A Red Room of Her Own: Dominants, Submissives, Fans, and Producers of *Fifty Shades of Grey*

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that *Fifty Shades of Grey* serves as a key example for understanding the relationship between fans and producers today. As a text, *Fifty Shades* began as fan fiction and therefore blurs the lines between amateur/professional and free/commercial. Within the narrative, *Fifty Shades* offers the dominant/submissive relationship between Christian and Ana that mirrors the games of control and power fans and producers enact extratextually. I draw upon Gérard Genette's notion of paratexts and Jacques Derrida's concept of the archive, as taken up by Abigail Derecho, to examine fan campaigns for the casting of Christian Grey in the *Fifty Shades* film. These fan works reveal how *Fifty Shades* exists as a collection of paratexts (or what Derecho calls 'archontic' works), without an authoritative center. As fans generate new material for the archive and consume material from the industry, they engage in complex games of power over authenticity and originality. In this way, *Fifty Shades* becomes a case study in how the relationship between fans and entertainment industry producers can be allegorised through the dominant/submissive relationship present in the narrative.

Introduction

In one of her early encounters with billionaire Christian Grey, Anastasia Steele is shown the Red Room, where she and Christian will enact scenes of BDSM if she consents. Christian requires a signed agreement that outlines the terms of their dominant/submissive relationship. Ana's initial refusal to sign the agreement exemplifies their complex power dynamic. Christian is a wealthy, domineering, sexually experienced patriarch; Ana is meeker, poorer, and a virgin. But Christian can only wield his power over Ana if she agrees to become his submissive. While the 2015 film adaptation concludes with Ana (Dakota Johnson) walking out of Christian's (Jamie Dornan) condo (and presumably his life), fans of *Fifty Shades* know the trilogy of novels continue with Ana winning Christian's heart; indeed, brief teasers for the two film sequels have been released to assure fans unfamiliar with the novels that the story has a happy ending. Ana reforms Christian into a committed 'vanilla' partner, even as she also comes to enjoy their

dominant/submissive scenes in the Red Room. As the two are changed by each other, control and power shift between them. The eponymous grey in the title is exhibited by the blurring between dominant and submissive. Once a frightful place for Ana, the Red Room becomes a site of pleasure.

Fifty Shades of Grey (James 2012a) is certainly not the first best-selling novel to be turned into a film, nor is it the first piece of erotica to become mainstream. Contemporaneous to the film's production and release were adaptations of a number of novels, such as *Twelve Years a Slave* (Dir. Steve McQueen, 2013), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (Dir. Martin Scorsese, 2013), and *The Hunger Games* trilogy (Dir. Gary Ross, 2012; Dir. Francis Lawrence, 2013, 2014, 2015). While erotic dramas seem to have fallen out of favour in Hollywood in recent years, films like *Fatal Attraction* (Dir. Adrian Lyne, 1987), *Basic Instinct* (Dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1992), and *Indecent Proposal* (Dir. Adrian Lyne, 1993) were once mainstream hits with

giant box office revenues (Sperling 2015: 24-25).

Fifty Shades is also not the first work of fan fiction to become a commercial success. As Abigail De Kosnik argues, however, it 'effectuated fan fiction's breakthrough into the general public's consciousness, drawing attention, notoriety, and controversy to the fan fiction genre by virtue of its extraordinary fame' (2015: 117). Other examples of commercially successful fan fiction include Jean Rhys' 1966 novel *Wide Saragasso Sea*, a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Moving backward through Western literary history, we can find many examples that would meet today's common understanding of fan fiction or transformative work: additions to the Sherlock Holmes canon made by others after Arthur Conan Doyle's death, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and so on. My point here is not to chronicle a history of the creation and publication of fan fiction but to emphasise what distinguishes *Fifty Shades* from preceding examples. Through its tremendous popularity and the media buzz it generated, *Fifty Shades* sparked awareness simultaneously about BDSM/erotica and fan fiction on an unprecedented scale, thus twinning these two cultural phenomena. Positioned somewhere between the commercial and fan realms, *Fifty Shades* is a paradigmatic example through which we can understand contemporary producer/fan relationships.

Perhaps more than any text in recent history, *Fifty Shades of Grey* shows the blurring and shifting of control and power between industry and fans. Originally a work of fan fiction, then a commercially published series of novels, now a feature film, *Fifty Shades* complicates the very idea of what makes a text or paratext. As defined by Gérard Genette, paratexts surround and extend a text 'precisely in order to *present* it' and to 'ensure the text's reception in the world, its "reception" and its consumption' (emphasis in original, 1997: 1). Building on Genette's concept, Jonathan Gray describes paratexts as filling the space between text, audience, and industry; Gray divides paratexts into two categories, those that 'grab the viewer before he or she reaches the text and try to control the viewer's entrance to the text', and those that 'flow between the gaps of textual exhibition, or that come at us "during" or "after" viewing, working to police certain reading strategies in medias res' (2010: 23). Gray notes that even paratexts created by

fans can 'police' reading strategies and work to control reception.

