Fifty Shades of Remix: The Intersecting Pleasures of Commercial and Fan Romances

Katherine Morrissey

Abstract: *Fifty Shades of Grey's* past as a work of *Twilight* fan fiction has turned a spotlight onto the conversion of fan works for the commercial romance market. *Fifty Shades* reminds us of the increasing flow of texts, readers, and writers across these two categories of storytelling. Blurring traditional genre categories, stories like *Fifty Shades* represent a challenge for fan and popular romance studies. While scholars need to be attentive to medium specific contexts, the impulse to deny intersection may signal problematic assumptions and artificially segregate these storytelling forms. This paper reexamines past work on the differences between fan fiction and romance, arguing for greater attentiveness to the ways these two modes of storytelling intersect. Focusing on the importance of intertextuality and play with form in romantic storytelling, the paper argues that greater attention to these qualities offers new ways for us to study texts like *Fifty Shades of Grey* and may help scholars reconceptualize the relationship between fan and commercial work.

About the Author: Katherine Morrissey is a PhD Candidate in Media, Cinema and Digital Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and has a Master's in Communication, Culture and Technology from Georgetown University. Her research interests include digital and participatory culture, genre, and depictions of gender and sexuality within popular media. Katie also has professional experience in communications and marketing, as well as web and graphic design.

Keywords: digital culture, digital writing, erotic romance, fan fiction, fan studies, fifty shades of grey, intertextuality, media studies, popular romance studies, Slash

The commercial success of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* books has prompted an outpouring of media coverage on the trilogy and its rapid success. Much of this coverage has focused on the idea of "mommy porn" and the notion that not only do female readers seem to enjoy erotic literature, but there is also potential for making money off this trend. For readers of all kinds of romantic fiction, however, this news is neither particularly

shocking, nor, in any way, news. What may be of more interest to many romance readers and scholars are, instead, the origins of *Fifty Shades*, and the fact that the series has made the move from a not-for-profit piece of *Twilight* fan fiction to a set of commercial books. *Fifty Shades'* history and success marks an opportunity for fan studies and popular romance scholars. This is an occasion to revisit past conversations regarding the connections and disconnections between romantic fan fiction and commercial romances.

Past explorations of fan fiction as romance have often focused on the categories of het (male/female relationships) and slash (male/male) fan fiction. This work often either categorizes fan fiction as a type of romance writing, or works to mark out boundaries, separating fan fiction and romance into two different storytelling types.[1] *Fifty Shades* refuses such clear categorizing. In its transition from a lengthy work of fan fiction titled *Master of the Universe* by fan writer Snowqueens Icedragon to the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy authored by E.L. James, *Fifty Shades* blurs the lines between fan work and commercial fiction, amateur and professional, as well as the romantic and the erotic.[2] *Fifty Shades* compels us to look beyond taxonomic mappings of what does or does not constitute romance. The series reminds us that the differences perceived between categories can be shaped as much by networks of production and distribution as they are by story content.

With these themes of intersection and blurred boundaries in mind, I want to use the grey-ness of *Fifty Shades* as an opportunity to explore the connected pleasures that fan and commercial romances bring to their readers. First, I will review some of the concerns raised regarding the reconfiguration of fan work for the commercial market. Next, I will turn to past scholarship on the similarities and differences between fan fiction and commercial romances, discussing the challenges faced by scholars exploring these different modes of production. Finally, I will outline the importance of play with form and intertextuality across fan and commercial romances, emphasizing the significance of these elements to readers' pleasure. While scholars need to be attentive to disciplinary concerns and medium specific contexts, the impulse to deny intersection and to quickly apply labels like "original," "derivative," and "formulaic" can signal problematic assumptions and artificially segregate certain storytelling forms. As Abigail Derecho argues, "[t]o label [a] genre of fiction based on antecedent texts 'derivative' or 'appropriative' then, throws into question the originality, creativity, and legality of that genre" (64). These terms reinforce stigmas long connected to women's authorship and reading. In exploring intersections between fan fiction and commercial romances, new opportunities emerge to explore the ways that romantic storytelling is working within and against social norms and testing new possibilities for the representation of relationships and desire.

Reacting to *Fifty Shades*

For many readers and writers of fan and commercial romances, the repackaging of works of fan fiction as commercially sold texts is seen as a growing problem or threat to their reading experiences. While *Fifty Shades* has gained notoriety as a media event, it represents neither a first incident nor an isolated one. As digital publishing opportunities expand, a growing amount of stories and authors are moving from non-commercial fan

spaces into digital-lit markets. This movement is facilitated by increased opportunities for self-publishing as well as a growing digital publishing industry. Recently, Amazon.com has even taken steps to get involved in this trend, marketing their new Kindle Worlds service as a self-publishing platform for authorized works of fan fiction.[3] Readers and writers of commercial romances and fan works are observing these trends and wondering what *Fifty Shades'* success may signal. *Fifty Shades* has offered these two communities an opportunity to discuss this type of crossover literature. In spaces like Dreamwidth, LiveJournal, and Tumblr, many fans have posted their reactions to the *Fifty Shades* series and its success. There have also been lengthy discussions on popular romance blogs like *Smart Bitches Sexy Books* and *Dear Author*. These discussions have raised questions regarding the ethics of converting fan fiction into a commercial product and the impact this may have on fan communities. Discussion has also focused on aesthetics and the perceived quality of fan work, fan fiction's legal status, and whether something like *Fifty Shades*, a story that began as fan fiction and has been converted, qualifies as "original" work.

