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Fandom and fiction: adolescent literature and online communities

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Fandom and fiction: Adolescent literature and online communities

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University

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DEDICATION

To my community. Thank you for all that you do—especially, my parents, my brother, my family, my teachers, my friends, my coworkers, and my students. Each of you inspires me every day.

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ABSTRACT

Internet and multimedia platforms are changing the way adolescents read and interact with literature, and in turn changing the way many writers for adolescents approach their readers and their work. Three authors of popular young-adult literature, Lois Lowry, J.K. Rowling, and John Green, demonstrate a range of approaches and responses to new communities of readership and “fandom.” The communities built around successful adolescent reader franchises have begun to engage in both online interaction and real-world activities such as charitable fundraising and fan publishing; this phenomenon may change the nature of adolescent literature and has even broader possible implications.

CHAPTER I

CONNECTING FANDOM TO READER RESPONSE CRITICISM

“Books are so special and rare and yours that advertising your affection feels like a betrayal.”

— John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

While the characters in John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* may be averse to praising the special books that change lives, in the age of technology readers do “advertise [their] affection” and do not seem to consider the activity a betrayal of the author or the work. From websites such as GoodReads, which consumers can use to find reader reviews, to devoted fan sites such as mugglenet.com and nerdfighteria.com, which invite users to explore multimedia websites in a select community, readers today advocate, celebrate, and interact with books in many ways and for many reasons. The ways novels, authors, and readers communicate seems to have changed in the Internet era. It is a difference of degree rather than of kind, yet technology has increased the speed with which consumers, fans, and authors can communicate. Multimodal spaces incorporate video, audio, text, and user feedback onto one website. In these spaces, users can interact in immediate, global ways that alter the ways fans, authors, and corporations share their messages. Looking specifically at adolescent literature, this thesis attempts to explore the way authors’ interactions with readers and fans have developed in the last thirty years.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the late nineteenth century *fan* had a specific meaning: someone who followed baseball (“fan” n.2). However, by the turn of the century, the term applied to theater patrons, sports enthusiasts, and any “keen follower of a specified hobby or amusement” (“fan” n.2). While defining *fan* is relatively easy, defining the “sociocultural phenomenon largely associated with modern capitalist societies, electronic media,

mass culture and public performance” of fandom proves more difficult (Duffett 5). Academic studies of fan culture often take ethnographic approaches through which scholars analyze how fans interact, communicate, and take part in rituals of the subculture (Coppa 41). However, Karen Hellekson and Krista Busse assert that “No single theory or approach has been able to comprehensively discuss all fans in terms of community and affect; rather, certain disciplines tend to discuss certain sorts of affective fans” (136). For this reason, I will focus my discussion on fans of adolescent literature and the growing popularity of the genre, as well as how authors and corporations are assessing the global community.

Adolescent literature as a genre is still being defined. However, scholars have created working definitions for this emerging form of literature. As Roberta Sellinger Trites explains, “While growth in children's literature is depicted as a function of what the character has learned about self, growth in adolescent literature is depicted as a function of what the adolescent learns about how society curtails power” (472). Chris Crowe defines Young Adult (YA) literature to be for “a person old enough to be in junior or high school, usually grades seven through twelve... published since 1967 [and] written for and marketed to young adults” (120). For the purpose of this paper, I will use the term *adolescent literature* because all the texts discussed concern the power struggle Trites emphasizes, even though these works are mostly marketed to the young adults Crowe defines.

In 1934, the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI), one of the first fan communities, was established in New York City. The BSI revered and celebrated Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous fictional detective, Sherlock Homes. This still-active society, like most fan clubs, gathers for discussion, games, quizzes, and other activities while forming a community around the object of their amusement (Pearson 49). This fan community of BSI, and others like it, helped to keep

Sherlock Holmes alive for almost a century. Partly as a result of this ongoing enthusiasm, in recent years, Sherlock Holmes has appeared in many commercialized forms of media: he has worked in New York City on CBS's *Elementary*, appeared in film adaptations starring Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law, and solved present-day crimes in London on BBC's *Sherlock*.

The latter has seen an especially robust fandom, for as the BBC series gained popularity in the 2010s, its fans had many media outlets, including the Internet, to discuss their favorite detective (Grossman 40). At the end of the second series, Sherlock must die in order to save his friends from prison, and it seems that he had committed all the crimes that he so brilliantly solved. Or was it really Moriarty, Sherlock's nemesis? Sherlockians took to the Internet to show their support, creating posters stating "I Believe in Sherlock Holmes" or "Moriarty is a Myth" to express their theories (Laredo). Networks of people discussed the show's finale, using both old and new forms of media to share and analyze the show's characters and storylines.

As the example of Holmes fandom indicates, the rise of the Internet and other technologies did not give rise to fan bases. Fans still meet in face-to-face settings: the classroom, library, coffee shop, or book club. As Antero Garcia notes, "[A]dvances in how social networks connect physical world relationships, and the ways blogs indicate the ease with which a layman can become an author, act as beacons for engagement with and about books and authors" (111). It is not necessarily the case that social networks and the Internet create large fan bases or change how fans communicate their admiration; instead, scholars find that the Internet and technology provide a global space for interaction. As Francesca Coppa asserts, "If the expansion of the Internet allowed communication between fans in different worlds, the translation and adaptations of fannish terms, forms, and practices that [have] emerged from those communications is rapidly transforming the fannish landscape into something that older fans may barely recognize" (57). In

the digital age, fans actively employ media to interact with like-minded peers, finding new ideas and interpretations. These interpretive communities have often grown around objects which can be explored such as Doyle's works involving the detective Sherlock Holmes, yet multimodal technology offers a powerful space in which fandom can flourish.

Fan clubs, which had been part of fandom since the BSI, became more popular in the 1960s and 70s when such television series as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Starsky and Hutch*, and *Star Trek* inspired fans to incorporate new ideas into their discussions. These groups became fans who interacted in groups through magazines and other products that could be distributed easily. At this point in history, the use of copiers created faster and cheaper forms of distribution than previous decades allowed (Coppa 43). Fan magazines, like fan clubs, offer camaraderie. While Stephen Duncombe admits that defining a so-called "fanzine" is difficult, mainly because there are a wide variety of types (just like levels of community in fandom), most contain essays, opinion pieces, and editorials describing and criticizing the object of fandom (14). Some fanzines contain a mix of fan-created products such as fiction, drawings, and poems, and material "pirated from other zines and mainstream press" (14). Before the Internet, fanzines were a primary way in which fans could spread their ideas to the community at large.

In the 1960s and 1970s, *Star Trek* appealed to a wide audience of adolescents, young adults, and families. In 1966, producer Gene Roddenberry first screened *Star Trek* at Worldcon, an annual convention held by the World Science Fiction Society, and launched the subsequent NBC television series. *Star Trek* attracted a new audience of (often young) female fans, although science fiction fanzines and fandom had not previously attracted a large female audience (Coppa 43).

Because its fans were diverse, *Star Trek* (1966-1969) is considered instrumental in the growth of fan networking. While the show received mediocre critical reviews, fans managed to keep the show on the air for three seasons. Inspired by the series, fans wrote scripts, stories, and other works to express their enthusiasm. As Coppa explains, fans of traditional science fiction “dismissed *Star Trek* as science fiction for nonreaders. This was an unfair slur against the (mainly) female fans who were helping to build *Star Trek* fandom and who were still active science fiction literature fans as well” (45). These fans broke away from “traditional” science fiction fans, creating their own subculture and their own materials.

While fan clubs create spaces for members to interact, fan fiction creates opportunities to explore individual identity and the source material. When the two are combined in fandom, individuals explore their identity through a community of like-minded persons. They also receive insight into other interpretations of the text (both commercial and fan-created) that they may not have reached on their own. As Lev Grossman observes, “writing and reading fanfiction isn’t just something you do; it’s a way of thinking critically about the media you consume, of being aware of all the implicate assumptions that a canonical work carries with it, and of considering the possibilities that those assumptions might not be the only way things have to be” (xiii). Through reading and writing fan fiction, fans become more active in their communities, more open to new ideas and theories regarding interpretation of the source material. As Rebecca W. Black argues, today “fans often use their texts as a means of exploring issues and concerns from their daily lives. For adolescents, this often includes many potentially sensitive topics” (23). A teen who is exploring her sexual identity, for example, may read fan fiction that incorporates new romances into the commercial text to understand her own interaction and reactions better. Further, fan fiction can help the writer explore the same topics which commercial fiction encourages.

