

Female Supporting Characters: Refocalization Through Fanfiction

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On more than one occasion upon reading a book or watching a movie or TV series, a member of the audience has wished that the plot or character was different. Fanfiction gives those people a chance at retelling the story or even creating a new story with those characters. Fanfiction is a relatively new form of literature and one that has become increasingly popular and widespread with the internet. Fanfiction is fan written fiction about characters and settings based on original works of fiction. Now, fans of all different kinds of media can write stories, poems, and more, which then can be shared.

From a study by William Lewis Bolt (2004), it was found that the majority of fanfiction writers were female. During this study, Bolt (2004) also wrote about some of the different forms of fanfiction. Within fanfiction works, there are many different categories of fanfiction which can sometimes overlap. According to Bolt, there are eleven main categories (the list and definitions can be found at the end of this article). For the purpose of this article, the focus will be on refocalization, where secondary become the primary focus (Bolt, 2004).

The largest amount of fanfiction has been written in relation to the Harry Potter series and has seen hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of stories created by fans. Since the world of Harry Potter is so vast, many have written refocalization fictions where in a secondary character is set as the protagonist. In some cases, a secondary character might be paired with another character who would have originally been primary or secondary to the plot. Alternatively, fanfiction could also focus solely on the secondary character (Bolt, 2004).

In terms of Harry Potter fanfiction, there are many retellings where Hermione is the main protagonist, making her a stronger female character and role model. Sometimes she is romantically paired with one of the other main characters such as Harry or Ron. Alternatively, Hermione has been paired with another secondary character, such as Draco or Snape.

Another example of refocalization in Harry Potter fanfiction, is that of Ginny. Similar to Hermione, there are many fanfictions which primarily feature Ginny, presenting her as a more developed character or changing her backstory from that of the books. She is often romantically paired with Harry or Draco.



Refocalization is just one of the ways in which female characters are given a chance to be portrayed in a stronger manner. Gender can go through shifts in fanfiction. For example, in Harry Potter fanfiction, there are many examples of Harry's sex being presented as female, or other works of similar effect where females take the role of the protagonist.

There are numerous examples of secondary female characters being refocalized into primary characters. This demonstrates that, whomever is writing the fanfiction is actively contributing to and reshaping how women are perceived. Additionally, the more people create and read these works which portray strong women, the more of an impact it will have on people's perceptions of women.

Category Definitions as defined by William Bolt

- Recontextualization – fans fill in perceived gaps in series timeline which are not provided in original work
- Expanded timelines – where prequels or sequels are written
- Refocalization – secondary characters take the place of the protagonist
- Moral realignment – heroes become villains or villains become heroes
- Gender shifting – changing a character’s gender
- Cross overs – merging series together
- Character dislocation – changing the settings but the characters stay the same
- Personalization – where author inserts themselves into fiction
- Emotional intensification – focuses on characters tragic circumstances
- Eroticization – adding erotic elements to a fiction
- Slash – creating homosexual relations between characters which originally were heterosexual

(Bolt, 2004)

Reference

Bolt, W. L. (2005). The Hidden Authors: A Study and Survey of Fan Fiction Writers. Retrieved from https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1715&context=utk_chanhonoproj

