4-11-2014

The Tolkien Guide to the Literary Phenomenon of Fan Fiction

Amanda Palomino

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_13

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_13/73
The Tolkien Guide to the Literary Phenomenon of Fan Fiction

What is Fan Fiction?
Fan fiction, also called fan fics, are literary inventions by fan authors using already-established characters and story universes. First popularized in the 1970s with Star Trek fanzines, fan fiction today is an incredibly popular, Internet-based phenomenon, with hundreds of host-sites now freely available. The largest host-site to date is fanfiction.net, which has nearly 2.2 million registered users and over 6 million posted stories.

Digital Literacy: Controversies
Fan fiction is often accused of violating the principles of originality, creativity, and reality which define our modern, academic notion of literature. However, as products of the Internet-age, where many traditional boundaries of time and space are broken down, new digital literacies such as fan fiction are founded on a different “ethos” of story-telling which includes an emphasis on participation, collaboration, and distribution. Fan fiction is a new, different kind of literary experience and as such, requires a new, different framework of understanding.

Tolkien’s “On Fairy Stories”
J.R.R. Tolkien, master of fantasy literature and author of The Lord of the Rings series, explores the defining elements of the fairy story as a defense of its literary worth. In particular, Tolkien’s concepts of Enchantment and Subcreation, the Cauldron of Story, and Escape-Recovery stand out, not only in fairy stories but in fan fiction as well. Both are characterized by a spirit of community, creative sharing, and escapism which ultimately restores our appreciation for what is really good. The parallels between Tolkien’s theory and practices regarding fairy stories on the one hand and fan fiction on the other suggest that such guidelines may help address many of the concerns regarding fan fiction and even help bring out its literary potential.

Amanda Palomino, Mellon Scholars 2014
Mentor: Dr. Curtis Gruenler