Through fan fiction, readers explore characters they know in new ways and build on their own understanding of self.

Just as Black recognizes that adolescents use fan fiction to explore sensitive issues, the genre as a whole has played a role in the exploration of identity. Black investigates how fan fiction uses language to help adolescents create identity. She discusses how this type of fiction lets youth reimagine “preexisting media tales by infusing them with social and cultural themes, multiple literacies, various forms of expertise, and concerns from their lives.... [T]hese mass-produced media become resources for and integrated into fans’ day-to-day interactions and activities, and the cultures of online fandoms” (79). Black finds value not only in fans’ fiction writing but also in their exploration of preexisting tales that allow adolescents to explore fictional worlds. Further, “many youth in this space are able to take on identities... as learners and users of multiple social languages and discourses” (79). While fans of *Sherlock* are drawn in through character relationships and the detective’s mystery, and *Star Trek* found an outlet for many women who wished to explore social issues, adolescent fandom and fan fiction allows readers to explore who they are and how they can interpret their world.

Adolescent literature attempts to encourage individual growth. But how do these texts encourage and interact with fandom, specifically? Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst discuss the audience continuum of fandom, from consumer to fan to cultist to enthusiast and finally to petty producer. Consumers are those who buy an object of fandom, such as an adolescent literary text. A consumer may become a fan when she is “not yet in contact with other people who share [her] attachments, or may only be in contact with them through the mechanism of mass produced fannish literature (teenage magazines for example), or through day-to day contact with peers” (162-63). Fans move into the category of cultist or subcultist when they

focus their use of media “around certain defined and refined tastes. The media use has become more specialized, but tends to be based on programmes which, and stars who, are in mass circulation” (163). A cultist who becomes a dominant member of the community emerges as an enthusiast. This category of fan is “based predominantly around activities rather than media or stars. Media use is then likely to be specialized in that it may be based around specialist literature” (163). Finally, a petty producer will have a “use of skill in production for market” (167).

To exemplify this relationship we might imagine an adolescent who likes to draw. She purchases *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* because her parents nag her to make a purchase at a book fair and she actively reads it (consumer); after reading the book, she discusses it with friends and searches online for a copy of the movie (fan). While searching, she finds other novels about wizards and witches (cultist). She begins reading other fantasy novels as Richelle Mead’s *The Vampire Academy*, Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl’s *Beautiful Creatures*, Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight*, and Cassandra Clare’s *The Mortal Instruments*. While reading in this specialized genre, she gets to know other genre lovers and discovers the Harry Potter Alliance, an organization that creates community through supporting social justice issues. She decides to join a Harry Potter fan club online and start a branch of the Harry Potter Alliance, which is devoted to charity work, at school (enthusiast). Finally, she employs her artistic talents, drawing and painting pictures imagining the novels to sell at a small cost (petty producer).

As a petty producer, our fan must become part of a community. While a single fan can still interact with the text, participate in discussion with friends, and read other works of the same genre, without the interaction with the community, she cannot be sure her interpretation aligns with those of others. Further, as a member of a fandom, she may embrace multiple storylines in

her productions. For example, she may identify with the strong female characters of the novels, so the art she produces may blend all the strong female leads from related series: J.K. Rowling's Hermione Granger, Eion Colfier's Holly Short, Cassandra Clare's Clary Fray, and Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl's Lena Duchannes.

This continuum is particularly important in the age of the Internet, where movement happens at a rapid pace. In the age of multimodal websites, readers can place their reactions to and interpretations of the text online through multiple outlets. Using blogs, comments, web posts, and tweets, reader-fans articulate their opinions to the global community. Before the consumer ever becomes a consumer, she can see how others have evaluated the product. The Internet creates an atmosphere where "the text is... dislodged as a center of authority in favor of the reader whose interpretive strategies make [the text]" (Fish 13). Readers' responses to novels create opportunities for discussion, increased sales, and often profitable film versions.

This interaction helps to create the communities that Stanley Fish asserts occur within the classroom, community, and culture. Because readers are able to voice their opinion online easily, capitalists can profit from reader reaction. For instance, when Jeff Bezo launched Amazon, he encouraged customers to write reviews. As Richard L. Brandt explains, "People thought he was crazy for allowing negative reviews. It's not exactly something to help sell books, at least in the short run. But because bad reviews were allowed as well as good, customers learned they could rely on Amazon.com to point them to books that wouldn't disappoint them" (11). No longer were recommendations the property of professional critics. Now, audiences across the web could "publish" reviews regarding a piece of literature, recommend old or new books, and create a shared community of like-minded readers who enjoy the same pieces of literature—all on a commercial site. While consumers can recognize that both positive and negative reviews can

occur with extreme biases, these reviews create a space where anyone can voice their opinion. Whether the reviewer is anonymous or not, the review attaches itself to the object for people across the globe to access and judge.

Currently, most consumers are accustomed to the fact that “Amazon’s computers can recommend books that others [like-minded consumers] may not have found otherwise” (Brandt 12). Just as fandom uses the Internet to share interpretations of a work, so do companies use it for their profit, creating new relationships among consumers. This profit-seeking creates new opportunities for interpretive communities to form and assess literature. It also creates spaces where the consumer can find like-minded peers and begin the process through the fan continuum and into the fandom network.

For instance, not all critics enjoyed the classic coming-of-age story of Harry Potter, finding the novels were “derivative or somehow don’t measure up as literary works” (Garrett 6). Other fans, authors and critics, however, rapidly created local and global communities that awaited, speculated on, and anticipated new stories. The Internet created a new space for immediate commentary on the novels. Amazon.com has embraced a mix of critical (“Editorial”) reviews and customer reviews. For example, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* has over 11,000 customer reviews, dating back to 2000. Above these are reviews from Amazon.com, Publisher’s Weekly, and School Library Journal (Amazon). GoodReads.com has shifted away from critics’ recommendations entirely. Instead, the popular website uses only fan reviews to build a community of readers and book recommendations. GoodReads’ mission is “to help people find and share books they love” (Chandler). Today, the addition of consumer reviews alongside or in place of critical reviews shifts the product’s marketability from a top-down approach to a bottom-up market.

This streamlined communication has caused the rapid growth in popularity of such novels as the *Harry Potter* series. As Blake points out, the series was not an instant success. Rather “the news was spread by word of mouth (and by mobile phone and text message, email and web page) by adults and children alike. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of children cut their web-designing teeth by running Harry Potter websites” (66). These consumers turned enthusiasts began the fandom community that made Harry Potter the franchise it is today. Part of its rise in popularity is due to consumer interactions that were rapidly occurring across the globe.

When a consumer purchases a book, she must read it to move through the fan continuum. Reader-response theory may explain why readers become fans who interact with each other, forming communities. Fish asserts that readers can create community to establish understood guidelines for how to respond to literature. To explain this concept, he examines how the community shapes the reader’s responses and comprehension. Fish recognizes that the reader’s conclusion

sounds like the rankest subjectivism, but it is qualified almost immediately when the reader is identified not as a free agent, making literature in any old way, but as a member of a community whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays and thus the kind of literature “he” “makes.”... Thus the act of recognizing literature is not constrained by something in the text, nor does it issue from an independent and arbitrary will; rather, it proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count as literature, a concision that will be in force only as long as a community of readers or believers continues to abide by it. (10-11)

All readers are critics, and communities of reader-critics collectively determine what is considered literature as well as how literature can work in society and affect people’s lives.

Literature as it was defined “any old way” becomes less powerful than the interpretations of reader-critics. Thus, interpretive communities “are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties” (Fish 14). These communities create a shared meaning.

While Fish was specifically discussing how readers in classrooms create collective interpretive communities, his ideas also apply to fans and fandom. As Duffett explains, communities of reader-fans shift the focus of a text’s approval from private spaces to the public sphere. In this way, readers “understand what they see or hear through novel frames of reference,” which “sets in train a productive multiplication of perspectives. They may start to understand their favourite character, author, or performer in new and more intimate ways, or to recognize of the depth of their text on new levels. As fans do this, their ongoing debates create new interpretations” (250). Further, “A good deal of the literary theorizing of the past half-century has been devoted to dismantling the ideology of the single, autonomous work of art as a literary standard. But no fic [fan fiction] pretends to be an autonomous work of art” (Grossman 14). Instead, readers join a community that redefines its conceptions of art and literature. Through these communities, fans react to new perspectives brought in through other followers.