In this paper, I examine examples of paratexts created by fans prior to the film's release. As these paratexts attempt to influence industrial decisions and audience expectations for the film, they demonstrate the negotiation of power between fans and producers. I ultimately argue that this power struggle parallels the relationship between Christian and Ana, so that we can conceive of the producer/fan relationship as a dominant/submissive paradigm. Through this paradigm, it is evident that what we conceive of as 'Fifty Shades' is a collection of paratexts.

Master of the Universe and Canon-from-Fandom[1]

In its initial form, *Fifty Shades of Grey* was a fan fiction story based on Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga (2005; 2006; 2007; 2008). Originally titled *Master of the Universe* by Snowqueens Icedragon, the story alters the narrative world of Twilight so that vampire Edward Cullen is now a human entrepreneur and Bella Swan the young college graduate he pursues. This changing of the details of *Twilight* while keeping the principal characters and the relationship between them is known as setting a story in an 'alternate universe'. Alternate universe stories are popular in fan fiction communities, as they offer the chance to explore new facets of favourite characters through the new situations created for them. They also help demonstrate the popular fan notion of 'one true pairing' in that, regardless of the narrative circumstances, characters like Edward and Bella will always fall in love.

Precisely because of the possible changes in narrative circumstance, Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse argue that alternate universe fan fiction especially points to the 'source text as discursive referent'; for fan fiction writers, the 'appeal of writing with and against the source text offers [a] pleasurable challenge' (2009: 196). By commenting on and drawing attention to the original text, alternate universe stories are an especially ripe example of fan-created paratexts. Gray claims that while fans 'commonly lack the capital and infrastructure to circulate their texts as widely [as the industry], their creative and discursive products can and often do become important additions to the text' (2010: 143).

Master of the Universe, however, is not only an important addition to the textual world of *Twilight*; it is also its own text with its own, sometimes unique, fans. The story's alternate universe setting facilitated the move of that new text to commercial publication. As Bethan Jones (2014) has chronicled, *Fifty Shades of Grey* came into existence as a slightly revised version of *Master of the Universe*. By making only slight revisions, such as changing characters' names, E.L. James (the new pseudonym for Snowqueens Icedragon) was able to sell the trilogy of novels *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Fifty Shades Darker*, and *Fifty Shades Freed* through the Writers' Coffee Shop site and later sign a contract with Vintage for their print publication. As Jones demonstrates, many fans of *Master of the Universe* supported James' move into commercial publishing and helped to promote *Fifty Shades* upon its release (Jones 2014: 3.9).

As *Fifty Shades* entered the print world, it became available to new groups of readers, those who typically do not consume Internet-based fiction and those outside the *Twilight* fandom. For these readers, *Fifty Shades* can be regarded as its own canon with its own fans – hence the notion that the books were 'mommy porn', erotic literature created for and consumed by mild-mannered mothers unaware of the fan fiction origins and previously unexposed to BDSM (Trevenen 2014).

This canon-from-fandom marks a shift in the economics of fan practices. The lack of commercial gain was once a common argument fan writers made to protect themselves from litigation over copyright infringement, and it is customary for fan fiction stories to begin with a disclaimer that the writer does not own the characters and is not profiting from the distribution of her story (Jenkins 1992: 32-33; Hellekson 2009: 114). However, the free exchange of creative works within fandom is about more than avoiding litigation; it reinforces community. Beyond posting work to the Internet, fans also engage in a variety of activities, such as beta reading fiction before it is finished or posting story prompts for others to respond to. The dialogue generated by these activities fosters a sense of community within fandom (Jones, 2014: 2.3). Drawing upon the ideas of anthropologist Marcel Mauss, Karen Hellekson describes women-centred fandoms like *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* as gift economies wherein works given from one fan to another for free are 'incorporated into a multivocal dialogue that creates a metatext, the continual composition of which creates a community' (2009: 115). By creating work for each other, engaging with each other's work and offering feedback, fans solidify social bonds and forge group identities. Because this exchange happens through gifting, rather than the sale and consumption of commodities, scholars like Hellekson argue that the gift economy is a subversion of patriarchal, capitalist models of exchange (2009: 116-117).

