

Fanfiction, Story Sharing Sites, and Online Samizdat

Maxwell Memorial Library's Technology Class
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0 Introduction

This month's tech program will explore sites and apps for those who want to read literature that might not yet be ready for prime-time but that still might be just the thing they were looking for.

Fanfiction goes back to before the Internet first came online. At least since the days of *Star Trek's* original series,¹ fans of various works in many (possibly all) genres have been writing stories that take place in the universes of their favorites and that tell stories about the works' characters that the original creators never imagined. Similarly, people have long shared their original creative works with others without publishing them through an "official" publisher.

Granted, the quality of self-published work is quite variable, but Andy Weir's *The Martian* was first distributed online in this way as was E.L. James' *50 Shades of Grey* (originally a fanfic of the *Twilight* series). Also, under the former Soviet Union and other restrictive regimes, samizdat (Russian for 'self-publishing' but with the implication of distribution in violation of censorship) has brought out works like Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, Václav Havel's "The Power of the Powerless", and some of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's material.

¹ See "[Fanfiction](https://fanlore.org/wiki/Fanfiction)." *Fanlore* (last modified on 11 February 2019). Accessed February 25, 2019. <https://fanlore.org/wiki/Fanfiction>.

However, the point at which "true" fanfiction -- or at least, identifiable amateur stories by fans using [copyrightable](#) creative works -- started to be written is difficult to determine and depends on how broadly one defines the term itself. [Jane Austen](#) fanfic has been around since Austen's nieces started writing it. (See "[Jane Austen fandom history](#)."") [Sherlock Holmes](#) appeared in fiction written by other authors as early as 1891's *An Evening With Sherlock Holmes*, the first of [three Holmes parodies by James M. Barrie](#). [Sherlockians](#) were writing [pastiche](#)s about the Great Detective in their [journals](#) in the early 1900s [[see here](#)]. A fictional account of 19th century fanfic writers can be found in [Little Women](#), suggesting that the pursuit was widespread, if undocumented. Possibly the first published [Tolkien](#) fanfic appeared in *I Palantir* in 1960. And *Star Trek* fans started publishing zines ([lots and lots of zines](#)) with fanfic in the late 1960s, starting with [Spockanalia](#).

1 Parallel literature and fan fiction

FAN FICTION is literature created about (in some way) an already established work (or body of work) by fans of that work. It's a more specific type of literature with in the larger category of *PARALLEL LITERATURE*.

Casey Hicks describes part of the motivation to write or read parallel literature:

Great literature leaves its impression upon us, and some characters have haunted authors enough to be reincarnated in new works. These reinterpretations show just how little control an artist has over his or her work once it has been released, and they give some hope to writers of fan fiction.²

Hicks also has a list of some recommended titles:³

Title	Author(s)	Universe
<i>The Bloody Chamber</i>	Angela Carter	Fairy tales
<i>The Book of Lost Things</i>	John Connolly	Fairy tales
<i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead</i>	Tom Stoppard	<i>Hamlet</i>
<i>Grendel</i>	John Gardner	<i>Beowulf</i>
<i>Foe</i>	J. M. Coetzee	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
<i>The Big Over Easy</i>	Jasper Fforde	Nursery rhymes
<i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i>	Seth Grahame-Smith & Jane Austen	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>

1.1 Is fanfic legal?⁴

The answer to whether fanfic is legal is, as is often the case in copyright law, "It depends." Copyright reserves to the creator (or their assignees) the exclusive right to create derivative works. Moreover, the courts have held that created characters and settings are protected by copyright if they are well enough defined and delineated.⁵

2 Hicks, Casey. "[Fan Fiction for Adults: The Best in Parallel Literature.](http://www.flashlightworthybooks.com/Fan-Fiction-for-Adults-The-Best-in-Parallel-Literature/446)" *Flashlight Worthy Books*. Accessed February 20, 2019. <http://www.flashlightworthybooks.com/Fan-Fiction-for-Adults-The-Best-in-Parallel-Literature/446>