When readers bring their perspectives into a community, they employ one kind of reader-response criticism. In this assessment of literature, the reader actively brings her thoughts and experiences to the text. Reader-response criticism discusses the reader’s “transactional” relationship with the text. As Louise Rosenblatt explains, the relationship requires the reader to examine the text through a personal lens, rather than that of the author’s point of view, time period, or other qualities. She advocates that readers take an active role in understanding and responding to the text. Rosenblatt argues,

First, the text is a stimulus activating elements of the reader's past experience—his experience both with literature and with life. Second, the text serves as a blueprint, a guide for the selecting, rejecting, and ordering of what is being called forth; the text regulates what shall be held in the forefront of the reader's attention. (11)

Understanding the text as stimulus and as blueprint changed the way literature was taught to adolescents. Instead of authors, teachers, and scholars focusing on author biography, psychology, or formal features, the readers control the critique, creating a personal relationship with the text. Further, the reader creates a relationship with the text regarding how to interpret and use it.

The importance of reader-response criticism, specifically in adolescent literature, is seen in the active nature of fans and fandom. Without an active, personal response to a text, the adolescent does not become a fan, cultist, enthusiast, or petty producer or join a fandom. With it, we see exemplified Rosenblatt's notion that in literature, "the boundary between inner and outer world breaks down, and the literary work of art, as so often remarked, leads us into a new world. It becomes part of the experience which we bring to our future encounters in literature and in life" (21). As readers interact with other readers, they are able to interpret multiple perspectives, which in turn create diversity through which the reader can reexamine the text.

Today, the Internet encourages a transactional relationship between the reader and the book. As Mark Duffett explains:

As the internet made fan activity more public and put the distribution of media content into the hands of ordinary computer users, the changes threatened the organizations and individuals who depended on intellectual property for their revenue streams (Jenkins 2008, 141). Fans were, in fact, early adopters of both the

internet and the World Wide Web, participating in multi-user dungeons and bulletin boards. (236)

Thus, fans are able not only to interact with literature and media that brought them into the community, but also to branch out into new forms of media and literature. The fast-paced world of the Internet creates a space where fans can interact immediately, creating the opportunity to incorporate more texts into the network. In this way, “media fan culture, like other forms of popular reading, may be understood not in terms of an exclusive interest in any one series or genre; rather media fans take pleasure in making intertextual connections across a broad range of media texts” (Jenkins 33).

The emergence of new media has also created a space in which authors can reach readers in a more immediate way. Taking advantage of the new media, many authors have become more transparent in their roles as creators of fictionalized worlds. These authors often use multimodal websites to communicate with active readers and fans. To some extent, these authors set a precedent that fans will expect from new authors. New authors will have to find a balance between, on the one hand, letting fans build on their work through fan creations, and on the other hand, maintaining their authority in and over the work.

The next chapter will discuss three authors who take varying approaches to interacting with fans. The first, Lois Lowry, has been publishing adolescent fiction for almost forty years and continues to enjoy success due to well-written, award-winning works. Through techniques she incorporates into her works, Lowry creates active readership that can interact with her text in ways that create fans. Her interaction with readers can successfully occur in print, online, or through other media in traditional transactional communication. The second author, J. K. Rowling, has successfully created a fantasy world, through an adolescent novel series, in which

fan and fandom could flourish. Rowling did not create a wholly new way of marketing to or interacting with fans, but she did create the first novels and franchise to be built on an interactive, multimodal fan base due to fortuitous timing. Because of her benchmark set of texts, Rowling had to find new ways to balance fan interaction and authorial integrity. The final author, John Green, has acquired a substantial fan base due to his large media presence, well-written novels, and two movies. Green employs multimodal web pages that allow him to create a full relationship with his audience. Green's use of paratextual information about the author, novels, and fans has established a community. Adolescent literature authors are faced with new choices regarding marketing and interaction as readers are taught to expect an active relationship with texts, authors, and other consumers to create an interactive, communicative literary culture.

In Chapter 3, I will examine how authors must look at copyright in new ways in order to maintain fan bases while maintaining their intellectual property. Further, I will examine the different reactions of authors and publishers to the use of intellectual property by fans. Finally, I note how these fandoms take active readership from the traditional classroom setting into the social activism in the twenty-first century. While these authors are merely a small sample of the adolescent authors trying to communicate with readers, they represent a tradition, a set of innovations, and forms of activism that are growing in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2

THREE EXAMPLES OF MODERN AUTHORSHIP

The Tradition of Lois Lowry

“I don’t know what you mean when you say ‘the whole world’ or ‘generations before him.’

I thought there was only us. I thought there was only now.”

— Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

When I taught eighth grade, I saw the tattered copies of *The Giver* on my shelves, and watched as a gangly student of mine ignored me to read his copy. I was intrigued when I realized he had been further in the book the day before. He admitted that he had finished the book and was now in the process of rereading it. He was a young man who hated reading, yet he could talk passionately for hours about this book written long before he was born. For me, this has always been one of the powers and privileges of reading. From this powerful book, I could engage my student in ways I had previously been unable to do.

Lowry is from a generation different from mine and my student’s, but her powerful speculative fiction reached both of us. Lowry creates spaces in which the mind can wander through the visual imagery and fantastic worlds she imagines. In 1990 and 1994 she won Newbery Awards for *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*, respectively. In her Newbery acceptance speech, Lowry reflects on humans’ innate tendency to think, like young protagonist Jonas in *The Giver*, that “there was only us... there was only now” (98). The inability to remember the past, and to understand that life is complex, becomes integral to the writing Lowry embraces. These issues remind her audience that there is more than “only us...only now.” Rather than actively

and regularly engaging with readers through multimodal spaces, Lowry lets her work speak for itself as a literary text, creating opportunities for readers to come together, often in traditional classroom communities.

The Giver is a science fiction story (Lowry herself calls it speculative fiction) of a young boy, Jonas, in a dystopia where all bad memories are stripped from the mind. The Giver is the man who decides what memories will stay, and which will be taken from members of the community. When Jonas is assigned to be the next Giver, his world is opened to memory, color, senses, and emotions. His ability to see these aspects of the world help Jonas see how oppressive is the society he lives in. Ultimately, he chooses to leave the community for Elsewhere in order to avoid becoming the next Giver or dying as punishment for his refusal. Joel D. Chaston writes, “a gripping novel, *The Giver* holds the reader’s attention to the very end. The most powerful part of the book is the ending in which fact and fiction, the present and memory blend together as Jonas struggles to bring Gabriel safely to the outside world” (120). Gabriel, scheduled for execution, is the infant whom Jonas decides to rescue from the community.

Both *The Giver* and *Number the Stars* work as conversational starters for multiple cultures, nationalities, and communities. *Number the Stars* tells of a young girl, Annemarie, in World War II Denmark. Annemarie, her sister Kristi, and her best friend Ellen, a Jew hiding from the Nazis, must learn how to find courage under the oppressive regime. She must make choices that will save or harm friends, family, and strangers. Again, Lowry practices her skill as a writer “to make events of the war accessible to young readers[;] Lowry utilizes simple, direct language and a concise structure that imitates the very stories that Annemarie tells Kristi. The incidents in the book are alternatively suspenseful and humorous” (Chaston 112). Three aspects of Lowry’s writing—humor, language, and accessibility—create an award winning novel. Her

characters in *Number the Stars*, like those in *The Giver*, are easy for readers to identify with, but also allow discussions of history, society, and ethical choices.

Lowry allows readers to react to the text without authorial interference. She keeps her Internet presence minimal while creating works that encourage reader response, facilitate the incorporation of the Common Core standards, and guide classroom discussions about the values teachers incorporate into their lessons every day. In this way, a fandom may form in the classroom, but does not necessarily branch out into a larger, global community.