For others, the free exchange of fan fiction is one way in which fans—typically women—lose the opportunity to profit from their labour, creativity, and goods. Because of the 'long, gendered history of fan communities and their relationships with producers', Suzanne Scott advocates that 'women fans, not male-driven media industries, profit from the monetization of fan works' (2009: 3.5). In an issue of the fan studies journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* dedicated to the concept of 'fandom and/as labour', editors Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis note the tension that exists between the idea that 'fan activity is by all appearances both freely chosen and understood as pleasure', and the reality that fan labour generates value, often in the form of profit, for media industries (2014: 1.1, 1.2). Prior to the commercial publication of *Fifty Shades*, Abigail De Kosnik referenced Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own* when she expressed a 'pressing need' to 'reiterate that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction"' (2009: 118).

Fifty Shades has become the most notable example of the monetisation of fan practices carried out first by a fan herself, then by a fan in tandem with the industry. Its sale by the Writers' Coffee Shop and subsequently by Vintage marks a fan's choice to return to the capitalist system. Following in the wake of James's success, many fans are hopeful that they, too, can profit from their creative endeavours. In 2013, Amazon launched Kindle Worlds, a platform for the sale of fan fiction of certain media properties specifically licensed for this purpose; the profits of sales would be shared by Amazon, the fan fiction writer, and the media partner (Rothman 2013). Perhaps inspired by the success of *Fifty Shades*, other fan fiction writers and commercial publishers seek more traditional book and film deals. For example, Penguin

announced in 2012 that it had acquired a popular fan fiction story about the boy band One Direction and intended to turn it into a novel (Hess 2012). Film studio Paramount acquired the screen rights to Anna Todd's novel *After*,[2] published on the platform Wattpad; the novel centres on the relationship between a young woman and a character based on One Direction's Harry Styles (Walker 2014). In short, women fans are beginning to find rooms of their own.

Yet the transition from fan writers to commercial novelist, or fan fiction to commercial publication, is often fraught with contention. The process of changing copyright material for commercial publication, known in fan communities as 'filing off the serial numbers', and the related process of removing a story from a fan fiction website in order to drive commercial sales, or 'pulling to publish', are hotly contested by many fans.[3] The process demonstrates a disavowal of the fan fiction origins of a work and removes the work from the community it belongs to (Morrissey 2014; Jones 2014: 3.4-3.6). One consequence is a potential loss of cultural heritage for the work or the ability to recognise the works' place within a larger archive. In a response to her 2009 essay, De Kosnik expresses concerns over the way '*Fifty Shades*, denuded of all markers of its membership in an archive of explicitly intertextual stories, loses many, or most, of the potential meanings it can have for female readers' (2015: 122). Although James received support from some of the original *Masters* readers, she and other fan fiction writers who pull their work to publish it commercially often experience a fair amount of backlash from other fans, who perceive them to be 'selling out', and from non-fans who perceive them as unqualified amateurs (Stanfill 2013). Conversely, fans authoring fan fiction about *Fifty Shades* have received warning letters from publishers about potential copyright infringement, despite the fact that these fans were participating in the same kind of paratext creation that Snowqueens Icedragon initially was (Boog 2012).

This contention results from the questions about authenticity and authorship that are raised by the commercial publication of fan fiction, particularly in the digital age. My purpose here is not to condemn or praise the idea of getting a 'room of one's own' through a move to commerciality. Rather, I want to call attention to the ways in which this room does not stand alone but is within a house—an archive— of interrelated texts.

As Roland Barthes argues, all texts are a 'tissue of citations, resulting from [a] thousand sources in culture' (1967: 4). Nick Couldry similarly argues that in lieu of a single text, we think instead of a 'vast space of more or less interconnected texts' (2000: 70). Gray's definition of the paratext similarly foregrounds this intertextuality: a paratext is 'both "distinct from" and alike…intrinsically a part of the text' (2010: 6). Given this inevitable intertextuality, *Fifty Shades* cannot be isolated from other *Twilight* fan fiction or even fan fiction about *Fifty Shades* itself, and the film version cannot be isolated from the three novels. Instead, our understanding of what 'Fifty Shades' is hinges upon Abigail Derecho's (2006) concept of the archontic. Drawing upon Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995), Derecho argues that the archive is driven by a principle which 'never allows the archive to remain stable or still, but wills it to add to its own stories' (2006: 64). Archontic texts are not, therefore, 'not lesser than the source text, and they do not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather, they only add to that text's archive, becoming part of the archive and expanding it' (2006: 65). The pleasure gained from encountering archontic paratexts need not correspond with whether they are 'unique' or 'transformative', for sale or freely exchanged. Pleasure instead corresponds with the process of adding to the archive and seeing the archive grow.