3 Hicks, Casey. "[Fan Fiction for Adults: The Best in Parallel Literature.](http://www.flashlightworthybooks.com/Fan-Fiction-for-Adults-The-Best-in-Parallel-Literature/446)" *Flashlight Worthy Books*. Accessed February 20, 2019. <http://www.flashlightworthybooks.com/Fan-Fiction-for-Adults-The-Best-in-Parallel-Literature/446>

4 **Disclaimer: I am not a lawyer, and nothing in this section should be construed as legal advice. It is merely a survey of my understanding of various relevant aspects of U.S. federal copyright law. If you want to know the actual law regarding any action you might take related to this material, consult an attorney first.**

5 Locke, Scott D. "[Parallel Novels and the Reimagining of Literary Notables by Follow-on Authors: Copyrights Issues When Characters Are First Created by Others.](https://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/ckjip/vol17/iss2/3)" *Chicago-Kent Journal of Intellectual Property* 17, no. 2 (2018): 271–89. Available at: <https://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/ckjip/vol17/iss2/3>

However, since an author does not have to defend their copyright against all infringement in order to maintain their rights (unlike with trademarks and patents), some authors are fine with amateur fans creating and sharing extensions of their worlds with other fans.

Moreover, actual parodies (works that imitate other works for the purpose of criticism through satire) are protected by the legal doctrine of fair use. Fair use is rather nebulous, but it has protected rather extensive borrowing when the satirical nature of the parody was quite clear (In *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music, Inc.*, 510 U.S. 569 (1994) the U.S. Supreme Court found that 2 Live Crew's parody of Roy Orbison's "Oh, Pretty Woman" did not necessarily infringe on Orbison's copyright because of the clearly transformative nature of the parody. The Court reached this finding even in noting the commercial nature of the parody and its extensive borrowing from the original.)

In the main, though, fanfic is in a gray area because of fair use's nebulous nature. The Organization for Transformative Works holds that it is legal,⁶ but the claim is largely untested.

1.2 Where can I find fanfic (or share my own contributions)?

I personally use Archive of Our Own to find most of the fanfic I read, but there are many other places that it can be found. The rest of this section lists several sites recommended in articles by Piotr Kowalczyk and Joanna Smith.⁷

1.2.1 Archive of Our Own (AO3)

[Archive of Our Own \(AO3\)](https://archiveofourown.org/) at <https://archiveofourown.org/>

The site describes itself as "a fan-created, fan-run, non-profit, non-commercial archive for transformative fanworks, like fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, and podfic."

- Has writers within a variety of fandoms.
- Works within a browser and seems to be designed to work well with either mobile or desktop/laptop devices.
- Some works may have more graphic content (in a variety of ways) than some readers want to read, but the site does employ tagging and warning labels so that readers can filter out themes or ratings that they don't want to see.

6 Organization for Transformative Works. "[Frequently Asked Questions](http://www.transformativeworks.org/faq/)." *Organization for Transformative Works*. Accessed February 25, 2019. <http://www.transformativeworks.org/faq/>

7 Kowalczyk, Piotr. "[15 Most Popular Fanfiction Websites to Explore](https://ebookfriendly.com/fan-fiction-websites/)." *Ebook Friendly* (blog), March 18, 2018. <https://ebookfriendly.com/fan-fiction-websites/>

Smith, Joanna. "[The Ultimate Guide To Fanfiction and Fanfiction Sites](https://medium.com/@joannasmith008/fanfiction-428029544a12)." *Medium*, December 19, 2017. Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://medium.com/@joannasmith008/fanfiction-428029544a12>

- Anyone can read works published there, but signing up for full privileges requires an invitation (the system itself issues invitations, and you can join the queue from the homepage).

1.2.2 deviantART

deviantART at <https://www.deviantart.com/>

Fanfiction on deviantART at <https://www.deviantart.com/literature/fanfiction/>

- deviantART showcases art in general, so the site has a lot of visual art along with (or in) works.