If a reader were to be curious about the author, the website Lowry has set up, loislowry.com, will give him valuable information. The reader can learn about her and her work, contact her, or see where she has been and where she is going via her blog. Fans can also read her speeches, although she says these are mainly for teachers and librarians. And fans can see pictures of her life and photos she has taken—she is a successful photographer as well. These all give her readers some idea of who she is and how she will interact with her fans.

In all this, Lowry interacts with fans in a traditional way. The novels create opportunities for readers to explore literature through her works while also creating readers as fans who respond to the ethical messages she exhibits in each of her works. To a large extent, Lowry's fans have opportunities to connect with each other only via the Internet, and do not often directly interact with Lowry. However, Lowry does occasionally answer fans through letters, personal communications, and sequels, rather than via multimodal spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube.

Lowry has read and lectured at many events. There she discusses how readers can affect her and how she wishes fans to react to her works. For example, in one lecture, Lowry discusses receiving a letter regarding her first novel, *A Summer to Die*, from a father who had recently lost

his son. The man's daughter struggled, but found comfort in the book and offered her parents an extensive quotation which became a comfort for the family: "...After a while you remember the good things more often than the bad. Then, gradually, the empty silent parts of you fill up with sounds of talking and laughter again, and the jagged edges of sadness are softened by memories" (Lowry "May Hill" 28). The father of this family sought out the author some 30 years later. The novel was inspired by Lowry's own loss of her sister, so it seems fitting that she could use this tragedy to discuss death with children. This novel thus acts a tool for readers to realize how loss can be handled in their lives.

Although her interactions with fans are traditional, Lowry has also encountered, and responded to, the phenomenon of fan fiction. In 1990, Lowry recalled that a fan who had read *Number the Stars*, a little girl from Texas, "wrote a sequel ... and sent it to me" (Lowry "Newbery" 100). This fan fiction indicates the level of curiosity the original story created for the young reader, who produced new material to continue the story. Such an activity could be used as a classroom assignment, but in this case the reader sent it to the author, illustrating that the reader wished to further her relationship with the text through personal interaction with Lowry. Because Lowry read and responded to the work, she demonstrates that the interactions she does have with fans are valuable to her as a writer.

When Lowry wrote *The Giver* she had no intention of giving closure to her fans. In fact, she felt her gift was the ambiguity of the ending. She states, "They [the fans] want to know what happened but for me, I was more interested in the stories I was creating, I just never felt the need to go back" (Cooper "Another Look" 91). However, after many fan inquiries, Lowry turned the novel into a tetralogy. *Gathering Blue* became a companion novel to *The Giver* in 2000. *Messenger*, which told the story of Gabe (the infant set to be executed in *The Giver*) was also

published in 2000. In 2004, Lowry finished the series with *Son*, a novel set twenty years after the original, also continuing Gabe's story. Responding to fans in a major way, Lowry gave readers her version of the rest of Jonas' tale. To this end, Lowry does give fans a glimpse into how she works as an author.

However, in the classroom Lowry lets her work stand on its own as a way to interact with readers. Because of shifts in educational values, Common Core curriculum standards have been adopted emphasizing diverse texts and allowing teachers to have freedom in setting the curriculum. William Shakespeare is the only required author ("English Language Arts"); school boards, administrators, and teachers can choose which other authors will help their students learn in the classroom. They may embrace more electives or tailored courses to create active learning settings in high schools. Rather than require set texts, Common Core emphasizes the *use* of texts to teach concepts, applications, and analysis. Reader response thus becomes the foundation of other forms of literary analysis as the adolescent chooses what she will read in a course. While Lowry does not actively pursue an educational line of communication with her fans, Lowry's works can become foundational texts to build into a course.

Theoretically, a teacher as fan could use a combination of Lowry's works to set up a course covering a wide range of topics. The teacher could use *The Giver* to discuss dystopian literature, *Number the Stars* to discuss historical literature, *Looking Back: A Book of Memories*, a memoir by Lowry, to discuss nonfiction writing. Further, the teacher can incorporate texts that inspire Lowry, or were inspired by Lowry, to discuss how authors interact with each other. Lowry's diverse range as an author creates a focused opportunity for teachers to explore with students a wide range of responses to literature. Lowry acknowledges that she uses inspirations from classic texts to create opportunities for students to explore the world around them (e.g.

Flannery O'Connor and E.B. White (Lowry "How I Write"). Her work gives readers new insights into the world at large. And as many of her books incorporate the concept of storytelling, the works drive readers to other parts of the literary community.

Through this application of Lowry's work, teacher-fans can use her texts to create fandom in the classroom. They can tailor lessons to incorporate active readership, Common Core standards, and creative responses. Throughout the years, classroom teachers have been using Lowry's texts to create fandom within learning communities. By using these novels, teachers can address reader-student concerns about how societies function. Through the novels' treatment of oppression, hierarchy, and choice, the reader can find how a dystopia correlates and differs from the world she experiences. Vivid imagery and sense-filled scenes create an aesthetic experience for the reader to activate

certain elements in...past experience—external reference, internal response—that have become linked with the verbal symbols. Meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among the things symbolized as [readers sense] them.

The symbols point to these sensations, images, objects, ideas, relationships, with the particular association or feeling-tones created by...past experiences with them in actual life or in literature...Thus built into the raw material of the literary process itself is the particular world of the reader. (Rosenblatt 11)

Lowry's novels are a perfect catalyst for reader response. She uses images, smells, sounds, and feelings to create pictures and scenes that activate the "network of relationships" Rosenblatt wished to have all active readers develop. In addition, though, Jonas' escape from the community allows students to examine aspects of how society can motivate individuals to make

drastic decisions. These responses can help create communities which value and create fandom around the text.

For example, *Number the Stars* can work as a stimulus for a reader to discuss how the world has changed since World War II, and how she can relate to the characters. As with *The Giver*, the reader is invited to interpret the world of the story as it relates to personal experience. Readers can use *Number the Stars* as an ethical tale examining the way people handle and solve problems in intense situations. As David L. Russell insists, “The Holocaust leaves no room for deception. It was itself, after all, orchestrated through a grand deception—it would be a cruel irony indeed if we perpetuated its memory with yet more deception” (279). The importance of this tale is not only the response that readers have to the story, but also how it provokes discussions regarding deception, courage, society, and history. This time period is one that adolescents need to confront in order to grow up and be aware of the world. This text can also create opportunities for teachers to incorporate nonfiction texts to assess varying perspectives on the war. Lowry’s work creates an overlap between English standards and History standards because it raises the issues of war. This can draw fans of World War II, heritage, history and other topics into the community that appreciates and admires Lowry.

Lowry’s powerful writing has been widely used in classrooms’ assigned and optional reading, partly because her works start conversations about character. Sheryl O’Sullivan argues that by using novels such as *The Giver*, teachers and students can have discussions regarding how character is developed and nurtured. In this way, the novel is more than a responsive exercise, becoming a tool in the assessment and development of character in schools (O’Sullivan 641). Through interactive exercises in critical thinking regarding the human condition and their personal traits, adolescents can develop valuable skills.

Although Lowry’s Internet presence is minimal, her readers can still interact with her and examine her works in many ways. Over a long career, she has left many objects for fans to explore. Her strong fan base includes thousands of students, teachers, librarians, and authors who have been affected by her work. In fact, John Green “loved Lois Lowry’s Anastasia Krupnik books... I think I loved them both because I saw myself in them—I worried like Anastasia; I felt socially uncomfortable like Ann Martin’s Claudia—but also because I could *escape* myself” (“Does YA” 16). Lowry’s power lies not in electronically forged connections with fans, but in well-written works that transcend gender, generation, and genre.

J.K. Rowling Builds a World

“Books! And cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery”

– Hermione Granger, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s (Philosopher’s) Stone*

In the spring of 2001, I picked up J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. Over the next three years, from sixth to eighth grade, I read and reread the first four novels so many times that I lost count. I was once in trouble for reading the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* instead of doing my homework. Impatiently waiting for the fifth novel, I would update myself on the latest news using fan sites such as mugglenet.com, leaky-cauldron.org, and jkrowling.com. At school, I debated with friends on what would happen next, and who would die in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. I rejoiced when I saw messages that stated Rowling had finished each novel, and when the cover art was revealed. Finally, I stood with thousands of others at the midnight releases of books six and seven.