Casting Christian Grey

If we acknowledge that *Fifty Shades* began as a fan-created work about *Twilight*, it seems only fitting to compare it to the fan works it has inspired in turn. In this section, I examine fan-created paratexts about the process of casting Christian Grey in the feature film, as these paratexts precede the film itself and call attention to the dynamic relationship between industry and fans. They also serve to blur the distinction between canon and fandom or professional and amateur. In doing so, they demonstrate ways in which fans attempt to 'talk back' to the industry and influence reception of the future text (in this case, the film).

Once news spread in the summer of 2012 that the first *Fifty Shades* novel was being adapted into a

film, the Internet began to teem with speculations on casting. For example, the article 'Ten Actors Who Should Play Christian Grey' was posted to *What Culture*, a pop culture website that features media news (Gallagher 2012).[4] Other media outlets and social media sites featured similar lists, many of which drew upon the same crop of actors. Determining whether such lists come from Hollywood insider information or from mere speculation on the part of the writer is often difficult. On the one hand, 'Hollywood invests large amounts of money, time, and labour into hyping its products' (Gray 2010: 47). On the other hand, many media blogs feature contributions by amateur fans, rather than trained journalists, or simply reblog content instead of creating their own (Kawamoto 2003). Thus, articles like 'Ten Actors Who Should Play […]' can be read as hype generated by the *Fifty Shades* producers, as journalism, or as fan-created paratexts.

The ambiguity of the origins of articles like this is part of the reason they become so widely read and circulated: they raise affect, inciting the creation of additional paratexts. Fans are spurred to campaign for their favourite actor on the list and to fantasise about seeing the actor step outside the role that made him a fan favourite in the first place. The process of exchanging dialogue about the unmade film parallels in many ways to the feedback *Master of the Universe* originally received as Snowqueens Icedragon posted it one chapter at a time. In both cases, fans participated in shaping the discourse and meaning of a text in progress, for each other if not for creators. When readers of *Master* offered feedback on a specific chapter, they had no guarantee that Snowqueens Icedragon would read the feedback or, if she did, that she would alter future chapters to reflect the readers' ideas. Similarly, fans leaving comments on *What Culture* have no guarantee they are responding to news from the casting director's office; they also have no guarantee their campaigning for particular actors will be heard by the film's producers. Nevertheless, fans continue to participate in these activities because, first of all, they are pleasurable in and of themselves, and second, because there is additional pleasure in the hope that they may influence industry decisions.

There are, of course, key differences between offering feedback on fan fiction and on casting decisions for a feature film. As a fan fiction writer posting one chapter at a time, Snowqueens Icedragon was engaged in the gifting of her work in order to receive comments, which are gifts back from the readers. Regardless of how open a film production may seem to audience intervention, casting decisions are ultimately based on actor availability, producers' and directors' choices, and budget—a variety of factors having little to do with the gifting of a casting choice to fans. In both cases, however, the negotiation of control, including the forfeiting of it, leads to pleasure. Fans of the *Fifty Shades* expressed their excitement and pleasure about the casting process through the creation of additional blog posts, digital movie posters, art work on Tumblr, and tweets. In short, they continued to create more paratexts that preceded the film and contributed to the larger *Fifty Shades* archive.

Filmgoers are accustomed to encountering paratexts that precede the text. These typically take the form of the film trailer that entices a spectator to return to the theatre at a later date. Because we make determinations about the meaning of the film seen in a trailer before we see the film in its entirety, Jonathan Gray notes that preceding paratexts like trailers 'serve as the first outpost of interpretation' (2010: 48). Importantly, though, Gray notes that producers are the ones who determine how that meaning is conveyed, and as a result 'paratexts tell us how [producers] would prefer for us to interpret a text' (2010: 72). Although Gray concedes to the existence of fan-created paratexts, he does not address the important role they can play in establishing an ethos for a text as yet unfinished or unreleased.

Casting speculation paratexts like the article from *What Culture* demonstrate the shifting relationship between fans and producers, since fans now participate in the creation of paratexts that will set up the meaning to the text. Between the announcement that *Fifty Shades* was being adapted into a film and the final casting of Jamie Dornan as Christian Grey, fans launched campaigns for their favourite actors across social media.[5] The most active fan campaigns were for Matt Bomer (known at that time for his work on the television series *White Collar* [USA

Network 2009-2016] and later the male stripper movie *Magic Mike* [Dir. Steven Soderbergh, 2012], and Ian Somerhalder (known for his role as a vampire in *The Vampire Diaries* [The CW 2009-], a series with an immense fan following).

