic is the use of social media platform as a template, for example Facebook and Twitter. Fanfiction is written in the format of those websites as extensively as the usual text format allows. Lately there has been a rise in creating mock Facebook wall screenshots for characters where their personal lives are extrapolated to status changes; however, this is more of an Internet meme than a method used in fanfiction. *Castle Facebook* (8) is compiled entirely of status changes across the Facebook profiles of all the main characters. The characters write status updates, 'like' posts on other people's walls, comment on posts, make relationship status changes, etc. — mirroring the activities of real life people while using Facebook. Unlike the actual website,

none of this is interactive for the readers; however, the Internet would allow for interactivity in fanfiction as well, if the website had specific formatting options. The following quote shows the manner in which the work of fanfiction mimics the format of Facebook, complete with the bolding of names in status posts, and italicising the time stamp, the 'like' button and the names of the people who have 'liked' a particular post:

Richard Castle is now friends with **Kate Beckett, Kevin Ryan, and Javier Esposito.**
37 minutes ago *Comment Like · Kate Beckett, Kevin Ryan, and 3 other people like this*
Javier Esposito · Hah! I can stalk you now!
35 minutes ago Like · 2 people like this

This kind of fanfiction tells a story like any other form of fanfiction, albeit in a different, tightly condensed manner. It describes events mainly through actions and forces the reader to figure out how these events came to pass, how characters reacted and what they might have felt. This is also somewhat similar to role-playing games in fandoms, where fans assume the roles of the characters and tell a story by acting it out on the Internet.

Continuing in the vein of the different forms crackfic occasionally takes, there are many genres in fanfiction that have a significant amount of them written in verse: angst and drama usually contain attempts at dramatic poetry, humour receives haikus, limericks, song lyrics and also poetry, and there are many other permutations. Crackfic also has many humorous poems, songs, and even attempts at mimicking the language and style of past eras or writers. For its illustration, the selection of works unfortunately contains only one example and it is a rather unique one. *Le Roman de la Starren, or The Evil Ex-Boyfriend's Tale* (1) is written for the British science fiction show *Doctor Who*, consisting of two columns of verse: one written in an attempt to mimic Middle English literary canon, particularly the West Midlands dialect, and the other is the Modern English parallel translation, so to speak.

A man ther was abroghd in myn countree,
 Who spek of Lofe from his auctoritee
 And whan, at Inne, was plyed with mede,

There was a man travelling in my country,
 Who spoke of love from his own knowledge,
 And after having become drunk at an Inn,

Strokinge much his berde, did procede
 To speke of an Maistre, a bourd,
 Forsooth he was thisse: an Tyme Lourd.

Stroking his beard all the while, started
 To speak of a Master, a dissolute person,
 Indeed he was this: a Time Lord.

The author assures the readers that the Middle English verse is by no means linguistically accurate, but rather an attempt to mimic the language and verse style. The use of (faux) Middle English alludes to the fact that the source text involves copious time travel, thus allows for the author to mimic the style and language of the era and making it relevant to the plot, as it actually set in the 15th century. Therefore, the possibility of the creation of such verse is not canonically impossible for this source text.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed the cultural and literary relevance of fanfiction, and yet it has barely scratched the surface. Fanfiction is a phenomenon that keeps growing, expanding and morphing at an exponential rate. It is widely agreed that it grew out of literary history, although when and how is still being debated. Fanfiction has been dismissed as theft, mocked for its derivative nature, and finally somewhat accepted due to its creative and unrelenting nature. Despite that grudging acceptance that it is slowly gaining, fanfiction is still widely unresearched, especially from textual and literary perspectives, which is mainly due to it being dismissed as paraliterature.

The thesis in hand attempted to prove that fanfiction has developed into its own form of literature, by looking into a collection of texts that fit a certain criteria – crackfic – and looking for common tropes, themes, methods and even genres in order to point out that if fanfiction has established its own norms and writing tropes already within a very tight set of specifications and uses them concurrently with several significant literary genres and methods, then it must stand to reason that fanfiction on a larger scale has done the same, and cannot therefore be easily dismissed as entirely unliterary. It shows that there is more to research in fanfiction than the ‘why’ – the ‘what’ is also worthy academic scrutiny.

The trope of ‘crack’ means that the fanfiction in question has an aspect of ridiculousness to it and requires the suspension of disbelief. Crackfic is a subjective term, since it relates firmly to the genre and style of the source text. The works selected were written mainly for science fiction and fantasy texts, the narratives of which would already account for crackfic for many other more realistic texts. Yet the stories selected were ‘crackfic’ even for science fiction. They contained dragons, lolcats, alien cultures, characters discovering and writing fanfiction about themselves, appropriations of Middle

English, the use of Facebook formats and so on. Despite all these differences in plot and style, some commonalities still emerged, which the author of this thesis predicted.

In terms of both plot and style, there was a significant presence of tropes that create links between fanfiction and its source material. Characters were written with familiar traits and behavioural ticks, often those aspects were greatly emphasised for humorous purposes, although in other types of fanfiction that would be seen as a tedious cliché. Crackfic also makes frequent use of characters' trademark speaking mannerisms or quotes, without the same fear. If a source text has a very specific vocabulary or even an invented one, it was used in order to stress the reality of that universe. Familiar interpersonal relationships were maintained in many cases, as there were no significant romantic shifts in terms of writing relationships that did not exist in the source material. Many references were made to events that take place in the canon of the source texts, both relevant to the plot and merely cursory.