Recently, I received a text from a mother whose son is a reluctant reader. She told me that instead of getting ready for school, he was found reading the fifth book on the steps, desperately trying to finish one more section before heading out. When I saw the family next, the boy readily discussed theories, scenes, and characters with me. This is the power of *Harry Potter*. The Wizarding world Rowling created grips readers and leaves them desperate to turn the page and learn more about each suspenseful event. *Harry Potter* brings people together to discuss theories, characters, and events, but readers respond to the novel in ways beyond mere discussion. Rowling has grown this adolescent narrative into a global franchise, allowing fans to build communities that have both local and global impacts.

In 1997, Rowling published the first *Harry Potter* with Bloomsbury. In many ways, the story was not new. As Andrew Blake points out, it follows the same narrative arc as many other hero/ine stories, where “the hero/ine is uncertain about who her/his parents are or were, and equally uncertain about who she or he really is. They seek their own true identities, including the truth of their lineage, as well as the defeat of evil” (18). However, *Harry Potter* appeared at a time when a good hero/ine story was greatly welcomed by children and families alike. The timing of *Harry Potter* collided with the accessibility of the Internet in many homes. The Wizarding world in which Harry learns how to be a hero allowed readers to interact online, creating and adding to a separate society on a new platform.

The series tells the tale of Harry Potter and his years growing up at the Wizarding school Hogwarts. An orphan, growing up with relatives who despise him, he struggles to see his own value. In this school he must navigate friendship, classes, and sports. He must also figure out how to handle his celebrity as “The Boy Who Lived,” having survived an attack by the dark Lord Voldemort. Throughout the seven years of the series, Harry faces Voldemort many times and

learns the difference between unpleasant individuals and truly evil villains. He gains important friends and an extended family network and learns the lessons of courage, truth, and honor.

Bloomsbury and Scholastic were struggling publishers before they purchased the rights to the *Harry Potter* series (Blake 62). However, in 2000, the novels were on the *New York Times* bestseller list for so long that editors created “a children’s bestseller list where they could move the Potter books, since the first three were clogging up the main bestseller list and the fourth promised to vault there as well” (Garrett 4). This new list opened the door for other adolescent books to become part of the mainstream market. In fact, when Andrew Blake published *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter* in 2004, he asserted that “sales of children’s fiction as a whole have increased by over 25 per cent in both Britain and the USA” since the first novel was published (72). Since then, children’s book sales have continued to grow. Recently it was projected that 80% of young adult book sales came from adults who wished to read the novels themselves (Gilmore). These numbers and the growth of young adult and adolescent book sales demonstrate how readers have responded to the coming-of-age stories and the accessibility of these texts. A consumer community was built from stories that related and correlated with Harry Potter.

In 2001, Rowling released two books augmenting the series, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch: A History*. In 2008, Rowling published another companion collection, *The Tales of Beadle the Bard*. These companion pieces raised money for multiple charities that Rowling supports. In 2012, it was estimated that she had given more than £100 million to charities (Quinton). As her wealth grows, so it seems does her charity work. However, these publications also increase the market and commodity that she has created. Through these

companion pieces, she is able to expand the world of Harry Potter and at the same time, can encourage readers to act by purchasing the companion pieces for charity.

In July 2016, Britain's Palace Theatre London planned to produce a run of the two-part play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. According to a publicity blurb, "it was always difficult being Harry Potter and it isn't much easier now that he is an overworked employee of the Ministry of Magic, a husband and father of three school-age children" ("Harry Potter"). The story is a collaboration among Rowling, Jack Thorne, and John Tiffany. As of March 2016, the play had already sold over £127 million in tickets. (Quinton). Again, Rowling's expansion of the Harry Potter universe, through a new medium, can expand the network of fans.

The success of Rowling's novels encouraged movie production studios to pursue the rights to the film versions. Warner Brothers purchased the movie rights in 2000. Rowling accepted the purchase of rights with the stipulation that the movies would stay true to the books, be live-action, be filmed in Britain, and contain a British cast (Adney 12). In this way, Rowling pleased fans while creating new audiences with her tale, even before the last novels were drafted. These movies earned at least \$10 billion worldwide over eleven years (Hughes). In November 2016, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, a movie prequel to the series, will open. This spin-off has already been billed as a trilogy (Quinton). Warner Brothers' decision to purchase the rights to the story has created a successful market for both parties. These films will continued to build the community Rowling fosters.

Even before the final film of the book series (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II*) opened, Warner Brothers had earned more than \$21 billion from the video games, box office receipts, video sales and rentals, merchandise, TV viewings, and other venues (Kruhley). The films built a market not only for the books but also for the franchise as a whole. This market

created opportunities for audiences to interact with the stories and each other using the venues of a consumer-driven market. There was nothing new about how Warner Brothers marketed the films, but they added to the appeal of the franchise because they successfully brought to life the fantastic world that Rowling created.

Fans were also enthused when Universal Orlando Studios Park expanded to include The Wizarding World of Harry Potter in 2007 (Kruhley). No matter an individual's interaction with the Wizarding world before attending, the park invites guests into the franchise. Recently, Universal opened a Wizarding world of Harry Potter at Universal Studios Hollywood (Martin). In the UK, Britain uses Harry Potter to boost tourism. Companies began a tourism campaign to highlight the locations used for the *Harry Potter* films. Incorporating sound stages, historical sites, and even a Platform 9¾ at King's Crossing rail station in London, the tours invite fans to see the physical world in new ways (*Harry Potter Attractions*). These locations create spaces in which fans can relive their favorite scenes, move through the fantastical world they enjoyed imagining, and create new memories that fit into both a real and imagined world. These tourist destinations invite consumers into the fantastic world in a flashy way that encourages the consumer to become more involved in the Wizarding experience.

In 2011, J.K. Rowling announced that she would expand her website and introduce an e-commerce website called Pottermore. The site offers fans the opportunity to be sorted into houses, see unpublished stories, purchase and interact with the e-books in a new way, and network with each other (Flood). Rowling adds new information about the Wizarding world from time to time. Recently, she published a page detailing eleven imagined schools around the world for training wizards and witches (Wizarding Schools). In this way, Rowling continues the

franchise she fostered from its conception and invites new generations of readers to learn tidbits that older generations of readers may not yet know.

When Pottermore launched, Rowling stated she wished to give everyone the same experience (Flood). To accomplish this goal, Rowling created questions to help the reader experience the story. As the reader progressed, she would be sorted into a house, choose a wand, and experience other aspects of Hogwarts. Instead of fans testing multiple variations of these activities on fan-created pages, this new multimodal space unified the fan experience. Rowling retained her authorial power by creating a site that all fans could visit for direct information about the author and her work—rather than fan sites that might convey information incorrectly. At the heart of Pottermore is Rowling’s desire to encourage the creativity fans use when reacting and adapting to the book, while maintaining her role as author (Flood).

Today, Rowling is the richest woman in Britain, surpassing even the Queen of England (Quinton and Brankin). She has fans across the globe who can relate to an orphaned boy from 1991 who is trying to understand a new and magical world. Her work has inspired fan fictions, films, and fantasy parks. The impact of the Harry Potter generation is still being felt and analyzed. Fans can not only live the story but also *be* the story through clubs, tours, parks, merchandise, films, and reliving the books online. Rowling did not seek great fame, but, she clearly knows how to handle it. She did not change the world of marketing, adolescent literature, or fan networking, but she was able to capitalize on it when the opportunity came. Rowling continues to foster her brand, while adding to fan excitement through new additions to the world of Harry Potter.

John Green and YouTube Meet

“It always shocked me when I realized that I wasn’t the only person in the world who thought and felt such strange and awful things.”

— John Green, *Looking for Alaska*

In the midst of every journey, every diary, there are memories of what has happened and hopes for what will come. Often dubbed the “Teen Whisperer,” John Green understands how to create responses from teens regarding the hopes and fears associated with growing up. Even many who do not read his work have a vague sense of who he is. When I picked up John Green’s *The Fault in our Stars*, I had little idea what to expect. My impression from media reports was that it was a sappy novel in which teens battle cancer. Yet, I discovered a well-written novel that told of life, teenage angst, and finding joy even when fate (in the form of cancer) kicks a person down.

