

FAN-FIX-TION: THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE AND CATHARTIC PROCESS IN FANFICTION WRITING

Aadishree Dixit
Student
Christ University,
Bengaluru,
Karnataka 560029

Abstract

Fanfiction is commonly perceived as an act of plagiarism and is not considered real writing by mainstream standards. This paper focuses on the impact that writing fanfiction has on the development of the identity of the character ‘Cath’ in the novel *Fangirl*. It applies Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence to analyse Cath’s interaction with fanfiction as a text by analysing Cath as a character. The study aims to make a case for fanfiction as a non detrimental action and sheds light on the contemporary situation of devaluation of fanfiction and its writers. Fanfiction works as a catalyst and a helping hand for Cath to express herself, and seek help to overcome her psychological blocks. Keywords: fanfiction, writing, identity, *Fangirl*, social anxiety

Fan fiction may be considered analogous to receiving a set of Lego blocks which have been preassembled and modifying it. Fan fiction is, to put it simply, as explained by Hetcher: “fiction created by fans, typically of popular commercial works.” (1870).

Fanfiction enables viewers to become more than passive consumers: it allows them to engage with the text and characters, using both critical analysis and creative thinking to explore the potential possibilities by asking ‘What if?’ This allows fans to fill in gaps that have not been explored or explained by the original text by adding or changing character backgrounds and relationships. Fanfiction writers create a space that allows other fans to engage in a discourse, which is why the evaluation of fanfiction as an uncreative and detrimental action needs to be reconsidered.

However, two of the most common reactions that a fan fiction writer receives when they reveal that they write for a particular show or book are:

1. Why don’t you write your own characters/story? This fan fiction business is a waste of your time. You won’t learn anything and you won’t become a better writer.
2. This is clearly plagiarism. You don’t own the characters or the story and you have no right over the intellectual content.

In the general consensus, the body of fan fiction writers is often devalued as it is considered a community of plagiarisers and received as such by both mainstream media and non-fans. Fans are characterized as abnormal and obsessive consumers. This has led to a stereotypical image of a crazed fan, as a person that has neither a social life nor any intellect.

This invalidates the effort that writers of fan fiction put into their work and can also lead to writers who primarily write fan fiction to feel like they have wasted their time. The diversity in nature of the creators in terms of age, nationality, culture, gender and professions is often ignored. Its creators are stereotyped as brainless consumers and hoarders of facts and theories that have no utility in the real world.

Though Fanfiction serves as a platform for writers to express themselves and grow their skills through creative variations on their favourite books or TV shows, it is viewed as plagiarism and a waste of one's time.

Fan fiction forms a particularly important part of the life of Cath (henceforth referred to as Cath), the protagonist of Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl*. It is a safe way for her, a socially anxious introvert, to express herself and form relationships with people. However, her creative writing college professor discourages Cath from writing fanfiction and this leads to an impact on Cath's worth as a writer and as a person. Cath thus faces alienation as a fan fiction writer due to a set definition of authentic creative writing in the mainstream understanding.

The novel *Fangirl* deals with the experience of Cath overcoming social anxiety and embracing new things in life after moving to university with her twin, Wren.

This book was chosen as it depicts fanfiction in a light that brings attention to the benefits of fanfiction in the lives of those who write and read it. The format of the book itself, with small extracts from the original text that Cath writes fanfiction for, as well as extracts from her epic sized fanfiction 'Carry On' is a unique one, creating a sort of meta text that is both immersive and informative. It also allows one to understand the experience of a fanfiction writer: The issue of alienation as a writer due to the mainstream understanding of creative writing along with the empowering power of fanfiction. It also presents a character that does not approve of fanfiction, giving one insight into both the pro and anti perspectives of the argument. Cath's development shows that a fanfiction writer can have both development in writing skills and also have a social life outside fanfiction. This book may help in debunking the most common and harmful myths about fanfiction, which is a necessity in today's context.

