

Female Fans, Published Authors
Case Studies of Female Fan Producers who are Published Authors

Fan Culture

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(Figure 1). Photo manipulation by soramame_kun with the titles of well know Harry/Draco slash fics superimposed over book spines.

In chapter four of *Convergence Culture* Henry Jenkins discusses the on going negotiations between fans and producers and how this pertains to fan works. Jenkins writes about fan filmmakers and video game players, such as Raph Koster (Jenkins, 139) who have moved from fannish to producer positions. However, Jenkins only discusses male fans that undergo this transition, while presenting the female fans that write fanfic and make vids as disconnected from official channels, “cut off from public visibility” (Jenkins, 156). While this removal from the public eye may be an accurate description of female coded fan works, which rarely gain mainstream recognition, it also creates the impression that there are not female fans who make the fan-producer transition. In actuality there are female authors who wrote fanfic before, and sometimes at the same time as, they published their own novels. In this essay I look at three authors who are well known fan producers in online media fandom who are also published authors, Sarah Rees Brennan, Jaida Jones, and Naomi Novik.

Sarah Rees Brennan has been part of the online media fandom and writing fanfic (most famously in the Harry Potter fandom) for six years, but started writing much earlier, as she always aspired to be an author, “and was writing original work before and during the time [she] was writing fanfiction” (personal communication), because “Fanfiction is fun, but I always loved writing my own books more” (Strock, 2008). She has become well known enough through her livejournal and her fanfiction that she is recognized at fan conventions and complemented on her stories. Her first novel, *Demon's Lexicon*, will be published in 2009. Although she thinks fondly of online media fandom, she no longer consider herself to be part it, and she will removing her fanfic from the internet. She says if she intends to “make a final break,” removing stories “because if any stories are up I’ll get emails asking me to write more...and because I do feel so very done with fanfiction. I’m not even considering the legal issues, really” (Brennan, March 20, 2008). However, she is finishing the two fics that she was working on when she made her announcement about publishing before removing her fanfiction because she feels that “leaving people hanging is cruel” (personal communication) but is taking it off the internet because she wants.

These two comments show how Brennan is negotiating the transition between being a fan producer and a producer of published works. Brennan says that fandom has “helped [her] become a better writer and it's a wonderfully supportive community” (Strock, 2008) and views it “as a fun hobby” although “it’s been a pick-me-up when I was down and I met several friends who are a huge part of my life through it, so I am very grateful to that hobby” (personal communication). She feels ties to the fandom community and to the people who read her fic, or she would not be finishing them, but

she is also moving on to a new stage in her life. Becoming a published author but still maintaining a livejournal and answering comments continues her relationships with people who are still part of fandom, makes Brennan both a fannish and professional producer. As of now people who first encounter her through her livejournal will most likely associate her both with her fanfic and her upcoming novel. However, this may change in the future when Brennan takes down her fanfiction, weakening the connection in fans minds between Brennan and online fandom.

Parts of fandom have viewed Brennan as an authoritative producer figure even before she announced that she was publishing a book. Figure one shows a photo manipulation where the titles of two of Brennan's fics, along with other authors' fanfiction, have been superimposed over books. This not only shows how popular Brennan's fanfic is, it also demonstrates, albeit somewhat self consciously, that some fans consider Brennan's fanfic as good as, if not better, than officially published books. In fact, many of Brennan's readers call themselves not only fans of Harry Potter, but also fans of her work. "Can't wait to read [Demon's Lexicon] - hope it's as funny as your fanfic! I'm totally a fanboy!" (drgaellon, February 12, 2008). Comments like this show how someone online media fans do not draw a sharp distinction between being a producer of fan works and being a published producer. They transfer this sense of fannish enthusiasm from the author's fanfic to their original work, assigning positive values to both.