Green’s work attempts to convey life’s hard truths to adolescents, specifically young adults, through mystery, adventure, illness, and other aspects of the real world. Green does not write fantasy or speculative fiction; rather, he takes adolescents on a journey that looks similar to the lives they are living right now. To date, Green has written six novels. He has a large fan base due to these novels, two movie adaptations, and a large online media presence. Green has often stated that he wishes to be part of a community of learners. As Green builds online communities of fans, and promotes lifelong learning, he creates positive, active spaces for adolescents to explore literature and life.

John Green published *The Fault in our Stars* in 2012. An allusion to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the title suggests that fate can interrupt a life as much as choices do (Cooper "A Conversation" 107). Inspired by Esther Grace Earl's battle with thyroid cancer and his own experiences as a hospital chaplain, Green wrote a novel not about cancer, but about being a teenager.

The story follows sixteen-year-old Hazel Grace Lancaster as she falls in love and loses Augustus Waters. Both teens are battling forms of childhood cancer. They bond over literature and their illnesses, and share many adventures trying to hunt down the reclusive author of Hazel's favorite book, *An Imperial Affliction*. When Augustus dies from cancer, Hazel must cope with his loss. The book concludes as Hazel, holding a letter Augustus wrote before dying, realizes that Augustus helped her accept her own fate as much as he accepted his.

However, Green did not base this entire story on Esther Grace Earl's battle with cancer. Instead, he used her story as inspiration while making sure her life was also publicized. He helped publish a book from of her collection of letters, journal entries, emails and blogs. A lengthy memoir, *This Star Won't Go Out: The Life and Words of Esther Grace Earl*, allows readers to experience Earl's life in comparison to Green's fictional character's struggles (Castellini 223). As paratext to his fiction, Green encourages readers to seek out more information about Earl via his website johngreenbooks.com. The website creates a space for discussion regarding the differences between the two texts as well as the difference between exploitation and inspiration. Through this exploration of literature, Green fosters fandom by providing additional information for the fan to investigate, analyze and adapt.

Green's novels usually explore how despair and hope, adventure and acceptance can lead to personal growth. Green's first novel, *Looking for Alaska*, views life through the eyes of a

confused and active teenager. Miles “Pudge” Halter decides to go to a boarding school in North Carolina where he meets a new group of friends and finds Alaska Young. Alaska, a spirited, troubled, sexy girl, befriends Pudge but refuses to date him. When Alaska dies in an apparent suicidal car crash, Pudge faces the mystery of what caused her death, and whether she really had feelings for him. Barb Dean discusses how *Looking for Alaska* can generate reader responses allowing teens to discuss suicide, spirituality, lessons, and meaning in life (94). Like *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Looking for Alaska* helps teens explore controversial topics within the confines of the novel. Also, like the writing of Lowry and Rowling, the work itself is a blueprint which readers can use to discuss issues regarding growing up while exploring the world around them.

While Green’s novels inspire readers to react through discussion, Green chooses to interact with readers very differently than do Rowling or Lowry. A primary way he interacts with fans is through a YouTube channel, Vlogbrothers. A collaboration with his brother Hank, this channel builds a community through posting video blogs (vlogs) that discuss current events, and moral, ethical, and global issues. As with the young adult literature discussed, the Vlogbrothers use their videos to start responsible discussions with teens learning how to be independent, moral adults.

Green also uses the channel to respond to questions from fans. Recently, he answered fifty questions from the absurd (Llamas or Alpacas?) to pertinent (When will the next book come out?) in just four minutes (Green “My New Book”). This video, like others he posts, helps communicate, sell to, and expand Green’s network. The videos show fans he values them and sell his products, as the books are often mentioned or in the background. In addition, Green expands his network by incorporating other multimodal spaces (such as SnapChat) while keeping

his own message as brief as the SnapChat clips themselves. This Vlogbrothers channel becomes part of Green's body of work that fans can admire and analyze.

But his YouTube clips with Vlogbrothers are not Green's only appealing quality to young adults. The Green brothers coined the term and created the community of Nerdfighters. Linked to their main page, nerdfighteria.com, are more than a dozen YouTube channels on a variety of topics. These vlogs and videos build support for teens searching to belong. In a 2012 TED Talk, Green discusses his views on how this network works. He emphasizes

people [are] watching not in classrooms, but because they are part of communities of learning being set up by these channels. And I said earlier that YouTube is like a classroom to me, and in many ways it is, because here is the instructor—it's like the old-fashioned classroom: here's the instructor, and then beneath the instructor are the students, and they're all having a conversation." (Green, "The Nerd's Guide")

Green recognizes that his role as an author and YouTube star is to educate, grow a community, and effect change. He uses this role to emphasize the messages conveyed in his novels. Through participation in an event such as TED, he shows how community means reaching to those outside his base community of teens. His networking includes not only teens but also adults who wish to build fan-based communities.

One YouTube channel the brothers host, CrashCourse, features informative, thought-provoking, and fast-paced videos on a variety of subjects including history, chemistry, sociology, and literature. In the 26-episode literature course, Green discusses books that have inspired and challenged him. From Shakespeare to Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath to Toni Morrison, Green discusses the canon of adult literature. The videos invite viewers to become active readers of

texts that are classic and accessible. They also work to inspire adolescents and young adults to reach for adult, classic literature that may or may not be part of their classroom's curriculum.

In these videos, Green even interrupts himself as “me from the past” expressing the response he had as a reader of the works in high school. Through these videos, Green empathizes with reluctant readers, and builds rapport with viewers. Asking students to put their responses into action, Green establishes the notion that readers need literature to embrace important aspects of life and encourages viewers to respond through comments to begin discussions of the literature. While some comments will be trivial or valueless, Green receives immediate feedback regarding the ideas he presents and discusses. Green's respect for viewers and what they read helps nurture the fan base he is acquiring.

Green also appeals to fans because he is himself a fan. He loves Internet communities, specifically YouTube. He praises learning and reading as he writes and teaches. And he values fans, both his and those who are simply enthused about other fandoms. When *The Fault of Our Stars* came out, he signed all 150,000 pre-order copies to show fans how much he valued their support (Cooper, “A Conversation” 107). He encourages readers to ask questions about his novels and has answered so many that *The Fault in Our Stars* questions alone are categorized into sixteen sections on his website. Green's first novel, *Looking for Alaska*, has thirteen categories. Readers could spend hours reading, responding to, and exploring this paratextual information to learn about the author's inspirations, symbols from the book, relationships among the characters, and ways they can act (e.g. donating to cancer research or buying Earl's memoir) when they search for information regarding the novel.

Green shows he is a fan in many ways, but he also mediates his message to emphasize this point. On “Esther Day” 2015 John published a Vlogbrother video to Hank entitled “I love

You Hank. Esther Day 2015.” As Green explains in the Vlog, Esther Day is commemorated “by celebrating love in all its many splendors. Not just romantic love, but the love within families and friendships. Today is the day we say ‘I love you’ to those people even when it is hard, in fact especially when it’s hard” (Green, “I Love You”). The video is shot in Agloe, New York—a locale that inspired his novel *Paper Towns*. This place is significant not only as a location in his novel, but also for the anxieties and fears that the main character of *Paper Towns* confronts. Green expresses why his brother is important in his life and hints at his own struggles with anxiety—the “bad wiring in my brain or illness or whatever, it gets very hard for me to escape the prison of my own brain” (Green “I Love You”). Because of the nature of this video, Green effectively shows his passion for fans, encouraging viewers to research and buy his novels (to explore the topics and location he discussed), and confront and discuss mental health issues in an open way. At the end, the video requests questions that he can answer for fans in his next vlog. Again, this practices encourages active participation by his audience and fans and promotes his books while growing his fan base.

Green’s goal is to engage his audience in discussions of illness, death, depression, love, and fate. Green “often states that books belong to their readers” (Mathur 21). Therefore, he writes with readers in mind and understands, as Rosenblatt professed, that his completed text and its readers become the active members of the relationship. His texts become blueprints to help teens navigate and recognize injustice, sorrow, and challenges during their lives. His novels, like those of Rowling and Lowry, do not shield adolescents from the truths of adulthood or growing up. They embrace the idea and the opportunity that adolescents have the capacity for doing great things.

