

Digitally Altered Fanfiction Text: The Study of Paratextual Dynamics in Reshaping the Collective Identities of Harry Potter Fiction

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Abstract

Archive of our own (AO3) is an unauthorised and non-funded digital platform, where the online participants archive their real-life experiences interactively in the paratext form. Proceeding with a digressive function of serving the marginalised authors, AO3 emerges as a distinctive site for digital literary production. The participants or the contributors of AO3 examine the Subaltern subjectivities imposed by the original canonical writers and transform or reconstruct the marginalised ideas. The study explores the digital narratological elements and paratextual strategies to underscore the oppression and suppression protested by the Living Subaltern communities through the paratextual analysis and socio-ontological counter narratives against the stereotypical erasure of the marginalised sector. The current study examines 40 fan fiction works of Harry Potter, and it draws social attention towards reconstructing or reshaping the marginalised identities through the metafictional devices, Narrative voice, focalization, etc. The study demonstrates how narratology and the socio-cultural factors influence the fandom to create an alternate universe and reaffirm the identity by emphasising the collective experiences of the marginalised.

Keywords: Digital narratology, Subaltern identities, AO3, Counter-narratives.

I INTRODUCTION

With the advent of digital technology, transformation in every discipline is active, especially the online published fanfiction has outwitted the printed literary production in terms of subject and interactive methodology of writing with altered characters. Although the contention of altering the originality of literary work is still under debate, the growing scholarship of digital literacy promotes the interest of the Integrative community in

offering a democratic space for the marginalised section of society. The original literary works are often found to be reluctant, disinterested and biased in discussing the subjects of Queer, coloured narratives, disabled and the transgender struggle in the real world. But the dissuaded audience, readers and fans entered into the dynamic art of self-inscription on the digital platform and reconstructed the politics of writing what social interest. The digital fandom is a dominant interactive community, aimed to disempower the social inequality and promote

cultural resistance and self-autonomy concerned with gender, race, caste and creed. In recognition of selfhood

as the manifestation of self-expression, the fanfic society enabled multiple authors to navigate in a nonlinear fashion of creating hypertext as counter-narratives to the original literary works. The fanfiction writers take suggestions from the readers and curate their opinions in the process of writing, allowing the mediation of a complex narrative pattern, hyperlinked with the likes and dislikes of the readers, to validate the intertextual writing

of fandom. Often, the writing cycle is perceived as a meta of conversational continuum that expresses both the euphoria and the dysphoria of the readers.

With the expansion of digital technology, the tightly knit fandom extended its reconfiguration of canonical works in diverse online platforms like Fanfiction.net, Wattpad is and Archive of Our Own (AO3) with advanced categorisation tools. Among the different interactive digital publication organisations, AO3 has grown into the largest fanfiction archive aimed to create, share and preserve the socially transformative works (altered universe) without censorship or corporate control. AO3 is also identified as a fan activism movement that unmask the structural racism, imperialism, social aggression, etc., underpinning the predominant evidence's canonical work in canonical work. This platform has created a space for the fans to critique white supremacy or social judgmentalism and suppression of marginalised ideas by leaving comments or tags and recreating the popular narrative. This paradigm shift from passive consumption to exploratory active protestation against controversial ideas amplifies the fan's freedom to blur the boundaries of authorship with autonomous identity. This transformative democracy of rewriting and reinterpreting with pseudonyms has enabled the writers to resonate the drama of LGBTQ+, queer narratives and sensitive issues without reluctance. The shield of anonymity fosters an opportunity to express the challenges and real-life experiences of the marginalised to reclaim an inclusive sphere globally.

The fanfiction series blends myths, legends, psychoanalytical narratives, historical anecdotes, real-life experiences, romances, slash fiction, unanswered compelling questions, altered characters, etc, to reimagine the expansive alternate universe. Harry Potter, written by JK Rowling, inspired millions of fans