Response from the actors about these fan campaigns and their position as internet fan favourites was mixed. Somerhalder joked about the possibility of discovering BDSM: 'There's a website you can go to where you can actually outfit your basement as a dungeon. So, you know, for the role I thought I'd get prepared, just in case' (Arciero 2012). When Bomer was asked how he felt about being a frontrunner for the role of Christian Grey, he responded diplomatically: 'I need to read the book and see who the director is, but it sounds amazing from what I hear...' At the time of the interview, there was no director attached to the project, and Bomer's position as 'frontrunner' was merely the product of hype from his fans. His and Somerhalder's responses fit with industry protocol that requires a diplomatic response in case they are being considered or have the opportunity to work with the same producers on a future project. In addition, their enthusiasm, or at least mild interest, at being a fan favourite to play Christian Grey is an equally diplomatic response to fans. Their reluctance to confirm or deny talks with casting directors and film producers leaves open the possibility and the hope that they were, indeed, eager to be considered for the role of Christian and did not want to jeopardise that status. Without being in the conversations among casting directors and producers, we cannot discern which casting rumours were fantasy and which were reality. Moreover, we do not need to.

Alongside interviews with the actors were fan-created paratexts that reveal how hype can be easily understood as legitimate industry news. In July 2012, a Photoshopped cover of the magazine *Entertainment Weekly* featuring Matt Bomer was disseminated online. The cover declares, 'The Wait Is Over', in reference to anticipation about the studio's final casting decision. The image was mistaken for authentic, forcing a response from *Fifty Shades* film producer Dana Brunetti on Twitter: 'All of the rumours on #FiftyShades are just that—rumours. No

one has been cast in any role. We have to get a writer and director first' (@DanaBrunetti, 23 July 2012). Many other entertainment websites picked up the story and reported the cover as a hoax (Boone 2012; DiFalco 2012).

Hoax, however, is an overly simplistic description of the fan-created paratext. For fans of Matt Bomer unacquainted with *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the *Entertainment Weekly* cover image may have seemed like genuine news about their favourite actor; but it also functioned as a fan-created version of an 'entry-way text' (Gray 2010: 18), which may have inspired Bomer fans to investigate *Fifty Shades*. Conversely, it may have inspired *Fifty Shades* fans who were unfamiliar with Bomer to find out more about his acting career. While fan-created paratexts may cause some confusion about their authority, they do not merely undermine a text; the confusion they spark prompts greater interest in the text itself. For fans of *Fifty Shades* who were aware of the film's pre-production process (that casting hadn't yet been determined), the magazine cover skilfully tapped into an important moment of cultural dialogue.

The second example moves beyond casting speculation for a film that hadn't yet been cast, and to the release of a film that hadn't yet been made. A fan video purporting to be a trailer starring Matt Bomer and Alexis Bledel (a fan favourite for the role of Ana) was posted to YouTube in 2012.[6] The trailer follows traditional commercial film trailer conventions through the use of ratings warnings, a logo for Universal Pictures, voiceover, and scenes edited out of sequence for dramatic effect. However, it also signals its creation by a fan, rather than a professional trailer-creating studio, in that the logo for the television network USA can be seen at the bottom of scenes taken from Bomer's series *White Collar*. At other moments, it is evident that there are multiple women fulfilling the Anastasia role: Alexis Bledel in close-ups from her WB/CW series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) and feature film *Post Grad* (Dir. Vicky Jenson, 2009), and Bomer's various scene partners in shots over the shoulder. Because *White Collar* and *Gilmore Girls* do not have any BDSM scenes to mine, the trailer borrows from the 2002 film *Secretary* (Dir. Steven Shainberg) to show 'Christian' spanking

'Anastasia'.

Fan-created trailers like this one are examples of what is known as 'vidding'. In her work on the history of vidding, Francesca Coppa (2008) describes how women fans of the original *Star Trek* created vids as a kind of textual analysis that called attention to certain themes and narrative limitations within the series. Coppa also outlines some of the technical constraints of the medium in its analogue form. Although digital technologies enable faster and smoother vid creation, some of the complexities in creation still result in aesthetic markers seen in the *Fifty Shades* fan trailer: the use of multiple women to signify one character, the omnipresent network logo in the corner of the screen, and the use of scenes from a different film for the BDSM content. These idiosyncrasies of the genre remind viewers they are watching a fan creation, which Coppa suggests shares 'an aesthetic tradition and analytical impulse' with its analogue predecessors (2008: 1.4). Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse similarly note that makers of fan videos must surmount the 'clear constraints of finite visual material to create stories that move beyond those told in the source text', and it is precisely because of the video's ability to reimagine material that it becomes effective (2009: 202). Viewers watching the trailer are aware that it is fan-created but may choose to suspend their disbelief at its origins, to believe they are watching an official, studio-sanctioned promo.