In this way, Green proves that building a community around an author is not always about the author. His multiple YouTube Channels, social networking pages, and other engaging web pages invite adolescents into interesting discussions and engaging narrations. This multimodal portion of his career not only encourages fan interaction and engagement, but also inspires his fiction.

This chapter examines three authors' varying interactions with readers and fans. Lowry's interactions transmit messages into the classroom and into the hands of teachers, librarians and scholars. Her novels, while geared towards adolescents, create opportunities for adults to discuss key life lessons in the classroom and at home. While readers have become fans, and helped spark Lowry's decision add to *The Giver*'s official story, it would seem that she has not embraced the full scope of new media available to authors. This lack of social media interaction does not diminish her success as a novelist; merely, it stands as a traditional example of how adolescent readers find the novels that they read.

J.K. Rowling's success also began through the traditional model, with the word of mouth of teachers, librarians, friends, and adolescents. But as she launched a series that adolescents embraced—not only in the classroom and home, but also on the Internet—a franchise quickly grew. This required her make decisions that pleased fans and required her to navigate the franchise in a way that maintained her authorial power. She has done this successfully for almost twenty years, still adding to the published works about the Wizarding world.

As the Internet grew, many authors began using it to grow their fan bases. John Green exemplifies how authors can interact with readers through multimodal design. He creates fans not only through his novels, but also through his Internet channels. He acknowledges traditional routes of readership and their importance to publishing, but embraces new ways of marketing his

product. Rather than emphasize his authorial position, he appeals to fans by emphasizing his role as a fanatic of readers and learning communities.

These authors are simply examples of the different roles authors can embrace with the multimodal, global, and immediate platforms of the Internet. They show varying ways authors can grow readership and fan bases. There is no single correct way to become a successful author. But works that speak to the complexity of growing up seem to draw in students and readers.

CHAPTER 3

AUTHORS, FANS, AND BEYOND

You can read the books; you'll have the memories. You have access to *everything*.

—Lois Lowry *The Giver*

Today consumers are bombarded with messages. We can watch TV, play games and sports, and check social media. In all these places, advertisers remind us of the consumer goods available to us and the causes that need our money. A factual question can easily be answered online. Media gives individuals quicker access to information, analysis, and merchandise pertaining to the novels that they read. Therefore, authors may not merely transmit messages that readers receive. To stand out, authors must write in ways that relate and pull at a reader, offer new perspectives on our world, work, love and life. This doesn't require social media, but it does require a tradition which thousands of authors have used before—great storytelling.

This thesis has discussed how the rise of fandom, especially online, has created a new age in adolescent literature. This new age comes from the way multimodal web pages can convey reactions to and ideas about novels to millions of people at once. This accessibility can give rise to temporary fads and trends, but can also spread the word about literature, people, and social change. Lois Lowry, J.K. Rowling, and John Green represent only a subset of authors attempting to reach adolescent readers through their novels and through the Internet, but they may offer a glimpse into how contemporary authors interact with their adolescent readers. Lowry may be taken to represent the traditional author who can succeed without a large Internet presence.

Rowling is an author who is enfranchised by the market. Green seems to be a new kind of author, one who wishes to share his work in every way he can. In the twenty-first century, each author must decide how he or she will interact with readers and fans.

Commercially, the Internet has caused a variety of new concerns regarding authorial intellectual property. As more active readers become fans and petty producers, businesses must find new ways to make a profit and decide where lines are crossed with intellectual property. As Mark Duffett explains, “[N]ow that the fan community can organize itself online in a particular way, people can distribute their own understandings and interpretations to each other without a need to be mediated through commercial channels” (242). Their products can be produced in professional ways that entice global buyers. Fans can also use the Internet to advocate or critique a product created by commercial markets depending on the fans’ interpretations of source material. Thus, commercial markets must recognize the importance of the fandoms created around literature. Without the fandom base behind a commercial product, the product dies. And fan products can be as marketable as those created by commercial entities.

However, readers as fans also affect other areas of the market and of culture. As readers become enthusiasts, they use creative and critical skills to decipher what authors may do to continue a story. In the case of *Harry Potter*, for example, five staff members at Mugglenet (Andy Gordon, Jamie Lawrence, Ben Schoen, Emerson Spartz and Gretchen Stull) produced and published *What Will Happen in Harry Potter 7: Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Falls in Love and How Will the Adventure Finally End* in 2006, before the last novel appeared. This fan publication was on the *New York Times* children’s bestseller’s list for 20 weeks (Raine). Later, in 2009, Spartz and Schoen published and toured with *Harry Potter Should Have Died*. In 2009, Mugglenet published a creative guide, *Sharpen your Pen*, to help fan fiction writers compose

their own works. This site is just one of many that gave fans a place to congregate, discuss, and evaluate all things related to Harry Potter. The site not only encouraged fans to enjoy the *Harry Potter* novels but also offered a safe place to discuss and develop their own creativity. These books become important to the culture, even if they are only momentary best sellers (such as *What Will Happen*, which became less relevant to fans after the last book was published). They offer fans concrete ideas of how the novels can be interpreted and reassessed. These books create a profit for the fan-based website, encouraging further productions, tours, and efforts to build community.

Literary and media fandom does more than discuss the object of their affection. Fans share their creative work with the community. As discussed in Chapter I, with the rise of the Internet, specifically multimodal platforms, fans create and share fan fiction and fan art instantaneously. This opportunity gives fans feedback to enhance the marketability of their products, creating many opportunities for fans as well as issues for source material producers. Therefore, fan product becomes controversial as fans become producers of product that reaches and entices a global audience.

Fans are writing fan fiction at a remarkable speed. As Duffett asserts, “Fan phenomena can now explode at a very fast rate. The concerted efforts of the mass media and Internet fan community have made fame and franchises grow more efficiently than ever” (240). These multimodal interactions create networks of consumers, fans, cultists, enthusiasts, and petty producers. As of March 2016, fanfiction.net, one of the largest fan fiction sites worldwide, had more than 737,000 stories about the Harry Potter world. The nearest “competitors” of fan fiction stories are *Twilight* (218,000) and *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (66,900). Through fan fiction, readers continue responding to the story long after the author finished the last novel.

Lowry's novels also attract fan fiction writers, while she seems committed to her role in the classroom and local fan communities. Her views on online fandom, copyright, and intellectual property are difficult to assess. However, her traditional role as an author, with minimal fan interaction, still creates opportunities for fans to write about her works. On fanfiction.net, *The Giver* has 555 fan stories branching off the original; *Number the Stars* has seventeen works. These fan works establish that, with or without a large authorial presence on the Internet, readers will take steps to move beyond simple response into production based on the object of the fandom.

While Lowry has not had to confront disputes regarding intellectual property publicly, both Green and Rowling have voiced their opinions regarding fans' use of their work. The popularity of Green's and Rowling's novels has brought to light new issues of copyright for works that fans create and wish to market independently. In 2008, Steven Vander Ark attempted to turn his fan website hp-lexicon.org into a book by the same title. The *Lexicon* would showcase books, spells, characters, and locations in the Harry Potter world. Rowling's attorneys sued, claiming this publication would break copyright laws protecting Rowling's intellectual property (Pudelka and Kairis). This event set a precedent when courts ruled that Vander Ark could not publish the *Lexicon*, as Rowling could intend to publish her own lexicon one day.

While fans are able to write predictions regarding novels, and companion analyses of the novels, commercial adaptations of the novels will not be permitted. As Aaron Schwabach notes, "While tolerant and even encouraging of amateur fanfic, Rowling and her publishers have no tolerance for commercially published fan fiction" (117). Fans can put their work online, in fanzines, and share among themselves, but fans cannot publish their work in traditional publication formats.

The Vander Ark ruling and similar cases raise the question of where the lines between fandom and intellectual property lie. They also require audiences to reassess how international laws and international copyrights are written. Vander Ark's *Lexicon* was to be published in the US, while Rowling's work is published first in the UK. This meant two sets of copyright laws had to be interpreted to assess the validity and decisions in the case. As the Internet makes fandom a global concern, fans and authors will have to be conscious of how the work is used and reused. While Mugglenet's fan-based analysis books were not processed through the judicial system to validate intellectual property rights, the *Lexicon* was called into question. This seems to suggest that analyses of texts are welcome, but encyclopedia-type fan-based texts, which do not analyze the text, cannot be produced for profit with consent of the publisher and author.

