

Of Fanfiction & Creating Space (OFACS)

by Jercy Dee

[Preview]

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Word Count: 1400+ (preview) / 3400+ (full)

Themes: Fandom and fanfiction, community collaboration, radical queer politics, polyamory

Major Warnings: Discussions of sexuality

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Abstract

The politics surrounding fandom—marketing and consumption, radical understandings of sexuality, positioning and inclusivity, among many more issues—inform the decisions that go into the final product of any transformative work. As a result, the fanfiction genre is often a productive space for representation through its racialization, queering, and disabling of established popular narratives. Fanfiction traditions within highly collaborative communities allow for unconventional modes of creative writing.

Unconventional Rules is a collection of short stories that are rewritten versions of anime fanfiction made with the support of intersecting fan groups. The accompanying installation, *[Fanfiction] Reading Corner*, was a reading space that encouraged viewers to sit and read *Unconventional Rules* and/or any of its supplementary materials.

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Of Fanfiction & Creating Space

I combine publishing, design, and general nerdiness into a multimedia approach. Thus, my thesis is a culmination of this cross-disciplinary methodology. To introduce this project, I find the following quote relevant:

The experience of fandom, especially in the age of the internet, is one of binge reading: most new fans, upon discovering fanfic, gobble it down. The first story you read is usually an eyebrow raiser; shocking, maybe a bit embarrassing. [...] But I guarantee you this: no matter what you like, and no matter how much there is of it— there isn't enough of it.
Coppa ix-x

As a long-time participant in fan communities, remix culture and transformative work (like fanfiction¹) has made an incredible impact, not only on me personally, but my professional practice. As such, I dedicated my work and research to this topic.

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The Manuscript: *Unconventional Rules*

Unconventional Rules is an over 30 000-word novella (over 170 pages). The manuscript is a collection of eleven short stories, with accompanying footnotes. The stories are rewritten versions of anime fanfiction, revised into original fiction. All short stories feature the same five characters in different relationship configurations: as a group of friends, or as a romantic monogamous couple, all the way up to a polyamorous penta relationship (an intimate relationship between five people). The table of contents follows the same formatting as all my fanfictions posted online—with trigger warnings and word count—which I included for accessibility.

The novella was produced primarily as a result of writing for the annual event, National Novel Writing Month (or NaNoWriMo), in 2018. During that month, I participated with the following focuses:

- using fanfiction conventions/tropes as a production method,
- exploring the materialistic possibilities of fanfiction,
- and writing every day.

Every day, I begun by writing a completely new fanfiction based on that day's prompt. If I could find someone to edit it, I would get it revised, though this didn't occur often.

¹ Fanfiction = Creative fiction based on an existing franchise by using characters, setting, plot, etc made by fans of said franchise. Often shortened to "fanfic" or "fic".

My hope was to have thirty completed fanfics with an overall word count of 50 000 words. When I found that task too difficult, my ultimate goal shifted to writing something completely new each day, and to hopefully share a finished product before midnight. I shared my work on fanfiction host, Archive of Our Own.

By the end of November, I completed and produced twenty individual fanfics with over 40 000 words using a calendar-style mode of production. I finished the remainder of my prompts by March 2019 with over 56 000 words. All fanfictions were based on the volleyball anime-manga franchise, *Haikyuu!!* The prompts I chose were based on personal preference after consulting various archives, fanfic databases, and fandom² friends.

Once I completed producing all of the raw fanfiction, I then chose eleven stories to revise into original fiction. What was produced was the short story collection, *Unconventional Rules*. Since this manuscript is published independently and not by an official publishing press³, the original fanfiction is still available to read online⁴.

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The Installation: *[Fanfiction] Reading Corner*

[Fanfiction] Reading Corner was a small reading area with my completed novella, chapbooks, and other reading materials. It featured a space to sit down and read, with my final completed original fiction manuscript presented as a paperback novel. The chapbooks were my experiments in revising fanfiction into original fiction from throughout my thesis. Other material were zines of my research process.