Jaida Jones also was part of the Harry Potter fandom, and for her "fandom has always been about being on livejournal and meeting people with whom I share interest" (Jones, August 10, 2007). In online media fandom she is most famous for her

collaboration with co-writer Dorkorific on *The Shoebox Project*, a Harry Potter Remus/Sirius story told over multiple years using both words and pictures. She has also published a book of poetry called *Cinquefoil* in 2006 and a self published fully colored illustrated story with KJ Sturgeon, *Pix XI*, the first volume of which was issued in 2006. Her first novel, co-written with Danielle Bennett, comes out on June 24, 2008. As this goes on Jones is “slowly but surly taking [her] fanfiction down” (Jones, September 18, 2007) although *The Shoebox Project* remains up and will be finished. She has had her livejournal for seven years, but “a lot of her writing power has been turned to...original writing projects” (Jones, May 19, 2007). She plans on keeping her livejournal, which she recognizes as being a place where “a lot of [readers] are here for fan-stuff (which of course there will still be too much of, since the internet was made for encouraging a fan and I have always had a fan's fickle yet faithful heart)” (Jones, May 19, 2007) although she will no longer be writing fanfiction. She is changing the focus of the journal from fan produced content to a focus on her original works and more general fannish activity. Jones’ statements indicate that she still considers part of fandom, but no longer acts as a fannish producer.

Naomi Novik, author of the Teremaire series, the first novel of which was published on March 28, 2006, has taken a slightly different approach than either Brennan or Jones. Novik maintains an online authorial presence that is separate from the pseudonym that she uses to write fanfiction, although she does talk about writing fanfiction in her official livejournal. When asked if she was missing anything in the transition from fanfic to published author, she replied that “I am avoiding missing anything, good or bad, by not actually wandering away” (Novik, January 6, 2005). In

2004 Novik wrote “210,000 words in Volumes 1 & 2 of *Temeraire*” and “60,632 words in 16 stories, plus assorted other small bits” (Novik, January 6, 2005) of fanfic. Despite the separation of Novik’s fannish and professional activities, her acknowledgment of fan activity on her professional journal without specifications lets the reader know that although Novik is now a published author, she is also a fan producer.

Novik has written and posted fanfiction in at least forty-two different media fandoms over a period of fourteen years, as well as making fanvids. She says that her “own fanfic writing dates from the age of 3, when I started pestering my mother for revisions of *Peter Pan* for me because Captain Hook was my favorite character and I didn't want him to be eaten by the crocodile in the end” (Novik, June 10, 2006). She is also one of the founding members of the Organization of Transformative Works and strongly supports fanfic, both of her own work and others because “I myself have been and am a fan long before I am a pro, and the community of fan creators in particular is really in many ways my home. I believe deeply that transformative work enriches both those who do it and those who inspire it, and I am so very excited about this project” (Novik, December 12, 2007). In this statement Novik places a great emotional on the social aspects of fandom, identifying herself not only as an fan producer, but also as a member of the online fan community.

Novik feels strongly positive about online media fandom, but she also acknowledges that there are large differences between writing professionally and writing fanfic. She thinks that instead of debating whether fanfiction writers can become professional writers, which they obviously can and have, instead the questions should be “what are the things that fanfic writing teaches you that *are* applicable to pro writing?

what other skills do you need to learn? what do you need to *unlearn* from fanfic writing?” (Novik, August 9, 2005). These questions not only point to the differences that Novik sees between writing fanfiction and writing professionally, but answers would also provide a guideline for understanding the differences between a fan producer and a published producer and provide a guide for those fans who want to undergo that transition.

The three woman, Naomi Novik, Jaida Jones, and Sarah Rees Brennan, all approach online media fandom with different attitudes, and have handled the affects of the transition from fan producer to professional producer on their fanworks in very different ways. However, they are all examples of a type of producer that Jenkins neglects to consider in his characterization of the female fans: female fans who become female producers. The presence of these woman, along with others like them, shows that although some producers, like George Lucas, favor male gendered fan works and help male fans transition into more authoritative, producer roles, there are female fans who are also on the producer side of the fan/producer continuum. These women have not only made names for themselves both inside and outside of fandom, they also demonstrate ways of engaging with the text that do not have to follow the strict producer/fan dichotomy, but instead allow room for both.

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