Cases such as these seem limited at the moment. Partially, as Devin Beauregard argues, "fans police the works submitted to and distributed within their communities as a means of combating the perception that fans do not take copyright seriously" (119). It is not copying works that inspires fandom; rather, for most fans, it is creating their own work in order to reinterpret, expand, or understand the fiction as it pertains to their own lives. As a response to the fiction, fans have a commitment to the authorial intent (to an extent) in their creation of new texts and works. Yet some fans do not respect the author's product as a commodity, so issues of intellectual rights will continue for several years while the laws attempt to catch up to the time. Authors must learn to draw the lines between their intellectual art and profit, and the ability of fans to reinterpret, transform, and interact with the texts.

While Rowling has encouraged many fan fiction and fan website interactions and creations, Green takes a different stance on fans creating works that are marketable. In February 2016, Green created a video on Vlogbrothers in which he explained how he uses copyright for



Figure 1. Green's illustration explaining the global way his work has inspired other artists

the profit of fans who create novel-inspired works. In the video he asked fans to police themselves as the international laws had not caught up with the times of fan networking. He used an example from his own novel *The Fault in Our Stars* to explain the failures of copyright. Green saw a fan poster on Tumblr and decided he wished to sell it. Asking for help finding the owner, he learned it was a collaboration of two fans who had never met but were both inspired by the work. The poster was inspired by the copyrighted novel, painted by a fan in the Philippines, and enhanced into a poster with text by another fan in Norway. Green's attorneys drafted a multinational contract so that all three parties could profit as the art was sold on Nerdfighteria.com (Green, "Across"). Instead of waiting until fans attempt to commodify his work, Green selects fan art he already enjoys to create his own profitable commodity. In this way, he remains open-minded about the production quality and reactions pertaining to the novels. He also encourages the fandom of which he is so passionately a part.

In suing to protect copyright, Rowling's actions "seem shortsighted; they show a misunderstanding of where Harry's money comes from, and the value of fandom as free advertising and marketing far more effective than any marketing campaign Warner Brothers could actually buy" (Schwabach 127). While Rowling's actions prevent fans from profiting on their fan expertise, Green embraces fans' actions to his own profit. Lawsuits have not hurt the overwhelming popularity of Rowling's franchise, but such actions could hurt new authors entering the vast world of adolescent literature and fandom.

Fan fiction and other fan-created works are not the only means by which the Internet has created new opportunities for fans. Both Green and Rowling have fan-made and fan-supported charities to raise money, awareness, and the spirits of individuals in the global community. As fans respond through community-inspired activities, fans create the events that utilize the values exemplified in their favorite novels.

Rowling uses her franchise to support favorite causes. As a former Amnesty International employee, she knows how poverty, war, and hatred can affect families and individuals. Rowling's first two charity companion books, published in 2001, supported Comic Relief, a group funding the "education of children, the fight against child slavery, and the reuniting of parents and children separated by war" (Adney 318). In 2008, another Rowling companion book raised funds for Children's Voice Charity and the Children's High Level Group (Adney 319). As fans buy the product, they also add to the funds raised for these groups. In this way, Rowling encourages sales of the companion pieces while emphasizing her support of social needs.

Rowling's message has helped fans become even further involved in charity work. The Harry Potter Alliance aspires to be "a creative and collaborative culture that solves the world's problems" ("What We Do"). Its mission is to destroy seven "horcruxes" facing the world:

starvation wages, depression, body images in media, bullying, illiteracy, child slavery and the climate crisis (Garcia 118). Communities like the Harry Potter Alliance welcome fans and non-fans alike. More important than the fandom is its mission of social and cultural growth. Two of the Alliance's biggest accomplishments have been to persuade Warner Brothers to use only free-trade chocolate in Harry Potter candy bars and to raise \$123,000 to help people in Haiti ("What We Do"). The fans who created this non-profit organization, understanding that a novel is more than a story, use Harry Potter as the platform on which to build the values of young readers.

Green takes a different approach to building his charity work. As Garcia points out, Green "has helped organize young adult readers into civically engaged members of an organization that addresses issues of justice and inequality" (114). Through his work for the charity This Star Won't Go Out, and his Vlogs supporting Syrian refugees, Green encourages fans, readers, and viewers to become involved. Nerdfighters are encouraged to celebrate "friendship, reading, creativity and all things nerdy, while [the site acts] as a safe environment" (Mathur 19). Many fans have taken up this agenda to accomplish goals at a community and global level. One memorable Nerdfighter "provided lasting clean water to an entire village, rebuilt a cyclone-ravaged high school, provided emergency relief in multiple disasters, and helped over 10,000 children through a long-term health worker program" (Wilkinson).

Each year, the Vlogbrothers organize an event called "Project for Awesome." In December, adolescent, young adult, and new adult social activists create YouTube videos detailing their organizations. As a community, members then raise money and vote on which organization to support. In December 2015, the organization raised more than \$1.5 million in forty-eight hours. Funds were raised for Save the Children, the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and several charities chosen by the community.

Through these charitable causes, Green and Rowling—and more importantly, their fans—create opportunities for more individuals to be affected by the lessons in their adolescent novels. This is the growing power of adolescent fiction. It encourages responses to growth, change, and challenges. It calls on the individual to do something with the message that she receives. How can she escape the confines of her world as Jonas in *The Giver* did? How can she battle the forces of evil with Hermione, Harry, and Ron? How can she solve the mysteries of death and despair to find acceptance and peace in a world of turmoil? These are only a few of the ethical questions the novels raise.

Books hold tremendous power, not only as sources of information, but also as commodities that can be challenged, uplifted, and franchised. These commodities have often held power in society. Economists and futurists B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore discuss how our economy has shifted, especially in the last twenty years, from an economy driven by goods as commodities to services, experiences, and transformations as commodities. The novels I have discussed offer readers experiences and transformations as predicted by Pine and Gilmore (38). Through experiences such as the ones Rowling and Green offer, readers may develop new expectations. However, authors, as well as other innovators are “experientializing their goods, surrounding their services with engaging events, creating new and wondrous experiences, and eliciting transformations with those who seek help in achieving their aspirations” (Pine and Gilmore 41). Authors are not and should not be required to create opportunities for fans to experience the books. However, what some authors are doing to enhance the reading experience should certainly continue to be studied.

Even though Lowry does not take an active role in her fandom to the extent that Rowling and Green do, she has had a lasting impression on the future of adolescent literature. She has

inspired children, teachers, and artists through her prose. Rowling fostered the first major adolescent literature franchise as the Internet provided a global market for her work. She has used her franchise to create opportunities for fans while maintaining as much control as possible for such a large fan base. On the other hand, Green maintains a large community online that supports his novels and works towards building a community. His efforts create a means of bringing more good into the world.

These authors create different experiences for the modern adolescent reader and new opportunities of research for the scholar. Authors respond to fans in direct ways, such as Lowry continuing *The Giver* series, or Rowling and Green adding paratextual information online. Scholars, therefore, have more to analyze as authors extend their works into paratextual and series texts. Authors have added to texts for many years; however, the immediacy of fan interaction and reaction open up many lines of research. What motivates an author to create an online presence such as Rowling's or Green's? How do these interactions affect fans before the multimodal presence and those who become fans due to this presence? How do these large, global networks affect an author's career and creative choices as an author?

Scholars have the opportunity to use these adolescent texts as vehicles to assess the changing landscape of literature as popular fiction continues to do more than send books into the world. Much adolescent literature encourages the reader to act in ways that emphasize her role in the author-text-reader relationship, including: extending the story and art, creating fandom, and calling for social change. While responses have always been part of literature, the Internet has expanded texts' ability to create these opportunities, especially with adolescent literature that challenges developing minds about the moral and ethical systems of the world. This thesis has

merely scratched the surface of what these authors, texts, and adolescents have the capacity to do in coming years.

Whether the next generation of authors follows traditional or innovative routes, the emerging scholarship and market for adolescent literature will continue to influence how readers' responses to literature are moving beyond classroom discussion into communities built both on- and off-line. One author, one book, has the power to build a global community. Through active reading, fan groups, and fan-created work, these communities have the power to shape the next generation of literature.

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