For many fans, the monetization of fan work has often meant a fan author "pulling to publish": removing their writing from the community, deleting files on fan archives, and erasing as much of the work's history as possible on fan websites and archives. Since fan fiction is generally produced within a community setting, pulling creative work from this setting is viewed negatively by many fans. The processes of both production and reception for fan works are highly social and the stories are often perceived as part of this larger community network, a network of exchange built around themes of sharing and giving, rather than profit and commerce (De Kosnik; Hellekson). Fan work is also particularly intertextual. Fan fiction writers use their fandoms as common frames of reference and extrapolate on these frames as they develop their own interpretations of settings and characters. This intertextuality goes beyond the relationship between the fan work and the source text it responds to and encompasses social relations between fans. As Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse explain:

> [b]y definition, fan fiction is in intertextual communication with the source text; however, in practice, it also engages with a host of other texts, be they clearly stated requests [from other fans], shared interpretive characterizations, or even particular instantiations of the universes that the fan writer chooses to expand upon. (199–200)

Fan writers utilize and comment on these broader community ideas, critiques, and interpretations, adding to them with their own writing. Stories in this network influence and rub up against each other, feeding into a broader community dialogue around characters, narrative choices, and various potentials within different story worlds. Removing a particular story from this network threatens the gift economy through which fan networks often operate.[4] It erases a social history, moments of conversation, and moments of pleasure from a particular network of fans.

For readers of commercial romances, the repurposing of fan fiction stories into commercial ones is becoming increasingly visible with the growth of digital publishing, particularly within the category of m/m romance. The reworking of stories without disclosing their origins is sometimes framed by romance readers as a form of deception or a kind of cheating. (An allegation that implies fan authors are simply repurposing other

people's ideas and labor without putting in much work of their own.)[5] This sense of deception may arise simply from a reader's desire to know the history of the manuscript. However, a sense that the author is cheating can also reflect a deeper ambivalence regarding the very process of fan production itself and whether that process constitutes original work or, indeed, any work at all. While fan work has become more visible as a social practice in recent years, fans' creative practices remain contested and debated. Fan work challenges traditional notions of authorship, ownership, and labor practices around creative production. In this way, fan work and the blurring of romance and fan fiction as writing categories may also serve as a threat to readers and writers of commercial romances. In a community that is so often told by society that romance is not real literature and where romance authors are often perceived more as hobbyists than authors, the prospect of being connected with the proudly unprofessional world of fan fiction may spark understandable concern.

Just as commercial romance readers and writers are concerned about larger public perceptions of romantic literature, fans may also be uncomfortable with their work being associated with romance. (The history of this in fan scholarship will be discussed further in the next section of the paper.) It is important to remember that here too, there is a community reacting protectively against larger public perceptions. Fan practices are often characterized as obsessive, frivolous, and aberrant in ways strikingly similar to the ways that commercial romance reading practices have been positioned.

Stigma around romance and fan writing is part of a long legacy of public concern around women's writing and reading practices. Concerns about women's reading and writing have come from many different directions, conservative and liberal, academic and cultural. As Joan Hollows explains, due to the genre's association with women, "[m]any literary critics [have] regarded romantic fiction as the ultimate example of the trivial" (68). Romance has also been positioned as work "produced for mindless, passive consumers" (Hollows 68). Similar concerns have been raised regarding fan fiction. Discussing the ways shame operates in many predominantly female fan communities, Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen note that there is a "cultural fear of female sexuality which sometimes lies beneath criticism of female fan behavior" (60). In particular, Zubernis and Larsen observe that cultural discourse around "the 'wrong' kind of desire is powerful… and is an integral part of the cultural containment of female desire in general" (60).

The public nature of *Fifty Shades'* success and the equally public media debate over the "threat" BDSM content might represent to susceptible (i.e., female) readers has brought both fan fiction and romance into the spotlight again, reactivating many conversations about the relationship between these two modes of writing. Of course, the reactions and concerns described here do not reflect the views of all fan or commercial romance readers. More importantly, while here these reactions have been organized as emerging from two different writing and reading communities, the reality is that there is also a great deal of crossover between these spaces. Many fans of romantic stories read both fan fiction and commercial romances. Although there are differences between fan fiction stories and commercial romances, the success of *Fifty Shades* reminds us that stories, readers, and writers are flowing across these community boundaries.