This paper attempts to study the impact that writing fanfiction has on the development of identity of the character Cath on two levels: as a writer and as a person in order to make a case for fanfiction as an empowering act.

Fanfiction empowers Cath to overcome obstacles in self expression in both her writing life as well as in her personal and professional relationships.

Fangirl narrates the story of Cath, a young writer. Along with her twin, (Wren) Cath writes fanfiction for a book series, and is adamant to finish it before the final book comes out. Cath, the more introverted of the two sisters, struggles with the life change she is undergoing due to her social awkwardness and anxiety and the growing disconnect between her and Wren. Through all this, her fanfiction work she created under the penname 'Magicath' is the only stability she has in her life as well as a sense of identity and belonging.

However, this stability is threatened when her creative writing professor, a published author, challenges the validity of fanfiction as authentic writing, and Cath questions her identity as a writer and as a person.

Several studies have pointed out that there is more to fanfiction than the perceived theft of intellectual property. Henry Jenkins' path breaking work *Textual Poacher* explains the rationale behind the work of fans as a 'reluctant poaching' in order to do justice to the characters and the stories that they love.

Seymore adds that 'Fan fiction is a space for innovation, imagining old texts in new ways, and engaging with often exciting and controversial issues' (2016, 3)

Tushnet raises an argument in support of fan fiction – "Fan fiction deserves protection because it gives authors and readers meaning and enjoyment, allowing them to participate in the production of culture without hurting the legitimate interests of the copyright holder." (654)

Black, an ESL teacher, pointed out the utility of fan fiction in Second Language Acquisition—she noted that the students who need to be pushed to write a single page often spend hours both reading and writing on online community. (Black 2005) She studied this phenomenon, raising an important point that members who do not feel completely confident in their English writing abilities are able to contribute their opinion as well as express themselves through their own stories. The anonymity as well as the control over what information is made public to the community allows for the feeling of security. According to Black – 'Fan fiction is a self initiated act of composition.'

These studies point out the positive aspects of fanfiction in the life of both the individual and the community, supplementing the need to look at fanfiction through an unbiased perspective. This will help to truly understand not only its nature but also the implications of creating fanfiction on the writer who is at once, both a consumer and a creator.

Harold Bloom in his theory of poetry, titled "Anxiety of Influence" offered a powerful argument about the logic of succession of poems in a tradition. The poet faces a struggle at an instinctual level: a struggle of the individual psyche to distinguish oneself from the poets who came before as well as poets who come after.

A fear of not being original, of saying something that has already been said before is a constant experience for the poet. There is a struggle for primacy and independence from the preceding poets. Influence can work consciously or unconsciously, and certain poets claim that they have not been influenced at all. Bloom calls this scenario a strong misreading and asserts that "strong poets make that history by misreading one another"

Bloom also points out that poetic influence doesn't make poets any less original, and to study poetic misinterpretation one must study the life of a poet as a poet.

This paper will also use the concept of transformative writing, a creative writing practice that proposes that writers make meaning of their experiences through their writing such as a journal writing in order to improve their emotional wellbeing. Brian Alger describes it as a creative act of restoration.

This study is relevant to today's situation as fanfiction writers and fandoms (fan communities) are rapidly expanding due to the new platforms that have been made available by technological advancement. The internet allows one to interact with people who share the same interests. It also allows for sharing of opinions, theories about the main text (book, song, movie, band, TV-show etc). Thus, it becomes easy for a lot of young budding writers to share their take on the story and the characters online. Writing is a source of both personal growth and feedback for these fan-writers. These fandoms range from Harry Potter, Game of Thrones to fandoms of regional content, especially for Korean and Hindi TV shows. These writers are harshly criticized as fanfiction is considered unoriginal. This discourages potential writers from developing

themselves. Fanfiction proves a space for expression and growth, and thus re-evaluating its place becomes particularly important as it is concerned with identity and self-perception of these writers.