1.2.3 FanFiction

FanFiction at <https://www.fanfiction.net/>

- Also has writers in a variety of fandoms (though *Harry Potter* fandom seems to be the largest subcommunity).
- Works within a browser and seems to be designed to work well with either mobile or desktop/laptop devices (on a mobile device, you may need to enter [m.fanfiction.net](https://www.fanfiction.net/) into the URL bar directly).
- Doesn't seem to have as much content that might warrant warnings as AO3 does.

1.2.4 Tumblr

Tumblr at <https://www.tumblr.com/>

Fanfic on Tumblr at <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/fanfic>

Fanfiction on Tumblr at <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/fanfiction>

- Tumblr is more generally a social media site, but many people share their fanfic on it. Search on the #fanfic or #fanfiction tags.

1.2.5 Wattpad

Wattpad at <https://www.wattpad.com/>

Fan-fiction at Wattpad at <https://www.wattpad.com/stories/fan-fiction>

- Not just fanfic.
- Has a separate mobile app.

2 Original fiction online

Note that some of these sites are also sources for fanfic.

2.1 Litnet

Litnet at <https://litnet.com/>

- Original fiction in a variety of genres: romance, fantasy, science fiction, and so on.
- Some authors have blogs that allow you to communicate with them via comments.

2.2 Goodreads

Goodreads at <https://www.goodreads.com/>

Stories on Goodreads at <https://www.goodreads.com/story/>

Fan fic on Goodreads at <https://www.goodreads.com/story/tag/fanfiction>

- Goodreads is mostly about book reviews, but some users share their original work there as well.

3 Samizdat and underground literature

Looking at a Google search on “finding underground writings” or “samizdat” is a bit like peering into a time capsule: you’ll find links to pages on the Beat scene, the Underground Railroad, and dissent under the former Soviet Union but none to collections of Tweets from the Arab Spring or from dissidents in Venezuela (for example).

The very nature of samizdat — dissident literature from areas where dissent is suppressed — make the notion of any long-term, central repository for it unlikely (at least until it is no longer banned, hence the valorizing blast-from-the-past mentioned above).

In moments of crisis, though, various forms of social media have emerged as places for dissidents within the areas of crisis to share what they observe and their analyses of it. To follow events, you can follow (subscribe to) various hashtags on platforms like Twitter or Tumblr. To start following a tag on either of these platforms, search on a term you’re interested in (for instance #cuba, #venezuela, #bannedbooks. The hash [#] will restrict the search to posts with the tag, or you can leave it off to get all posts that even mention the search term).

To follow the tag from your own page on the platform, ...

- On Tumblr, click “Follow” within the search box

- On Twitter choose “Save this search” from the menu located directly above the results (note that to get to the command you click on the vertical ellipsis [:] at the right hand edge).

4 Resources

4.1 Links to sites

- [Archive of Our Own \(AO3\)](https://archiveofourown.org/) at <https://archiveofourown.org/>
- [deviantART](https://www.deviantart.com/) at <https://www.deviantart.com/>
 - [Fanfiction on deviantART](https://www.deviantart.com/literature/fanfiction/) at <https://www.deviantart.com/literature/fanfiction/>
- [FanFiction](https://www.fanfiction.net/) at <https://www.fanfiction.net/>
- [Goodreads](https://www.goodreads.com/) at <https://www.goodreads.com/>
 - [Stories on Goodreads](https://www.goodreads.com/story/) at <https://www.goodreads.com/story/>
 - [Fan fic on Goodreads](https://www.goodreads.com/story/tag/fanfiction) at <https://www.goodreads.com/story/tag/fanfiction>
- [Litnet](https://litnet.com/) at <https://litnet.com/>
- [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com/) at <https://www.tumblr.com/>
 - [#Fanfic on Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/fanfic) at <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/fanfic>
 - [#Fanfiction on Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/fanfiction) at <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/fanfiction>
- [Wattpad](https://www.wattpad.com/) at <https://www.wattpad.com/>
 - [Fan-fiction at Wattpad](https://www.wattpad.com/stories/fan-fiction) at <https://www.wattpad.com/stories/fan-fiction>

4.2 Articles

[Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music, Inc.](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/510/569/), 510 U.S. 569 (1994). Available at <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/510/569/>

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