Romance(s): Problematizing the Slash/Romance Binary

Scholarship examining the relationship between fan fiction and commercial romance has a tendency to either rapidly align the two modes of writing and move on or position them in opposition to each other. More often, the tendency has been to focus specifically on one category of fan fiction, slash, contrasting the m/m relationships found in slash with the traditionally m/f world of commercial romances. This approach excludes het fan fiction and tends to footnote femslash (f/f relationships) entirely, dismissing it as a smaller and less relevant fan fiction category. As Laura Kaplan describes it, "[t]he comparison usually carries with it a whiff of scorn for romance, if not for slash. Romance, it is to be understood, is a simplistic and static genre… slash fiction is either more of the same or is essentially the same but somehow improved" (121). This history sets up problems for scholars interested in exploring *Fifty Shades* and its position within both fan and commercial spaces. *Fifty Shades* began as *Masters of the Universe,* a lengthy piece of fan fiction connected to *Twilight*, a young adult paranormal romance series. As *Masters of the Universe*, it explored and reworked Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, adding more sexually explicit content and investigating the power dynamics of Bella and Edward's relationship in *Twilight* through the context of a fictional BDSM relationship. Later, as the commercially sold *Fifty Shades* series, the same content was repackaged with new character names and sold as a boundary pushing erotic romance. Where do we place such a story? Do we analyze it only as fan fiction? Do we ignore the text's ties to *Twilight* and focus more on the ways that *Fifty Shades* pushes at the boundaries of erotic romance? In order to better understand a text like this and the intertextual moves it makes, we need to revisit past scholarship and investigate some of the assumptions made regarding the relationship between romance and fan fiction.

Many early pieces of scholarship on fan fiction and romance seem overly focused on answering the question: Why would women want to read *that*? Often making problematic assumptions about what "that" is. Working in a variety of disciplinary fields, scholars often use terms like romance, pornography, and genre in ways that do not cleanly intersect, frequently causing communication errors. More recently, however, there has been a great deal of popular romance scholarship calling attention to the problems inherent in defining a single universal type of romance. Similarly, in fan scholarship, others are calling for a reconsideration of the slash/romance binary. As popular romance studies emerges as an interdisciplinary field looking at various modes of romantic storytelling, it is important that we treat this history with care and be mindful of the different ways our disciplinary fields may position us and the terms we use.

In scholarship on fan fiction, slash has often been framed as a kind of feminist and/or grassroots counter to a predominantly heterosexual mass-market romance (Lamb and Veith; Penley; Kustritz). Slash is also sometimes aligned with the pornographic or seen as utilizing and renovating pornographic elements into a new and distinct mode of romance writing (Penley; Woledge). In this configuration, the pornographic is often problematically positioned as active and romance assumed to be passive (Driscoll). The problem with positioning slash in opposition with commercial romance is that it overlooks the many shared interests and themes between these two modes of writing. It also ignores the diversity of commercial romances and the various ways that romance sub-genres

approach sexual content. Furthermore, the heavy focus on slash artificially isolates it from the larger field of fan fiction, which includes a variety of romantic stories, as well as stories with no romance plot at all. The relationship between slash specifically and fan fiction generally is far more intertextual than confrontational. Similarly, the heavy focus on "pairings" and "ships" across fan fiction, and a focus in these stories on overcoming obstacles to place two characters in relationship with one another, suggests that fan fiction and commercial romances are not oppositional modes of writing, but instead are modes of writing with linked interests.[6]

In much past analysis of slash, romance has been positioned as a problematic starting point which slash renovates and improves on. Penley, Lamb and Veith, Kustritz, and others contrast romance with slash, positioning slash as a "redoing," a "radical departure," or a "tear[ing] down" (Penley 318; Lamb and Veith 238; Kustritz 377). For example, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith find consistent themes of "psychological, emotional, and physical intimacy" in slash when they look at *Star Trek* fan zines from the 1980s (238). The difference between slash and romance, they argue, is that slash zines insist "that true love and authentic intimacy can exist only between equals"—the implication being that this equality is not possible in a relationship between a man and a women (244). To find this equality, Lamb and Veith argue that *Star Trek* slash writers and readers move beyond their day to day realities, and look instead to m/m romances and fantastic futures as a way of transcending the complicated realities women negotiate in their own relationships.