worldwide and spawned creative reinterpretation in the fandom. The literary production of Harry Potter remained a blitz with the fan world and endured deep human desire to expand the counter-narratives that challenge the conventional norms of literary representation. The fanfiction community of AO3 has created a web of interconnected narratives and reconstructed the unsatisfactory plot lines with characters transcended into different races, settings and genders. While fan fiction continues to explore the dynamic relationship among the altered characters, it has reshaped the specific marginalised groups' representation. The collective authorship allows the readers to contribute to an intertextual relationship by filling the tags, author notes, ratings, reviews, likes and dislikes. In Gerard Genette's definition, the paratext delineates the discourse, order, frequency, focalization and voice of the fanfiction writers' narrative activism in a dialogic method. Genette's mechanism of close reading with paratextual analysis of Black Hermione. Queer Remus/Sirius, trans Draco, and autistic Hermione, created by digital fandom culture, challenge the erasure and silence of canonical representation. The paratextual engagement delineates the race-bending and cultural politics embedded in the mainstream narratives. The study aims to demonstrate how the digitally altered narratives of *Harry Potter* transform the social experience and contribute to the digital humanities.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The long-established 'Participatory Culture' of fandom attracted the researchers to explore the canon source material and celebrate the textual poaching (Jenkins 1992). Bronwen Thomas analysed the intrinsic relationship between canonical text and the fanfiction hypertext to address the tension stemming from the upsurge in interest of fanfic communities who subvert canonical publications. He has also highlighted the paradoxical pertinence of power wielded by the canons. And the display of openness in editing the stories by the fanons that underlies the phenomenon of generating stories.

Anna Wilson (2024) argued that literary authorship is created by both producers as well as consumers (readers) by co-creating with a unique, interactive pattern to facilitate the facets of digital reading as social reading. The fanfic responses include the distinctive contribution from Facebook, Twitter and Goodreads.

Jenkins' Textual Poachers recognise the fanfic narratives as transformative texts scribbled with a purpose to dissuade the normative culture and essentialism practised in the canonical work by the corporate society, and explore establishing a new cultural, dynamic and innovative space to heal the harm done to the marginalised.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Reparative Readings highlight the queer narratives of fanfiction that sublimate the Heteronormative identity to empower the Queer activism not only embedded within the narratives, but also in the human psyche.

In the wake of decolonisation, the post-colonial body of work reveals an indispensable voice for the subalterns, whose ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation are excluded by the mainstream authors and the struggle of the marginalised was articulated by the feminist sphere is reinvented by the fanfiction writers, expressing their rage and dissatisfaction (Anastasia Salter and Bridget Blodgett).

Despite the immense popularity of the fanfiction communities and the growing body of work on digital participatory culture, which privileged the transformation subject, a prominent research gap exists in addressing the narratological exploration of counter-narratives in reimagining or reshaping the marginalised identity. The study aims to foreground the narrative strategies employed by the fandom of AO3 with reference to the altered characters of Harry Potter, namely, 'Black Hermione' and neurodivergent characters, 'Remus and Sirius', Trance Draco an autistic representation of Hermione in the context of narrative activism.

II RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employs a qualitative study of 40 fan fiction counter-narratives on AO3. The selection criteria include the close reading of paratextual elements in altered narratives. Ethical guidelines were followed to respect the anonymity of the fan fiction writers, exploring only the online available countertext

CASE STUDIES:

Here are the case studies explored to substantiate the objectives of research reclaiming the marginalised identities limited to 40 fanfiction texts of Harry Potter through narratological examination.

Case study 1: Reimagining Hermione Granger

Fanfiction readers altered the White Hermione as a black girl born in the Muggle world and recognised with double consciousness. The Black Witch who embodies Du Bois' double consciousness represents the lived experiences and racial discrimination of the black people, which is forgotten in the mainstream narrative, and questions the silence or erasure of the microaggressions absent in J.K. Rowling's canon. The fan fiction text foregrounds Du Bois' double consciousness of how the self-awareness of black witch Hermione is negotiating her space in the racist Muggle world, and how she is perceived as a black woman in the white supremacist world of racism. The authors' intentional tags, comments, and notes reveal the diverse dimensional struggle experienced by black women for racial validation and social representation. The Paratext is a blend of activism and personal experience.

Case study 2: Queer and Disability Narratives of Remus Lupin and Sirius Black.