The fan-created trailer is also at its core a promotion for the *Fifty Shades* novels, since it is crafted on speculation about which elements of the narrative would appear in the film. As such, it is also part of a growing number of book trailers, which serve as promotions for novels across video-sharing platforms (Vollans forthcoming). The viewer of the fan trailer watches with an eye toward how well it captures the spirit of the novels, including favourite moments of interaction between Christian and Ana and the pertinent BDSM themes. The viewer is also teased by this book trailer's double function as a trailer for the film.

The trailer works therefore in several ways as a teaser: teasing that the film would eventually be created and released, teasing that the film was already forthcoming, teasing that Bomer and Bledel

had been decisively cast. The trailer can also be read as a fan response to the industry, in that it shows what fans wanted and expected from the filmic adaptation of the novel.

In July 2014, the first trailer for the commercial film with Dornan and Johnson was released. The first few moments are nearly identical to those in the fan video: Ana arriving at Christian's office, harried, and nervously approaching him for their first meeting. There are other similarities in content between the two: Bomer and Dornan's bare chests, empty beds suggesting a sexual relationship, close-ups of various body parts. However, the tone of the two trailers is quite different. While the fan video emphasises the BDSM subject matter of the novels through voiceover describing the dominant/submissive relationship, the commercial trailer only hints at it in the final few shots and instead has the affective quality of the romance. In reality, Sam Taylor-Johnson's 2015 film is quite faithful to the BDSM themes of the novel and contains many sexually explicit scenes. In spite of the differences in sexual content, though, the similarities between the fan-created and studio-created trailers are difficult to ignore. While the similarities between the two trailers may be coincidental, reflecting the most important qualities of the *Fifty Shades* narrative, it is possible that producers were aware of the fan video and influenced by it. Even if producers did not see the fan trailer, the fan trailer resulted in hype and media buzz; if it did not shape the film itself, it certainly shaped discourse surrounding it.

Other fan actions were nearly impossible for the film producers to ignore, particularly as these actions garnered media attention. A petition to cast Matt Bomer and Alexis Bledel, begun by @Zaynctness on Change.org, garnered over 93,000 signatures before it was closed. Though the petitioners were ultimately unsuccessful at getting Bomer and Bledel cast in the *Fifty Shades* film, they succeeded at getting responses from Bomer, E.L. James, and producer Dana Brunetti (Strecker 2013). Jamie Dornan has even said that he has been accosted by fans claiming Matt Bomer as the 'real' Christian Grey (Takeda 2015). The hype surrounding fan campaigns clearly cemented Bomer as Christian Grey for many fans,

regardless of Dornan's ultimate hiring.

Although the impetus may be to sharpen or delineate the boundaries between 'fan-created' and 'official', the coexistence of these archontic paratexts only serves to add to the cultural experience of 'Fifty Shades'. While Derecho still sees the canon or source text as the centre of this archive, in the case of *Fifty Shades* the centre does not exist, since it is difficult to determine what the source text is. Is it the film or the novels? Perhaps it is *Master of the Universe*, or even *Twilight*? In a departure from Derrida's original notion of the archive as having centrality, I argue that 'Fifty Shades' is a confluence of paratexts. The film builds upon the *Fifty Shades* novels, which build upon *Master*; fan-created paratexts, such as casting speculations, build upon the trilogy of novels in hyping the release of the filmic adaptation. At each stage in the development of *Fifty Shades* as a brand and franchise, the centre is destabilised, and more works are added to the archive.

Dominants/Submissives, Fantasy/Reality

If it is difficult to parse the central text from the paratexts, it is because *Fifty Shades* reveals how fans can become producers and fan works can become commercial texts. E.L. James is the best example, making the move from amateur writer of freely distributed fan fiction to best-selling commercial novelist. The industry still retains the most power—after all, neither Matt Bomer nor Ian Somerhalder were cast as Christian—but only insofar as fans agree to continue consuming what the industry sells.

This push-pull between producers and fans mirrors the dominant/submissive relationship between Christian and Ana, as well as many practitioners of safe, sane, and consensual (SSC) BDSM. *Fifty Shades* has been rebuked for its misrepresentations of the BDSM lifestyle (Ramsland 2012; Harman and Jones 2013: 960; Barker 2013; Tsaros 2013; Steel 2015). Nevertheless, the intention of *Fifty Shades* is to demonstrate the simultaneity of erotic pleasure and games of power and control—which is not unlike the pleasures fans find in engaging with their favourite texts, especially as the industry plays with fans' expectations. It is for this reason that, regardless of the efficacy or accuracy of the portrayal of BDSM in

Fifty Shades, I contend that the dominant/submissive dynamic foregrounded in the narrative is a useful allegory of the relationship between fans and industry in the present moment.