If slash renovates romance, this still implies that it is heavily dependent on and exists in conversation with romantic conventions. Furthermore, this notion of slash as a kind of romance improvement model can overlook ways that themes of intimacy and equality are also popular in commercial romances. As Pamela Regis observes, a common element in much commercial romance literature is a flawed society which "may be incomplete, superannuated, or corrupt" and "always oppresses the heroine and the hero" (33). According to Regis, this setting often becomes a major part of the external and internal barriers that the protagonists struggle to overcome. In negotiating with these obstacles, romance is often working to bring its characters from a place of inequality and misunderstanding into greater intimacy and connection. Commercial romances also take flawed relationships and remodel them for their protagonists. Indeed, it might be said that a key element across romantic storytelling is the constant return to and reworking of relationship dynamics.

While much scholarship on the relationship between fan work and romance has focused exclusively on slash, it is also important to remember that slash is not the entirety of fan writing. Slash is one piece of a larger network of fans' creative work. While there are many fans who prefer one particular variety of fan fiction over another, the fandoms themselves weave together different threads of fan interest, serving as loose social networks that connect many types of fan fiction readers and writers. Thinking about slash in connection with other types of fan fiction reveals larger patterns. It reminds us of the significance of "pairings" and "ships" across fan fiction and suggests that the relationship between commercial romances and fan fiction is less oppositional and more interdependent.

Catherine Driscoll uses the existence of general, or what fans call "gen," fan fiction as evidence of the dominance of pairing culture within fan work. "Gen," she explains, "is

defined mainly by opposition… [it] is fan fiction that falls predominantly into no other available genre" (83). In this way, gen becomes a kind of catch-all categorical other to het and slash, suggesting "a layering effect to classification in fan fiction, where pairing and rating function as more important generic markers than *comedy* or *angst*" (Driscoll 84). Driscoll observes that common romantic patterns "of ignorance and revelation," as well as "obstacles arranged around status of different kinds," are used in fan fiction (84). These elements are used as barriers "to defer romantic fulfillment, which is the usual point of narrative closure" in fan fiction stories (84). As with any attempt at mapping out a mode of writing, there are ways Driscoll's description both encompasses many fan fiction conventions and also cannot cleanly apply to all of them. Her observations are still a reminder, however, that romantic conventions are common across many types of fan fiction. Each mode of writing (fan romances and commercial ones) varies in its use of these conventions and takes them in different directions. In particular, differences in production medium, editing systems, and distribution/reception networks all influence the kinds of romantic stories told within fan and commercial spaces.

A Blurry Field of Reference

Conversations regarding fan fiction and romance can be tripped up by terms and stalled by attempts to deflect stigma. Scholars interested in the larger questions that cross these writing spaces are often hindered by the meanings, implications, and histories different terms carry with them. Fan and popular romance studies are both interdisciplinary fields. Within their various research disciplines, fan and romance scholars are working to address and move beyond stigmas collectively faced by many modes of storytelling associated with women. With these goals in mind, greater care needs to be taken to ensure that this research is not deflecting stigma by constructing problematic hierarchies of its own.

The study of popular romance is an interdisciplinary field featuring various media, industries, and modes of storytelling. An interest in representations of love and sexual desire often connects this work, but terms like "romance," "erotica," and "pornography" can mean very different things in different disciplinary spaces. As the field of popular romance studies grows, our ability to place terms in relationship with one another and explore how various texts represent love and desire will be equally dependent on how we approach these words and our attentiveness to how others are using them.

This issue of terms also seems to saturate conversations regarding *Fifty Shades*. Readers and scholars alike struggle over whether *Fifty Shades* should be labeled romance or erotica, "original" work or "derivative" fan fiction, bad role model or good. The more complicated answer may be that *Fifty Shades* is all of these things at the same time. What different reading communities want to argue *Fifty Shades* is *not* may indicate as much about the person doing the analysis and their own perspective as it does *Fifty Shades.* While broader, cross-media analysis is challenging (and will always need to be balanced with focused and site specific analysis), this work remains important for scholars interested in broader cultural conversations and in thinking about genre beyond medium and industry specific zones. Despite the challenges, it is important that popular romance scholarship

considers romantic storytelling at both micro and macro levels of genre and culture. It also requires that scholars remain particularly attentive to and reflexive about the ways disciplinary context and medium shape their research and analysis.

Rethinking terms and taking care in how they are used seems particularly important at a time when romance scholarship, so traditionally located in the medium of print, is experiencing its own remediations and fluctuations. Genres are constantly undergoing change, but, at the current moment, the influence of digital publishing on the broader world of romantic literature warrants greater attention and study. Popular romance studies is working simultaneously to adapt to and trace this process. This makes seeking a clean classification system to either separate or connect commercial and fan romances a quest that is fraught with issues. Rigid taxonomies are not useful when examining a flow of texts and culture which is inherently intertextual, multi-modal, and constantly changing to address both market demands and shifting cultural norms.