Metafictionality and intertextuality were pervasive throughout all the works, although in differing forms and levels of intensity. The adding of metafictionality and breaking the fourth wall are popular tropes in fanfiction, and especially crackfic, which was achieved in several different ways in these works. Characters were either aware of their fictional nature or they became aware during the course of the fanfiction narrative, yet it never caused any existential issues for them. Also, references to the fictionality of the text itself were made quite often and in different manners. As fanfiction thrives on intertextuality, it was present in a significant number of text analysed in this thesis as well.

Crackfic is also famous for its fantastical element. There were several stories from different source texts where imaginary creatures were featured – dragons and unicorns seem to be special favourites. Talking animals made several appearances in several texts, although they were of different origins and reasons. Despite those varying backstories, the

existence of those life forms was never questioned in the narratives, even though they went against the canons of the source texts.

Another interesting facet that became apparent in this collection of works was the use of Internet phenomena. Internet platforms like Facebook and emailing services were utilised – their formats were used to tell the story. That meant that the more popular omniscient narrator was discarded in favour of more condensed versions of story-telling, in either email-form where the characters had complete control over the narrative told or in the manner of Facebook walls where the narrative was told through messages, actions and comments.

Having already mentioned the issue of style, there was also an example of fanfiction written in verse form, although instead of the more popular option of song lyrics, an estimated version of Middle English with a simultaneous Modern English translation was used to tell a fanfiction narrative. Curiously enough, the style of the story was compatible the canon of the source text.

Even though this was a relatively short and limited analysis of a very large subject, the hypothesis set in the beginning has found legs to stand on. The tropes, themes and methods analysed in this paper do not necessarily apply to all fanfiction, although intertextuality and the use of canonical material do seem very likely, from this analysis, it can be said that fanfiction has developed at least some established writing traditions in its evolution.

All of this brings up the question of why is this important. Firstly, it is high time to start paying attention to what and how fanfiction authors are writing. There are already millions of writers who engage in the same category of literature and yet what and how they write are overlooked in favour of questioning why. Secondly, it shows that fanfiction is lawless in terms of its creation, lacking in quality or effort put into it by the authors, or

that it has less value than other types of literature. Thirdly, it exemplifies that fanfiction has an internal structure, in terms of genres, tropes, methods, themes, and also within all those aspects. Not only are different genres distinct from each other in many aspects, they are internally structured with the help of specific methods and tropes, like the ones presented in this thesis.

One of the main limitations of this study was the length of the thesis – a more in-depth study might reveal more. The study could be developed in either the direction of quantity where a more statistical analysis on the presence of certain themes or tropes. Also, a more in-depth literary analysis might reveal more if the fanfiction and source texts were analysed more extensively.

Fanfiction is naturally a rich field of study. Much work has been put into understanding fan culture itself, the motivations of fanfiction writers, how fanfiction changes storytelling and the ownership of ideas. However, more extensive textual and literary analyses would be interesting as well. Different genres of fanfiction could be looked into – how they are written, how different source materials change how fanfiction is written (e.g., books and video games), whether fanfiction about original texts of different mediums varies in any manner. Additionally, more in depth look into various specific fandoms might be interesting – analysing how fan writers and readers of a specific text utilize those texts for fanfiction, what topics and characters are put into focus and why? There is an endless list of things to study in fanfiction, and the author hopes that future fans and academics will do just that.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

Liisbet Eero

“Crack is cheaper!” – Established Fanfiction Writing Traditions on the Example of ‘Crackfic’

“Kräkk on odavam!” – Fännikirjanduses kehtivad kirjutamistraditsioonid *crackfic*’i näite abil

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Annotatsioon:

Selle töö eesmärk on uurida, kas fännikirjandusel on välja arenenud iseloomulikud meetodid, teemad ja troobikasutus. Selleks on valitud üks tüüp fännikirjandust – *crackfic* – ning on kogutud selle all kategoriseeritud tekste analüüsiks, et neist otsida ühiseid jooni, olenemata algtekstidest. Töö teoreetilises osas võetakse kokku fännikirjanduse ja selle uuringute ajalugu, vaadatakse lähemalt troope kirjanduses, ja võetakse kokku, mis on *crackfic* ja kuidas see on seotud paroodiaga.

Empiirilises osas analüüsitaks 12 fännikirjanduslikku teksti erinevatest algtekstidest ning otsitakse ühiseid teemasid, meetodeid ja troope. Analüüsist tuleb välja nii metafiktsionaalsust, intertekstuaalsust, algtekstidele viitamist ja tsiteerimist, püüdeid sisse jätta tähtsaid aspekte algtekstidest, Interneti fenomenide kasutust, fantastilisi elemente ja proosale alternatiivsete tekstivormide kasutamist.

Märksõnad:

Fännikirjandus, troop, *crackfic*, kirjandus, teema, meetod, žanr, metafiktsionaalsus, algtekst.

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

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