The relationship, in its ideal terms, is one of mutually agreed upon cooperation in order to achieve maximum pleasure for both parties. The dominant requires the submissive's willing participation in order to have someone to dominate; likewise, the submissive requires the dominant's willingness to take charge of him or her in order to have someone to submit to. Speaking from his own experiences with SSC BDSM, dominant Jack Rinella argues that the 'dominance of one over the other [creates] a unity of purpose, desire, and being' (2004: 18). Sophia, who prefers to sub, similarly describes the dominant/submissive relationship as a 'multileveled power structure [...] that is far more complex than meets the eye' (2007: 272). As Sophia explains it, the crucial element of the arrangement is negotiation to ensure both parties understand their responsibilities and the other's limits.

These cornerstones of SSC BDSM—negotiations and clearly articulated limits—admittedly do not often transfer to the experience of the average fan. The case of the *Veronica Mars* film (Dir. Rob Thomas, 2014), which was funded by a Kickstarter campaign, offers one example of how explicit negotiation might be implemented: those who contributed to the campaign routinely received updates and behind-the-scenes content while film production was in progress (Chin et al. 2014; Gray and Askwith 2014).[7] When digital downloads promised to fans who participated in the crowd-funding campaign failed, producers offered refunds (Busch 2014). The rules agreed upon by both parties were broken, and so amends had to be made. The *Veronica Mars* example is rare, as often fans and producers find themselves in a power-exchange relationship they are unaware of and have not necessarily consented to. In such cases, fan backlash and industry policing are understandable reactions when one party believes the other has transgressed.

The concepts of SSC BDSM spelled out by Rinella and Sophia overlook what is perhaps BDSM's most noteworthy quality: that it is not spoken of in

polite company. Following *Fifty Shades*' commercial publication, for instance, news outlets reported on battles to have the book removed from public libraries because of its perceived scandalous content (Lush 2012). Sales of e-readers like Amazon's Kindle exponentially increased as Fifty Shades remained in top-ranking positions on e-literature markets; it was widely speculated this was a result of readers not wanting to be seen toting around the book (Brogan 2012). Within the narrative, Ana and Christian keep their preferences for BDSM largely private; both also must overcome a sense of shame that BDSM is non-normative. Despite the secrecy and taboo—or perhaps because of it—BDSM is thrilling.

A similar argument can be made about fandom. As Lynn S. Zubernis and Katherine Larsen note, the 'First Rule of Fandom' has traditionally been to 'tell no one about fandom', because fans are 'simultaneously defensive and ashamed' about their practices (2013: 32-33). Like BDSM, practitioners of which can meet through the website FetLife, fans find each other and establish social networks in vast online communities where anonymity may be maintained through use of screen names if a fan does not want to 'out' herself. *Fifty Shades* is at the epicentre of the mainstreaming of fans, fan practices, and non-normative sexualities, though tensions over shame and social acceptability persist.

Thus, in lieu of previous models for understanding the relationship between producers and fans, I propose the paradigm of dominant/submissive. The idea of fans as 'textual poachers' (Jenkins 1992), or as 'resistant' (Fiske 1989), no longer adequately describes the potential for fans, their creative products, and their labour to benefit or join the industry. As recent scholarship has observed, media industries increasingly engage with audiences and fans on a variety of platforms, especially social media like Twitter (Bury et al. 2013), but cannot and do not base all their decisions about texts on fan input (Hills 2002: 38). Instead, the ideal contemporary producer/fan relationship is characterised by mutual trust and mutual dependence, which lead to mutual benefit. When fans and producers find themselves frustrated by each other, it is not because the dominant/submissive paradigm has failed, but because it has not been

undertaken with careful negotiation and consensus on limits. As with non-SSC BDSM, there is potential for risk and hurt on either side.

In the film and novel versions of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Christian and Ana negotiate the terms of the agreement Ana must sign. They compromise on which sexual activities are allowed and on which aspects of Ana's daily life Christian is permitted to micro-manage. During these negotiations, it is evident how much power Ana actually has, despite her inexperience and her label as (eventual) submissive. Their negotiations and the exchange of power demonstrate how the dominant/submissive power exchange is a series of 'complex mind games, where the line between fantasy and reality can become blurred' (Moser and Madeson 1996: 194).