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² Fandom = Referring to a community of fans surrounding a franchise. In this case, referring to the *Haikyuu!!* fandom/fan community.

³ Most often (though not always) fanfictions turned into original novels and printed by publishing presses are removed from online viewing to avoid copyright issues.

⁴ Find my fanfiction on jercythesiscrying.tumblr.com or archiveofourown.org/users/jercydee.

Goals & Endgame

First and foremost, I wanted to make fanfiction accessible to non-fans and non-fandom readers. Writing about a niche volleyball anime is likely inaccessible to readers who do not have prior knowledge of the franchise; however, collection of queer short stories with humorous relationship dynamics might be.

This was also an opportunity to explore my own relationship with fanfiction, and to share that experience with others. The writing I produced and any of the work I provided may serve as an entry point for non-fans to explore. I wanted to find and express the *value* of fic production and methodology, from fanfiction's writing conventions to its community building. I also wanted to show appreciation for the plethora of works and efforts involved in fanfiction: "The fiction that is written in and for fandom is not only written to community specifications; it is also typically written as a gift. [...] many people write their first story to say thank you for all the stories they read previously" (Coppa 9). This was especially true for my experience navigating fandom, and the reason why I brought this practice to an academic space for further investigation.

Moreover, I wanted to frame fanfiction as a radical practice. In my writing particularly, I use fanfiction as a space to find and create representations of LGBTQ+ relationships, characters of colour, and disabled body-minds:

Fans are interested in transformations of social identity (what if a character were female, black, Jewish, queer, disabled?), as well as class identity (what if a character were a barista? a CEO? A single father of three?), and then there are more fantastic experiments: what if she were a werewolf, a vampire, an elf?

Coppa 13

For the diversity I cannot find from a franchise, I speculate in fanfiction.

Though fanfiction often gets a bad reputation for its focus on explicit sexual activity, it is also a space where sexuality—particularly female and non-heteronormative sexuality—become productive spaces of navigation and learning: "Many fanfiction writers write about sex in conjunction with beloved texted and characters not because they think those texts are incomplete, but because they're looking for stories where sex is profound and meaningful" (Coppa 95). Coppa furthers this argument succinctly: "It's

a genre of sexual *subjectification*: the very opposite of *objectification*. It's benefits with *friendship*" (95). Where mainstream television, movies, and literary fiction often uses sexuality as a plot device (often at the expense of a marginalized character), fanfiction can repurpose this narrative to engage in meaningful discourse about bodies and relationships. Regarding sexuality, "it's only certain kinds of sexuality that are shocking. Every eight o'clock cop show can start with a rape, but if Harry Potter turns out to be gay or Buffy and Faith have an orgasm then it's obscene" (Coppa 263). The limitations of this thesis project did not deeply explore the power of sexual expression in fanfiction, but the politics shaped many aspects of the writing process. Despite the final product being PG-13, a radical understanding of sexuality informed my choices in relationship dynamics.

Overall, I wanted to contextualize fanfiction alongside original fiction as a valid and valuable form of literature. Installing a reading space allowed viewers to comfortably interact with fanfiction and fan spaces, even if it was within an academic institution. The amount of reading material also showed the broad range of ways fanfiction can physically manifest, similar to other forms of fiction. Coppa says it best: "the key pleasure of fandom is multiplicity: different versions, alternate paths, endless supplements that respond to each other: *but what if?* In fandom you can have your cake and eat it; you can have things not just for *both* ways, but *every way*" (136). With *Unconventional Rules* and *[Fanfiction] Reading Space*, I attempted to bring this experience to the reader-viewer.

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[CUT FOR LENGTH. For the full text, please contact Jercy.]

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Works Cited

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Edited (2021/03): Minor discrepancies in format and spelling between this document and the printed publication from 2019 were done to correct mistakes missed before print. For the full text, please contact Jercy.