Within and Against / Unique and Familiar

With these themes of intertextuality and interdisciplinarity in mind, this paper will now return to the issue of the "formula." I want to look again at the significant roles that intertextuality and a spirit of play (with form and archetype) perform within fan and commercial romance writing. Being mindful of the differences between them, we can also find clear intersections between the intertextual play of fan work and that of commercial romances. Recent fan and romance scholarship suggests that these are processes that lie at the heart of both modes of writing. Within fan and commercial romances, intertextuality can function at the level of archetype/setting, as well as shared forms and narrative rhythms. Noticing these patterns reveals processes of storytelling in which texts and authors are constantly in conversation with one another, pushing each other to explore new configurations and possibilities for love and desire. Given *Fifty Shades'* success as an erotic romance series and the text's history as a lengthy work of *Twilight* fan fiction, *Fifty Shades* invites analysis from the perspectives of both fan and popular romance studies. With this need in mind, I want to place recent works of fan studies and popular romance scholarship in conversation with each other and then use these connecting ideas to think about some of the possibilities this scholarship has for a text like *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

Scholarship on romance novels has often worked to refute the stereotype of a mechanically reproduced romantic form. Carol Thurston, Jayne Ann Krentz, Pamela Regis, and others have worked to explore historic shifts in romance conventions, to reconsider formula as generic codes with nuanced meanings to readers, and to consider them as narrative elements found across literary history. Recent work by Pamela Regis and An Goris has called for these formulas to be seen instead as common frameworks: story elements available as creative tools for authors to work with.

Similarly, in fan scholarship, there has been increased attention to the intertextuality of fan work, positioning transformative work or remix as a long-standing cultural and creative practice. In this way, fan scholars are arguing that the remixing of characters and settings from individual fandoms should not simply be seen as a derivative process. They argue instead that the fandom (or source text) for fan work is only one

component of the process through which fan fiction is produced. In both fan and commercial romance communities, these processes of play with form and archetype seem to provide an important component to the pleasure of reading and writing romantic stories.

Play with formula is now being argued to be a principle part of the pleasure of reading and writing commercial romances. An Goris discusses this in her article "Loving By the Book," a project which analyzes "how successful romance writing is… conceptualized from within the romance industry" (73). Goris points out that, despite dismissals of romance novels "as repetitive and formulaic… [romance writing handbooks] define and locate the genre's success precisely in its ability to… [offer] its readers experiences of both comfort and surprise" (76). This practice, Goris continues, "translates into the simultaneous and interacting occurrence of familiar and new creative features in the romance's narrative, as well as in its rhetoric, thus profoundly influencing a reader's entire textual experience" (76).

Goris further emphasizes that, since this practice of repetition establishes a clear framework for all works in the romance genre, each text serves to provide a consistent and affective reading experience of "escape, relaxation, and positive emotions" (77). Consistency and predictability are not what is happening here. Readers expect common features, but look for them to be utilized in new ways. As Goris explains, "the romance reader expects and demands a new, exciting, and surprising reading experience… a unique new story which is still somehow familiar" (77). Key in building this encounter is the combination of an author's voice with the traditional patterns of romance literature. In this formulation, the often-derided notion of the generic formula can be seen more as a basic narrative pattern providing a particular affective rhythm to the reader. This is a pattern that comes with common character archetypes and relationship dynamics, but these are elements that the author can be playful with, use creatively, and personalize. Authors bring the reader the affective rhythms they enjoy while also offering new possibilities, settings, and interpretations.

Goris is, of course, not the only romance or genre scholar to explore this process of playing with the familiar and to note its pleasures. As Eric Selinger and Sarah Frantz observe in their introduction to *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction*, whatever the genre, "competent readers… take their pleasure in individual texts by reading them at once within and against the traditions and possibilities of that system" (6–7). Selinger and Franz observe, however, that genre scholars have historically hesitated to explore how this process plays out within romance. This is one reason why Goris' analysis seems so useful. Mapping out the pleasures that familiarity and surprise brings to readers, Goris argues that the emphasis on voice and creativity within romance writing handbooks offers scholars a counter to the accusations of unoriginality and repetition the genre is often subjected to. Also notable here, beyond this notion of working with and against the familiar, is an underlying spirit of play, both with form and the reader's expectations. A reader may read for a particular emotional journey, but part of writers' work is to deliver a consistently happy point of narrative closure, while simultaneously producing a sense of risk and surprise in the reader. Additionally, particular settings and archetypal characters are both reused and reworked to test different configurations and possibilities. Within this play, intertextuality serves an important role for both readers and writers, with narrative patterns and archetypes becoming a shared referent for a writer to work and rework.

Readers, then, have the pleasure of experiencing this process as it unfolds, uncovering the ways that each text in the genre links to those around it. This can occur in common patterns which a text utilizes or by offering a kind of rhythmic counterpoint to other texts in terms of approach, articulation of character, and the ways an individual author chooses to narrate one particular instance of romance.