Likewise, in the case of the archive that is *Fifty Shades*, it is often difficult to find the line between fan-created fantasy and industry-sanctioned product ('reality'). As more fans like Snowqueens Icedragon/E.L. James skyrocket to fame and become part of the industry, the division between fan-created and industry-sanctioned has become less distinct. While capitalist-driven media industries retain their dominant position, the case of *Fifty Shades* reveals the ways in which that power is dynamically granted by and negotiated with fans. The industry relies on fans for its profit, for free marketing through social media and word-of-mouth, and, increasingly, for the next big creative work that will turn commercial. In turn, fans rely upon the industry to provide them with creative properties like the *Fifty Shades* film, and with the painful pleasure that sometimes results from not being able to control how those properties eventually turn out. This dynamic, like that between dominant and submissive, is one that can be mutually beneficial if carried out through the principles of safe, sane, and consensual BDSM.

Conclusion

Awareness of paratexts and the ability of fan-created paratexts to become 'official' demonstrate the changing relationship between fans and industry. Just as Rinella and others suggest that the best model for SSC BDSM practices come from a shared power dynamic, so too do fans and producers benefit from

a cooperative approach to canon-building. Following Derecho's notion of the archontic, we can see how fan works do not merely appropriate or derive from the source so much as they add to it. The fan fiction story *Master of the Universe* builds upon the *Twilight* saga, which itself builds upon centuries of literature and mythology about vampires. *Master* was transformed into the *Fifty Shades* trilogy of novels; the movie was built upon those novels. The 'official' texts in this canon are already archontic; including fan works in the archive only increases the visibility and productivity of the franchise.

In the final scenes of the film, Ana grants Christian permission to show his true nature. Christian takes her to the Red Room, where he whips her brutally. The scene leads to an emotional breakdown for Ana, and the following morning she leaves Christian's condo. The film concludes with the elevator doors closing on her face—but, as Nick Romano (2015) observes, it is clear in the final close-up that she is as devastated by leaving as she is about having seen the full force of Christian's sadism. Notably, both Dornan and Johnson have been signed on for a sequel, and brief teasers for the two remaining films in the trilogy have been released to reassure new fans that Ana's departure is not the conclusion to the story. As readers of *Fifty Shades Darker* (James 2012b) and *Fifty Shades Freed* (James 2012c) know, the story continues with Ana and Christian's reconciliation and eventual marriage.

Although Ana first perceived the Red Room as a place for Christian's delight and her torture, it becomes a place where they work together to achieve mutual pleasure. Her initial belief that the dominant/submissive relationship is exclusively for Christian's benefit is undone by the complexity of their power dynamic and her enjoyment of that exchange. That complex dynamic allegorises the producer/fan relationship in the contemporary moment. Fans (like Snowqueens Icedragon) can become part of the industry (as E.L. James), and fan works (like *Master of the Universe*) can become commercial (as the *Fifty Shades* novels and film). Additional fan works like casting paratexts are received by other fans as somewhere between authentic and speculative, professional and amateur. Thus, what *Fifty Shades* teaches

us is that, just as Ana comes to appreciate her BDSM relationship with Christian, it is through the 'multi-leveled power structure' and blurring of boundaries that fans derive their pleasure.

Notes

[1] Although the term 'canon' historically carries notions of elitism and exclusion, its use within fan communities refers to elements from the source that fans agree are authoritative. My use of the term is therefore intended to reiterate the way in which fans grapple for power over particular texts, rather than a top-down hierarchical model.

[2] Anna Todd's After series can be found on Wattpad: https://www.wattpad.com/after.

[3] For a more complete description of 'filing off the serial numbers' and 'pulling to publish', as well as a summary of debates surrounding these practices, see the following entry on *Fanlore*: http://fanlore.org/wiki/Filing_Off_The_Serial_Numbers.

[4] One of the fan favourites for the role of Christian was Robert Pattinson, who originated the role of *Twilight*'s Edward (on which Christian was based). There was some buzz and casting speculation about which actress would be cast as Anastasia, but far fewer than that surrounding the role of Christian, perhaps owing to the predominantly female makeup of the *Fifty Shades* fandom.

[5] Charlie Hunnam, known for his role on the television series *Sons of Anarchy* (FX 2008-2014), was initially cast as Christian. After a brief period, however, the studio announced that he had quit the role. Jamie Dornan was cast shortly thereafter (see Gruttadaro 2013).

[6] The unofficial 'fan-made' *Fifty Shades of Grey* trailer is available to view at: https://youtu.be/swSA_GiB0g0.

[7] In a dialogue with Jonathan Gray at the 2014 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, Ivan Askwith explained that he was on set during the production of the *Veronica Mars* film as a liaison to fans, in order to ensure the additional content provided to them was of affective value. Although employed to be an industry insider, Askwith, a former student of Henry Jenkins, also expressed his sense of duty and loyalty to fans.

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