This paper will use the text of the novel *Fangirl* to analyse the impacts of Fanfiction on Cath's identity and interactions. This paper limits itself to Cath's character. It also studies different perspectives on fanfiction in the novel to determine the impact of fanfiction on her personality and relationships.

Through Cath's fanfiction writing and engagement with the world, some influences that can be seen. The first one is that of Cath's mother. Cath's mother makes an influence not through her presence, but her absence in Cath's life. The year 2001, in which Cath and Wren's mother abandons the family is the year that Gemma T. Leslie's book, the first in the Simon Snow series is released. (Rowell 150) The very first page of the book has a Wikipedia-like entry of the book series and this makes it an important year for the girls and functions as a hint to the reader of the novel.

The girls react to maternal abandonment in unique ways: Cath faces social awkwardness and anxiety whereas Wren deals with the situation by being rebellious. Both however, find a common ground for joint coping: writing fanfiction in a collaborative manner. Thus, the girls are able to cope with maternal abandonment by immersing themselves in the world of Simon Snow and Baz, building close relationships through reading and writing. The emotional bond that they are denied with a maternal figure leaves a void which is filled in by the bond built with the fandom and the characters. Fanfiction allows both the girls to build confidence, particularly Cath, who is introverted. Through fanfiction she is able to express her feelings of maternal abandonment in a healthier manner, as is seen in an insert between pages 60 and 61, where Cath's frustration about maternal abandonment is expressed through the character Simon. Simon is able to cry about the loss of his mother, who loved him freely. Writing this is a cathartic experience for Cath, which takes place unconsciously. Cath also spends a lot of time denying this influence of her mother's abandonment on her writing, further making her a writer who strives to set herself apart from her precursor's influence: her mother who has abandoned her.

This denial of her mother's influence is also seen when Cath returns home for a small break. Cath's father attempts to talk to her about her mother, who had abandoned the family when Cath and Wren were younger. Cath is not willing to let her mother back into her life, as she feels hurt. Wren on the other hand is willing to consider the prospect of giving their mother a chance. Cath cannot understand how Wren hid the fact that she already knew about this, and the isolation she feels deepens. (Rowell 98-99) Cath immerses herself deeply into her writing.

This event also cements Wren as the second precursor. Cath's feelings are an antithesis to Wren's own. Wren thus, becomes an influence Cath desperately tries to deny. In personality and expression, the girls are opposites, each one trying to define themselves as not-the-other-twin. Cath does this by continuing her fanfiction and Wren breaks away from it. Wren is also the older and more assertive twin. Cath's inability to assert herself confidently in real life scenarios such as with Wren, who wants to differentiate herself from Cath, leads to distress and anxiety. Fanfiction, is the point of departure between Cath and Wren, that enables Cath to begin remaking herself as a text that is different from Wren.

However, through the progress of the novel, Cath's analysis of characters that fanfiction has helped her nurture is turned toward herself and she recognizes her need for a mother figure, which she had spent a long time denying.

The next influence on Cath's writing is Professor Piper. Cath is the only freshman in a junior level course called Intro-to Fiction writing, the sole thing she has looked forward to in college. The class is taken by Professor Piper, a published novelist, who Cath admires. The Professor thus, is not only an authority figure, but also influential in the sense of being a role model, and a third precursor.

When the class is asked why they write, Cath's thoughts range toward disappearing, being someone else and to be free of oneself. This has parallels with T.S Eliot's idea of poetry as an escape from emotion and personality. Cath, who is so unsure of her own life choices, finds herself fitting in to a sort of 'tradition' that is the world of Simon Snow and in a way, is able to escape from her sense of helplessness.

However, she does not completely follow that tradition. She asserts herself through her writing and her take on the characters. In Cath's stories, the characters of Simon and Baz are portrayed as gay, a divergence from the original writer. It is through fanfiction that Cath is able to deny the influence of the novelist and misread the original meaning of the novel to create her own text. The novelist thus becomes the fourth but the most prominent precursor in Cath's writing. The Professor and the Novelist mirror each other, as both are authority figures, writers of original work and people Cath looks up to. Their impact on Cath's writing can only be studied by analysing both influences collectively.