This play with voice and narrative rhythms can be seen in both *Masters of the Universe* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Both texts follow a similar narrative arc to the one provided by Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (a pattern that is also common to many romantic stories)*.* In each text, the male and female leads encounter each other and immediately experience attraction and desire. Edward/Christian warns Bella/Ana away and this warning serves as a mystery that only draws her closer. Over time, secrets about the hero are revealed and these secrets challenge the couple's ability to form a normative romantic relationship. Like the first book in the *Twilight* series, the first book in the *Fifty Shades* trilogy also concludes with our heroine alone and grieving over the apparent end of the relationship. The couple then spends the next books in the series working through the different barriers blocking intimacy and a long-term relationship between them.

To a degree, the narratives of all of these texts share a common momentum. Once Bella discovers that Edward is a vampire and Ana learns that Christian is a Dom, each text begins to work through this disclosure and feel out the kinds of obstacles it will present to the protagonists forming a romantic relationship. In each text, the hero presents some danger to the heroine and this threat becomes a part of the novel's sexual charge. What is immediately apparent as different in the ancillary texts, however, is the way the narrative handles desire and sexual attraction. *Masters of the Universe/Fifty Shades* diverges from *Twilight* by insisting on addressing and satisfying Bella/Ana's sexual desire for Edward/Christian. As a paranormal romance targeting a young adult audience, sexual desire is present in *Twilight,* but it also remains carefully under wraps. *Masters of the Universe/Fifty Shades* aggressively departs from these limits, pushing desire to the surface and making the couple's sexual relations a primary focus of the narrative. Rather than reading about Bella and Edward spending many chaste and intimate hours talking together in the woods of Forks, Washington, in *Masters of the Universe,* these characters spend this time locked away together in Christian's sexual playroom. In the process, *Masters of the Universe/Fifty Shades* reconfigures the narrative patterns of *Twilight* to bring different relationship elements to the surface of the text. As the characters negotiate the terms of their sexual relationship in *Masters of the Universe/Fifty Shades*, the subtextual desire present in *Twilight* becomes quite literally textual. Now the extent and form of the protagonist's sexual relationship is discussed via numerous email exchanges, and Christian attempts to codify it further in the form of a contract between dominant and submissive partners.

In transitioning from *Masters of the Universe* to *Fifty Shades,* the revised text clouds the story's legacy as fan fiction by changing character names and making small alterations to the story. The familiar shifts again into something new. In the process of changing publishing environment (and, eventually, moving from digital publication to print), the text's ties to fan culture and the *Twilight* series fade from immediate view. Instead, the traditions and possibilities of each publishing system work to open up new angles of analysis. As *Fifty Shades* moves into the sphere of commercial literature and the references to *Twilight* become less vocal, the story's broader ties to other bodies of romantic and

erotic literature may now be better able to come to the surface. For example, *Fifty Shades'* frequent references to Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* and the parallels drawn between Hardy's Tess and E. L. James' Ana, subtly remind the reader that Bella and Ana (in all their textual iterations) are part of a long line of romantic heroines struggling with their desire and the themes of power, submission, and danger long attached to representations of female sexuality.

As a product, *Fifty Shades* also shifts the text's target audience from the younger readers associated with *Twilight* to a more adult demographic. The focus now moves from implications of desire and a narrative that focuses more on longing and delay towards a story in which desire is brought to the surface and made explicit. The sexual encounters between the lead characters of *Fifty Shades* and *Masters of the Universe* are not possible within the publishing realm of young adult paranormal romance. Sexual content is, however, a familiar story element for fan fiction and commercial romance readers.

These themes of intertextuality, play with form and archetype, reading for an emotional experience, and the pleasure that comes with balancing familiarity and surprise seem strikingly familiar to many of the elements fan studies scholars have described as pleasurable and central to many fan fiction communities. Indeed, Selinger and Frantz's description of readers taking their pleasure by reading "within and against the traditions and possibilities of that system," feels profoundly similar to some of the core pleasures fans describe finding in the reading and writing of fan fiction (6–7).

Selinger and Frantz refer to genre as a single system, but in fan writing, it is often possible to locate multiple systems that fans are working within and against. In addition to a fandom's system of romantic conventions, fan writers are also working with an immediate referent text (a fandom and its characters/story-world), a system of conversation within fans' social networks, as well as broader generic systems like romance (Stein and Busse). The multiple systems activated within fan fiction may help to reveal further layers in commercial romances as well and, in particular, help to shed light on the ways that commercial romances utilize formulaic elements associated with the pornographic or the erotic. This, in turn, may help scholars to better understand the various generic systems at work within *Fifty Shades of Grey.*

Comparing slash fan fiction and commercial m/m romances, Deborah Kaplan argues that "[s]lash and romance conventions play off one another intertextually [in slash] to create something which is difficult to pin down" (126). Still, there are striking parallels that emerge within the reading and writing process for both noncommercial fan work and commercial romance. This suggests that fan studies scholarship exploring intertextuality may offer useful insights to romance scholars. Goris suggests that further analysis of romance's process-oriented reading and writing systems may help romance scholars blur the high/low cultural divisions still producing literary hierarchies within our contemporary culture (82). Fan studies scholarship exploring intertextuality may offer useful insights to romance scholars pursuing these questions.