The reimagination of fanfiction in AO3 portrays queer romance of dreamers and Sirias in a gay perception and Remus's struggles as a neurodivergent, disabled person. The narrative style of the queer fans employs different focalisation to reveal the marginalised experiences of the Queer. The fanfic readers intend to expose the social stigma and the cultural hierarchy practised. A few fanfic authors have established an anonymous persona to engage in paratextual engagement to transform the collaborative text into a communal counterpublic narrativism, recented in a queer romance. This democratic space influences the readers to publish their reimagined narrative structure in chapters, notes, and messages of different durations and word counts. The digital threshold. As Genette demonstrates, "[E]very text serves as a paratext" (Paratext 8). Additionally, AO3 offers options in viewing sites and specific forms of writing and uploading text, images and videos to stay connected with similar interested collaborators. The fanfic community destabilise Harry's character and re-centres Remus and Sirius heteronormativity. The LGBTQ fanfic readers and the disabled readers affirm the subgenre to encounter the political intervention.

Case study 3: Regendering; TransDrucro

The paratextual ecosystem of the fanfic community features ratings and warnings to categorise the publications in terms of mature, F/M, Magic, Mystery, Romance, Fantasy, etc., in a complex

system. Regardless of the complexity, the readers navigate through the metaphysical exploration of reshaping Draco Malfoy as a transgender or nonbinary character in magical settings to normalise trans identities. This exemplifies voicing out the narrator's pleasure in reclaiming narrative space without disruption. The dialogic and collaborative fantastic express the resistance to cisnormativity embedded in mainstream narratives, and also focus on digital activism through storytelling.

Case study 4: Autistic Representation of Hermione

AO3 serves as a digital counterpublic that resists canonical supremacy and regenerates the story to recentre the marginalised community. The neurodiversity advocacy of fanfiction reletter Hermione and Luna as autistic coded to reflect the neurodivergent experiences. This underscores the relationship between autistic and non-autistic engagement of public reading through both textual and paratextual fanfic conversation.

Findings and Analysis:

The digital discourse of fanfiction narratives employs a phenomenal and unconventional focalisation that shifts from first person to third person to destabilise the neutrality maintained in the mainstream narrative. This influential narratology contributes to integrating the focus on authorial voice and personal voice in reconstructing the meaning. This accords with the feminist narratological perspective of resisting patriarchal dominance (Lancer, 1992; Yuan and Nan, 2018). The first-person point of view narrates the personal experience of racial aggression, and the development of the plot includes the dialogue between the characters and the presence of the authorial voice that engages multiple focalisations that obviously relate to the internal racial issues. This reveals a new social perspective of enabling the readers to represent their racial identity (Kosassin, 2023). The study focused on the expository revelation of fanfic writers, contradictory to canonical authors' experience in foregrounding the marginalised sector of society.

The Fan scholars have centred the Queer and Trans identities through non-linear structures to empower the marginalised characters, resisting heteronormative agents (Duggan 2021). The alternative universe expanded the recreation of Queer and nonconforming LGBTQ+ identity, ostracised or ignored in the canonical work, seeks

ecstasy in resurrection. The linguistic elements like syntax, vocabulary and the tone of the fanfic authors express the emotive struggles of the queer and trans identity. The literary devices include dramatic irony, symbolism, and foreshadowing, the internal monologue and the emotional turmoil, internalised from readers and writers' perspectives similarly. AO3 offers personal space for the readers to leave comments while allowing them to enter their comments in the categorical tags like 'Black Hermione Granger' or 'Trans Draco' to affirm the readers' marginalised representation. Genette's Paratext Theory offers a threshold of possible paratext framework for the fanfic communities to interpret and organise the fan tag narratives (Leavenworth 2014)

By drawing attention towards narratological and paratextual analysis, the research study reflects the challenging voice of marginalised groups against conventional literary canons. The Alternate Universe invented by the fanfic community serves as a powerful model in expressing or documenting the intersectional trauma.

CONCLUSION

Beyond the significant existence of fandoms as a potential mode of creative expression, the study reveals a critical engagement of fanfic writers, reimagining the mainstream narrative. This transformative approach of storytelling and alternative scenarios offers the researchers a dynamic scope for examining the linguistic skill, employment of literary devices in the process of developing plot and characters in the academic sphere. This emphasises the constructive approach of language learning. The present research focuses on the narratological study and thematic analysis of fan fiction by encouraging the readers to develop literary interpretation and critical thinking. Ultimately, the study sheds light on fanfic writers' enhanced cognition in transforming the world around them and highlighting the active participation of marginalised groups.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

The authors confirm that the final version of this manuscript has been reviewed, approved, and consented to for publication by all relevant contributors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, related to the content of this research.

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