Cath is aware that the characters do not belong to her, and makes it clear with a disclaimer on every chapter. However, the pressure that she feels due to her fiction being perceived as 'the' fan version of the unreleased eighth novel makes her push herself beyond her comfort zone. She is no longer simply writing for herself, but for an audience, and the demands and emotions of the people beyond her sometimes test her. However, Cath is unconsciously trying to assert herself and distinguish her identity as a writer in opposition to her identity as a fan. She finds the idea scary, as she would have to cut off the familiar and comforting influence to write about her own, suppressed feelings. Black also incorporates the issue of fluid identity of a writer in a fandom. "The writer's identity develops with time and interaction in the fandom." (Black, 2006). Interaction can occur with other fans as well the text, and thus, indirectly with the author. This interaction occurs in form of the writer's influence on the fanfiction writer, which Cath tries to deny. Fanfiction writing enables her to deal with her identity struggle, almost a cathartic act, just like writing a journal is, which is where the act of transformative writing comes into play. Applying the notion of Influence here one can see that Cath, though denying that she does not want to rewrite the story, is actually doing that. She is unconscious of her denial and of her slow breakaway from her precursor.

Thus, even though Cath is completely aware of the influence of her precursor, the novelist of the book series she writes fanfiction about, she experiences the fear of unoriginality and a struggle for primacy in her life as a writer and her personal life as pointed out by Harold Bloom's theory. She reacts to this by trying to deny the influence of the novelist by attempting to deny the influence of the eighth unpublished book by finishing her own version of the story before it is officially concluded. She wants to assert her own identity by finishing her version and thus not being brushed aside and forgotten due to the canon ending. This can be interpreted as Cath trying to break away from the influence of her precursor, the novelist.

Cath is unconsciously trying to assert herself and distinguish her identity as a writer in opposition to her identity as a fan. She finds the idea scary, as she would have to cut off the familiar and comforting influence to write about her own, suppressed feelings. Black also incorporates the issue of fluid identity of a writer in a fandom. "The writer's identity develops

with time and interaction in the fandom.” (Black, 2006) Interaction can occur with other fans as well the text, and thus, indirectly with the author. This interaction occurs in form of the writer’s influence on the fanfiction writer, which Cath tries to deny. Fanfiction writing enables her to deal with her identity struggle, almost a cathartic act, just like writing a journal is, which is where the act of transformative writing comes into play. Applying the notion of Influence here one can see that Cath, though denying that she does not want to rewrite the original story, is actually doing that. She is unconscious of her denial and of her slow breakaway from her precursor.

Cath feels certain only about her writing skill and her ability to express herself. She confesses that the words come out of her and she doesn’t know where from to Nick. Though she doesn’t directly tell her him about her fanfiction, she is able to talk to him about her writing, which is a big step forward for her. (Rowell 102-103)

This is once again, in line with Eliot’s idea of depersonalization. Cath considers her best work to be the one that is written without her own emotions being involved.

However, this confidence is shattered when Prof. Piper hands back her latest assignment with an F. Cath is worried her quality of writing, which she considered her best Simon and Baz scene, is not up to par. Prof. Piper explains the reason she graded Cath thus:

“This is plagiarism... These characters; this whole world belongs to someone else.”

“But the story is mine.”

“The characters and the world make the story...you can’t steal someone else’s story and rearrange the characters”

(Rowell 109)

Prof. Piper calls Cath’s fanfiction an immature mistake and advises her to abandon it for more authentic, original writing, using her own experiences. This is a phenomenon that occurs with most young writers. It can be interpreted as an imposition of a canon and thus of an implicit hierarchy. This is discussed in a paper by Gutiérrez:

We do want people, especially teenagers and young adults to be engaged in art, be it a painting, a book or videos. However, we want them to be engaged in things that fit into a defined and approved canon of sorts. (Gutiérrez, 2011)

Any deviation from this ‘canon’ is demeaned, often by a person who holds influence, such as a teacher or a parent. Gutiérrez terms this phenomenon ‘authority centered steering’. He also points out that this is detrimental to the natural impulse of fans, to enjoy an immersive experience without being told what is to be enjoyed.