There have been numerous explorations of the functions of intertextuality, repetition, and play within fan work. Abigail Derecho has, for example, identified an "archontic" process at work in fan fiction, a term which Derecho uses to describe "works that generate variations that explicitly announce themselves as variations" (65). Derecho's concept of an archontic work is derived from Derrida's notion of the archive and an archive's drive to expand and multiply. Archontic literature repeats with difference,

explores potentialities, and is shaped in relation to other texts (73–75). Within archontic literature, there is a drive to build on what came before, referencing other texts and adding new variations with each new iteration. Derecho sees the archontic process as a way to expand existing canons and add variation to norms (72).

This impulse to draw upon previous models and offer alternate interpretations to the canon can clearly be seen in *Masters of the Universe,* as well as being found across fan fiction and commercial romance writing more generally. In the *Twilight* series, Edward's fascination with Bella leads him to regularly sneak into her bedroom to watch her sleep, and he insists on controlling when and how she touches him. Bella is regularly threatened by different vampires in the series because of the temptation she presents to them. These details point to an underlying tension in *Twilight* around issues of desire, temptation, and control. *Masters of the Universe* takes up these same power dynamics and examines what they might look like within a relationship between adults where they are addressed more directly as aspects of fictional BDSM relationship. As *Fifty Shades*, the references to Bella and Edward are removed and, instead, the broader ways that the text works within and against generic borders come into view. *Fifty Shades* is a bestseller, but it is also just one of many erotic romances currently on the market tackling issues of power and control within a sexual relationship. In this way, *Fifty Shades* is one text of many within this conversation and builds on a long literary archive of works exploring the relationship between the erotic and the romantic.

Derecho argues that archontic literature's drive towards expansion and variation means that this type of literature will always appeal to the subordinate and provide those with less cultural privilege a place to speak. This is a tricky claim to uphold in relation to fan fiction given that, like all cultural products, it too struggles with issues of diversity and can reinforce hierarchies of cultural capital. Nonetheless, by framing archontic literature as a kind of expanding archive that gives voice to alternate possibilities, Derecho's work opens up new opportunities for thinking about the environments that fan fiction and commercial romances have traditionally been produced in. A writer's ability to be a voice for the subordinate or to deviate from norms also depends on conditions of production and market interests. Thinking about the ways different production environments facilitate or limit variance within romantic storytelling may provide alternate possibilities for discussing differences between various fan and commercial romances. This also raises intriguing questions about works and authors that cross these spaces. What enables a work like *Masters of the Universe/Fifty Shades* to move from fan fiction to commercial product? What drives authors to leave their publishing contracts and explore self-publishing or to write within fan networks? These are questions both fan and romance scholars will face as digital publishing opportunities expand and reading habits change.

Moving away from the metaphor of the ever-expanding archive, Mafalda Stasi describes slash fan fiction instead as an "intertextual palimpsest," connecting "the various types of intertextuality in slash… to other textual strategies in different genres, styles, and periods" (119). Stasi uses the palimpsest—a surface that has been cleared for new work, but still contains traces of what came before—as a metaphor for fans' use of existing characters and story-worlds as archetypal tools with which fan writers test new possibilities and variant histories.

Fifty Shades is a surface that contains the traces of many different texts within it. The two most visible influences are the work of fan fiction it was (*Masters of the Universe*) and

the *Twilight* series that initially inspired it. For example, *Fifty Shades'* use of first-person narration leads directly back to the first-person narration in *Twilight*. The story's regular references to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* also remind the reader of traces of even older texts and literary traditions. *Fifty Shades* is not unique, however, in the ways that it contains traces of past texts. The reuse and repurposing of certain archetypes and paradigms is common across commercial romance literature.

Fifty Shades' sexual language, however, and the use of non-conventional sexual encounters may also help explain the difficulty different zones of production have in fully claiming this text as one of their own. Frank discussions of menstruation are not necessarily standard fodder for romantic sex scenes in mass-market literature. Slowly working through barriers to intimacy, however, to form a mutually satisfying relationship is a paradigm at the heart of many romantic narratives. *Fifty Shades* is a story that borrows from many different writing traditions, high and low. The fact that this story emerged first online as a transformative fan work, and later made its way into print, may help explain *Fifty Shades'* jumble of influences and literary reference points.

In their discussion of archontic literature and intertextual palimpsests, both Stasi and Derecho also seek to cross between notions of high and low culture, as well as folk processes of retelling (as craft) with creative legacies and influences in art and literature. Like Goris, they are aware that intertextuality and reference are traits that all creative works share at some level, yet each of these scholars is also exploring the heightened role that intertextuality seems to play within their particular sphere of romance writing.