This interaction between Cath and her professor thus ends with the professor implying that there is a hierarchy in fiction, with fanfiction at the bottom and original fiction at the top. It also implies that a sensible, talented writer would not want to be linked to something as trivial and ‘uncreative’ as fanfiction, which involves borrowing and not creating something from nothing. One can thus infer the different attitudes that the two writers, the published novelist professor and fanfiction writer Cath possess. Whereas Cath writes to live in a world she loves dearly, Professor Piper sees writing as an ultimate act of creation, likening the writer to a God or a mother. Prof Piper’s ideology mirrors the idea of a writer’s struggle to establish their uniqueness that Bloom describes. This is also her reason for discouraging Cath. Later, Cath is able to confess to Prof. Piper that she does not think she is fit for fiction writing. In expressing her feelings about fanfiction, Cath is able to metaphorically address her abandonment issues. This however, can also be interpreted as a counter claim that fanfiction holds Cath back from

exploring her original writing. Prof. Piper explains that Cath's experience of feeling empty is a normal one, and that every writer goes through it. Prof. Piper gives her own example: using her own experiences to write a historical novel.

Confiding in Prof. Piper about her fears and how fanfiction helps her overcome them allows Cath to receive help, as Prof. Piper praises Cather's potential which can be seen in her writing. Cath thus, is given a chance to overcome her fear as the Professor offers to mentor her and discuss her progress. Cath's efforts to deny this influence are seen as she is even more encouraged and determined to conclude her fanfiction. This is a case of her trying to again, reaffirm her identity by denying the final influence of the precursor, the novelist who is like a tradition that Cath both tries to live up to and overcome. At the same time, Cath is denying the influence of her professor, who insists on original, non-fanfiction work.

One may argue that Cath uses fanfiction as an escape from the unpleasant things she cannot control in her life, using it to cope with the pressure of losing her agency. But fanfiction restores Cath's agency as she is not only in control of her work and her world, but is also validated through feedback by her own fans. This leads to her identity being dependent on a denial of the precursor, the novelist. Cath thus, goes to great pains to ensure the quality of her work. However, by becoming aware of her denial of influence, Cath is able to extend her unconscious cathartic expression from fanfiction to writing about her own repressed experiences, particularly those of her mother abandoning her, a prospect which previously terrified her. This story of hers, titled "Left" is published in the university's literary journal, which shows that Cath has overcome her fear of writing original fiction which she likens to falling off a cliff (Rowell 276)

Particular instances in the novel show that fanfiction is not detrimental or waste time but helpful. This can be seen with Cath's shift from the comfort of her home to the scary new university life that overwhelms and terrifies her. It is only when she puts up posters of the characters that she writes fanfiction about that she feels a little more comfortable. Thus, one can infer that the world of Simon Snow is an anchor and a safe space for Cath. She struggles with social anxiety and awkwardness which become obstacles when interacting with people. This is seen with her roommate Reagan and Reagan's friend Levi. Cath is anxious when faced with the prospect of meeting new people. She feels "tight and cornered" (Rowell 16)

Cath regains control of her life by channelling the energy toward her ongoing fanfiction. Fanfiction allows Cath to cope with her changing reality as a part of Cath and Wren to just Cath. Cath is able to talk to Wren's roommate Courtney assertively when the topic is about the Simon Snow books, but Wren changes the topic, showing her disinterest in both Cath and fanfiction. Fanfiction becomes a medium that allows Cath to overcome her social awkwardness and hold a conversation and thus, is empowering.

This can also be inferred in light to another instance: when a complete stranger approaches Cath in the library when she sees Cath's T-shirt, which displays the name of her fanfiction 'Carry On, Simon' and has the main character's faces on it. The stranger engages in conversation with Cath about meeting other fanfiction readers in real life, and confesses that it is almost like leading a double life. She also reveals she is a fan of the fiction Cath is writing, which makes Cath open up and have a conversation with her. The interaction, which is something that Cath would actively have tried to avoid, is made possible through the shared interest of fanfiction. The stranger also unknowingly boosts Cath's self esteem by confessing the impact that Magicath's work (Carry on, Simon) has on her: the quality of Magicath's writing

makes the stranger forget that Magicath's work is not actual canon, but fan work. (Rowell 211-214)

One can thus see the impact of fanfiction writing, which has created a safe space for Cath to learn how to assert herself and make her opinion known. Fanfiction thus, transcends the boundary of cyberspace and is extended to Cath's interactions, thus in turn becoming an unconscious influence in her life.

Fanfiction writing has enabled Cath to be comfortable with collaborative writing, as she has prior experience writing fanfiction with Wren. This enables her to express herself more freely when she is given a collaborative writing assignment with Nick, an older student. Nick insists that she step out of her comfort zone and use a notebook, pen and the second person point of view. The starter paragraph he writes makes Cath feel uncomfortable due to its sexual nature. The experience of effectively misreading a text that Cath has due to her fanfiction writing enables her to tackle the uncomfortable situation, turning it into her own text: she makes the blonde, sexualized character the guy's younger sister and interprets the male character as a gay one. Additionally, she names the main character Nick, and is able to effectively overcome her embarrassment and also assert her personality through her writing. She is able to co-write with Nick by making the connection to her previous days of writing with Wren and is able to write her parts. (Rowell 55-58.)

This is a specific example of how fanfiction empowers Cath to assert herself and have a relationship, overcoming her social anxiety to an extent. Nick, who is a confident, outgoing, person, is a precursor for Cath, and her act of breaking away from the format and the meaning he expects her to go along with is a misreading of Nick's words, though a conscious one. Thus, Cath's act of misreading is transferred from her usual fanfiction writing to a situation that causes her anxiety. She is able to turn it into a situation she is comfortable with.

Fanfiction also allows Cath to feel more in control, and that simple act feels like an act of rebellion, making her mindset available to the reader: Cath feels oppressed and voiceless and she is to overcome that feeling by using fanfiction as a means of regaining control in the stifling atmosphere of her University.

Cath is not able to properly articulate the reason that writing fan fiction is important to her, though she does attempt to explain it to Levi. She asserts that "they are not just stories" and as she is explaining why the characters and she story is important to her, she is simultaneously opening up to Levi. Fan fiction writing allows her to play inside a pre-created universe and that her job is not to rewrite the story but to stay in the world she loves. (Rowell 125-129). Though embarrassed of how she must sound, Cath's passion for fanfiction enables her to talk to Levi coherently. Fanfiction thus, becomes a medium through which Cath is able to articulate her feelings. Levi also asks Cath to read him some of her fanfiction and Cath obliges. This sharing can also be viewed as an allegory: through sharing her fanfiction, which is a deep and personal part of herself, Cath allows Levi to gain an insight into her mind. She also addresses her views on the LGBTQA community by explaining to Levi that the main characters being gay are a natural thing for her when she writes fanfiction. Thus, Cath is using her fanfiction as a medium to not just continue and extend the universe she loves but also to express her own views. It is also an example of how Cath reclaims the text from her precursor, denying the influence by interpreting the characters as gay which was absent in the original text. This is of specific importance as she is seen suppressing her feelings, even with her twin Wren.

This supports the claim that fanfiction empowers Cath to express herself. Further, discussing the characters with Levi builds a sort of kinship with him, and Levi becomes a part of

Cath's small circle of people she trusts. Cath's abandonment issues have made it particularly hard for her to trust people, and she is unwilling to completely trust her twin after Wren hides things from her. Engaging with Fanfiction by reading it aloud to Levi makes Cath more assertive, causing her aloof but well meaning roommate Reagan too; to take an interest in Cath's changed behaviour. Where Cath was actively avoiding social contact, she can now take the initiative and make plans with Levi for the future. Through continued sharing of fanfiction with Levi, Cath is able to channel the confidence that writing fanfiction has given her to her interactions with Levi. She is able to voice her opinions despite her fear of judgement.