Expressing a frustration that should feel familiar to many romance scholars, Stasi argues that, "[f]ar from being a monolithic, repetitive set of substandard texts created by a naïve set of scribbling women, whose bizarre hobby stands apart from any self-respecting body of literature, slash is a legitimate part of the literary discursive field" (119). In Derecho and Stasi's work, we see two fan studies scholars working through the particulars of intertextuality in fan writing, but also connecting these aspects of fan fiction to longstanding creative practices. Within Stasi's insistence that slash is more than a "repetitive set of substandard texts created by… scribbling women" and Selinger and Frantz's earlier frustration with genre scholarship's reluctance to explore romance's repetitions at an aesthetic and formal level, we see both romance and fan scholars struggling with a similar problem: The ways that intertextuality and play with form within genres associated with women have culturally been relegated to the role of mechanized formula, labeled a particularly feminine pleasure, and categorized as pastime or hobby. The intersecting modes of pleasure in these storytelling forms have historically been stigmatized and diminished within academic institutions and in broader society. This should remind us that, while these clusters of texts are not identical, fan and romance scholars still struggle against similar forces. Both fan and commercial romances constitute important and connected pieces of a larger conversation about women's leisure time, female desire, and women's creative work in our contemporary society. *Fifty Shades* makes these conversations and interconnections particularly visible, but this conversation should not be limited to *Fifty Shades*.

The Borders Are Always Grey

Past scholarship linking romance and fan fiction has sometimes been guilty of oversimplifying the similarities between these two storytelling modes, using them reductively to draw conclusions about "good" versus "bad" romantic formulas. This work has a difficult history. Both fan studies and popular romance studies scholars are warranted in their rallying call for more careful, contextualized, textual analysis of individual works within these different spaces. There is still much to be gained, however, in exploring the intersections between fan and commercial romances. *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s massive popularity reminds us of the impact that digital publishing is having on the broader romance market. As a text, *Fifty Shades* shows us that fan and commercial romances not only intersect, but that movement across these writing spaces may be increasing. Many of the broader public reactions to *Fifty Shades*— asking, should women read this? is this good for them?— represent concerns that, hopefully, romance scholarship is starting to move beyond. In this way, *Fifty Shades* is also an opportunity to push the conversation further. Authors, readers, and scholars interested in fan and commercial romances still struggle against ongoing discomfort with expressions of female desire, writing and reading connected to emotion and sensation, and work that challenges capital "R" Romantic notions of authorship and originality.

The intertextuality underlying commercial and fan romances may sometimes play out in different ways, but these are stories in which the blending of personal voice with shared characters and forms is profoundly pleasurable. *Fifty Shades of Grey* reminds romance and fan scholars that, while drawing up disciplinary boundaries is necessary to develop fields and methodologies, scholars also need to be mindful of interdisciplinary flows and of the intertextuality of their own work. Stories and readers do not easily stay in fixed categories, and in today's transmedia market, genres flow messily across media forms. Thankfully, however, as much as comfort and surprise are part of the pleasure of reading and writing romances, they also constitute part of the pleasure of studying it. Exploring the familiar in a new way seems a useful place to begin.

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[1] Some of this history will be covered later in this paper; however, a sampling of work on the relationship between romance and fan fiction includes: Lamb and Veith 1986; Penley 1994, 1997; Kustritz 2003; Salmon and Donald Symons 2004, 2004; Woledge 2006; Kaplan 2012.

[2] Both Snowqueens Icedragon and E.L. James are pseudonyms.

[3] Of course, many in fan studies have countered that this service is simply a new spin on the traditional practice of licensing tie-in novels for popular media franchises. For more on Kindle Worlds, see the announcement from the Amazon Media Room: http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1823219.

[4] For more on gift economies and fan cultures, see Hellekson, Karen. "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture." *Cinema Journal* 48.4 (2009): 113–118.

[5] Debate about the legality or ethics of commercially profiting from fan fiction are beyond the scope of this paper. However, conversation about these issues has certainly circled around the *Fifty Shades* series and has long been a topic of debate in relation to fan fiction more generally. For a sampling of these conversations in relation to *Fifty Shades*, the

Dear Author blog's series of posts on *Fifty Shades* (and its comments section) may be a useful place to start. For example, see the varied responses to blogger Jane Litte's suggestion that disclosing *Fifty Shades* origins as fan fiction would be "courteous… truthful advertising": http://dearauthor.com/features/industry-news/master-of-the-universe-versus-fifty-shades-by-e-l-james-comparison/.

[6] Pairings and ships (relationships) are terms fans use to refer to romantic/sexual pairings of characters. Individual pairings and ships help to organize a great deal of fan work, often serving as key terms used to structure fan fiction archives, guide web searches, etc.

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