She is also able to confront her problems instead of avoiding them. This can be seen in her misunderstanding about Levi being a lazy person when he stating that he is not a book person. Cath is able to talk to him and allow herself to listen to his perspective, which reveals that Levi has reading issues. She is able to thus, resolve the conflict by reaching out to Levi and reading out to him, helping him out for his exam.

Cath faces unexpected betrayals from Nick (who turns in the co written story as his own) and Levi (who she has feelings for kissing another girl.) To add to it, her father, who has his own psychological issues is hospitalized. Levi is the only person that Cath confides in about her father and he drives her back home. Cath withdraws from her improved state of socialization and retreats into Fanfiction, her reliable safe place. While this can be seen as an instance where Fanfiction acts as a defence mechanism, one can also infer that it allows her to retreat and recover.

However, Cath is able to give Levi a chance to explain himself. Their routine of her reading out to him continues and Cath is less self conscious of herself, allowing her and Levi's relationship to progress. She is able to confide in him about her trust issues and fear of abandonment. However, he doesn't dismiss her issues. (Rowell 324)

Cath is able to address her issues of perfectionism after she confesses the fact that she has been given a second chance by Prof. Piper. Levi helps her out by telling her she need not write something perfect. He also gently reminds her that her assignment has real world consequences without belittling her experience.

This bond encourages Cath to share her feelings about her mother, an issue she avoids talking about, even with her twin. This conversation ultimately enables her to confront her mother when her sister is hospitalized. This causes a change in the family dynamic, with both Cather's father not avoiding pressing issues and Wren opening up to Cath again. Wren confesses that she has still been reading Cather's fanfiction and resumes her role of talking to Cath about it. Cath too, has matured and is not completely dependent on Wren, though she has forgiven Wren's recklessness. Thus Cath's passive aggressive behaviour and the denial of influence of her sister is resolved. Wren and Cath spend a lot of time bonding over fanfiction as well as in their college life. Cath however, has come to acknowledge that she need not be constantly with Wren to feel like a whole person. Cath is also able to talk to Wren about both her boyfriend and Wren's without feeling awkward. Cath is also able to assert herself and not be guilt tripped by Nick when he asks her to give her consent use their co-written story to be published in the college journal.

Fanfiction provides a non judgemental space for Cath to express her views as opposed to the real life interactions, where she is anxious of being judged. However, Cath rarely talks about her identity as a fanfiction writer due to the fact that fans are stereotyped as fanatical, immature and obsessive perverts. She has been able to manage these aspects of her identity successfully, until she comes to college. As her identity as a fanfiction writer is the only concrete/constant

aspect of her identity, Cath pushes herself to excel in it. She also converts her feelings of being betrayed and lost into something more productive by channelling these negative feelings and writing steadily, using her fanfiction writing as a subconscious cathartic device.

Due to her obstacles of social anxiety and disillusionment with the events in her life, Cath imposes a harsh deadline on herself, to complete her fanfiction before the final novel is released, so that she can end her version prior to the official end. This personal goal gives her a sense of purpose in a time when all she feels is uncertainty about her life choices and relationships. Fanfiction thus keeps her from spiralling into depression. At the same time, it is an effort to deny the influence of the soon to be released final Simon Snow novel on her own writing, as Cath wishes it to be completely her own version.

Cather's self imposed goal is not flexible and also impractical. However, it is through her fanfiction which allows her to share her passion and her goal with Levi that she is able to overcome the sensitive self esteem issues and allow herself to be more relaxed. The bond that she is able to develop with Levi also allows her to find a balance between the old and the new elements in her life as she is not being forced to choose one of the two as she had initially feared. Sharing her fanfiction with Levi has allowed her to expand her world and in turn come to her an epiphany that she doesn't have to choose between her fanfiction and the real world. Cath allows herself to enjoy her last few days as a freshman, which signals a change, something with Cath would previously have been terrified of. The final Simon Snow novel comes out and Cath and Wren are able to celebrate the event with their friends.

It is observed that Fanfiction is a constant presence in Cath's life. However, it is a choice she has made, without coercion or compulsion. It empowers her to express herself freely through modification of a pre-existing world, allowing her elf to assert herself. Cath's fanfiction stories are a misreading of certain aspects of the novel, enabling her to create a text that not only gives her an identity in the fandom / cyber world but also enabling her to create an identity in the real world: She identifies herself as a fanfiction writer.

Before Cath shared fanfiction with Levi, she felt awkward around him and avoided interaction. However, sharing her passion of fanfiction with Levi enabled her to share other personal aspects of her life as well as her suppressed thoughts.

Through the identity of a fanfiction reader, she is able to engage with strangers both online and offline overcoming both her own anxiety as well as the anxiety that she faces due to the influence of the novelist, her twin as well as her professor who are her precursors. One can see that fanfiction serves as the first step for Cath to build healthier relationships and overcome her psychological blocks, playing a key role in enabling Cath to assert herself. Talking about her feelings about fanfiction to various people enables her to address repressed issues (such as her mother), creating a text by breaking away from the various influences of her precursors and also functioning as a transformative act. This is seen particularly when Cath is also able to channel her misreading of novels to write fanfiction to write her original work, overcoming the anxiety of not being original or good by creating her text.

One can conclude that fanfiction empowers Cath to overcome obstacles in self expression in both her writing life as well as in her personal and professional relationships.

Thus, one can infer that Fanfiction is not a detrimental act for both writers of the original text and the fan writers, but a conducive process that enables growth of a person and can enhance relationships.

Further scope for study in both fanfiction and this particular novel exists in form of specific focus on a study of fanfiction as women's work, as work of the marginalized as Cath as a

fanfiction writer is a member of a minority group in her creative writing class. One can also undertake a study to trace the impact of fanfiction on literacy and creative thinking to interpret and evaluate the approach of teachers toward fanfiction and the impact of the approach on student-writers.

Works Cited:

- Black, Rebecca W. "Access and affiliation: The literacy and composition practices of English-Language learners in an online fanfiction community." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 49, no 2, Oct 2005. pp.118-128.
- Black, Rebecca W. "Language, Culture, and Identity in Online Fanfiction" *E-Learning*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2006 pp 170-184.
- Bloom, Harold. *Anxiety of Influence*. 1997. Oxford University Press
- Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Sacred Wood*. 1921 New York Alfred A Knopf.
- Hetcher, Steven A. "Using Social Norms to Regulate Fan Fiction and Remix Culture". *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 157, No. 6, Symposium: The Foundations of Intellectual Property Reform (Jun.,2009) pp. 1869-1935
- Jamison, Anne. *Fic: Why fan fiction is taking over the world*. First e-book edition: December 2013, pp 31-38. Accessed on 12.06.2017
- Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge. pp 9-50.
- Peter Gutiérrez. "Focus on Policy: The Right to Be a Fan" *Language Arts*, Vol. 88, No. 3, *The Rights of the Reader*. National Council of Teachers of English ,January 2011. pp. 226-231.
- Rowell, Rainbow. *Fangirl*. 2013. Macmillan.
- Seymour, Jessica. Representations of fanfiction in the works of Rainbow Rowell; 'Borrowing ... Repurposing. Remixing. Sampling' *Authorised Theft: Refereed conference papers of the 21st Annual AAWP Conference, 2016* pp 1-11
- Tushnet, Rebecca. "Legal Fictions: Copyright, Fan Fiction, and a New Common Law" 17 Loy. L.A. Ent. L. Rev. 651. 1997pp. 1-37