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The Influence of Fan Culture on Young Adult Book Publishing

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The Influence of Fan Culture on Young Adult Book Publishing

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Introduction

Young adult fiction has become one of the largest and most popular genres in the publishing industry over the past twenty years. During that time, the number of people involved in various fan cultures has increased to the point where it has transformed from fringe culture into a societal norm. However, it is no coincidence that both of these things have grown in popularity simultaneously. Fans of young adult literary phenomena, such as the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, the *Twilight* saga by Stephenie Meyer, *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins, and *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, have all contributed in some way to bringing fan culture into the mainstream and to the popularization and evolution of the young adult genre. Participation in fan culture, both in person and online, has many benefits to both those taking part and to the publishers with whom those fans are engaged with. Fan culture has been crucial to the success of young adult fiction and will continue to be an important part of its future.

The History of Young Adult Literature

The Beginning

Young adult fiction is a relatively new genre of literature. Before the 1940s people were categorized either as a child or as an adult, with nothing in between (Cart 2016, 5). It was only after the Great Depression, which caused adolescents to leave the workplace and start consistently attending high school, did a youth culture begin to form (8). This emerging culture changed the way this age group behaved because they were too old to be treated as children, yet, they didn't have the same responsibilities or independence as adults. Their focus shifted from earning money and supporting their families to maintaining friendships and pursuing romantic

relationships (5-6). Essentially, they started to turn into teenagers not unlike those who exist today. Since the only responsibilities these new teenagers had were their school work and their social lives, they started to have more free time, some of which they spent reading. Librarians took note of this influx of young readers, and in 1930 the American Library Association began to release an annual list of the best books for young readers called the Young People's Reading Roundtable (9).

During the 1940s, the lives of teenagers became much different from the lives of adults and children due to compulsory education laws which led to more teenagers attending high school in lieu of entering the job market. This led to the emergence of youth culture centered on high-school social life (5). Because of this cultural shift, the literary tastes of teenagers began to evolve, and they no longer wanted to read books published for children. Librarians noticed this shift, and in the 1940s they changed their list to the Adult Books for Young People in response (9). While this helped adolescent readers find more appropriate and interesting adult books to read, it still didn't meet their literary needs for reasons not identified at the time. Teenagers were having trouble finding books that appealed to them because they were yearning to read stories that they could identify with, that spoke to the experience of being a young adult. Today, it's understood that young adults have specific literary desires simply because this time in their lives is so different from any other age group: "The fluid demographic barrier speaks to the emotional turmoil that makes contemporary young adult literature unique. Every decision feels life-changing, and every choice... can seem life-or-death. The emotions are no more or less valid... but it's the first time [they're feeling them], and thus very powerful" (Brown 2011). However, since that idea wasn't yet articulated, publishers at the time were unaware of, and thus unable to accommodate, this new market of young readers.

In 1942, *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly, was published. The novel tells the story of a seventeen-year-old girl named Angie who falls in love for the first time the summer before she leaves for college. Because of the teenage protagonist and the relatable first love plotline, the book became a favorite of young adult readers. Critics claimed that “*Seventeenth Summer*, perhaps captures better than any other novel the spirit of adolescence” (Burton 1951), and it has been said that “the modern period of young adult literature... begun with *Seventeenth Summer*.” However, it was not originally published for young adults. Maureen Daly has said that “*Seventeenth Summer* was not written as a young adult novel, incidentally. It was published to be an adult novel; it was reviewed as an adult novel. There was no such thing as adolescent literature in that day” (Daly and Richardson 1993). It was only later that publishers categorized *Seventeenth Summer* as young adult literature: “the book was in print for 20 years before someone noticed that teenagers were reading it and designated it YA.” (Carroll 1996). This was only after it became clear that books written for young adults could be successful, great literature that was worth publishing.

In the time between *Seventeenth Summer*'s publication and when it joined the newly established young adult genre, many other novels about young adults were published for adults. Some of the most notable examples are J.D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Although these works definitely appealed to teenagers, they were originally published as adult fiction and cannot retroactively be considered young adult literature, like *Seventeenth Summer*, this is because they were “written by aging writers who either try to remember their youth—which was at least fifteen years ago—or they try to write about today's teens without

knowing them” (Sutherland 1968). There was a disconnect between writers and their young readers. Authors were only writing worthwhile books about teenagers, not for them.

It wasn't until the late 1960s when writers “began exploring issues of relevance to the real lives of teen readers with art and insight” (Cart 2001), that teenagers were finally getting the books they wanted, and the young adult genre was formed. *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, published in 1967, is one novel that was a major catalyst for this change. Hinton's work was influential because it was “a work of young adult fiction, and not simply a novel with a juvenile protagonist” which helped readers to not that they were “being force-fed some other generation's madness, some other generation's solace and myth” (Godbersen 2017). *The Outsiders* depicted “a world that many [teenagers] know—and they want to read about life as it is for them” (Sutherland 1968) and “offered a mature contemporary realism directed at adolescents. The focus on culture and serious themes in young adult paved the way for authors to write with more candor about teen issues” (Strickland 2015). Like *Seventeenth Summer* before it, *The Outsiders* was first published in 1967 as adult fiction, and it wasn't selling well, until S.E. Hinton's publishers “noticed that... teachers were using it in classes. All of a sudden, they realize that there was a separate market for young adults... [which] almost single-handedly brought the Y.A. genre into being” (Michaud 2014). This changed the way that books for teens were written and published.

The First Golden Age

The realization that there was a market for meaningfully written young adult books ushered in a golden age that lasted for two decades, from the 1970s to the 1990s. These two decades had distinctly different trends and problems. The 1970s began with novels similar to those published in the late 1960s, which examined real issues teens were facing, and helped form

the young adult genre. *Go Ask Alice* by Anonymous, published in 1971, *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier, published in 1974, and *Forever* by Judy Blume, published in 1975, are a few of the most successful examples from this era. However, this trend soon devolved into what became known as problem novels, which were books that were “strongly subject-oriented with the interest primarily residing in the topic rather than the telling” (Cart 2016, 35). What began as compelling depictions of rich characters with realistic issues turned into clichéd cautionary tales. This caused young adults to look for other books to satisfy them, and by the time the 1980s came around, the next YA trend was genre fiction. During the first half of the 1980s, romance was the most popular genre because teenagers wanted to read books that helped them escape from their problems (43). Romance series such as the *Wildfire* and *Sweet Valley High* series quickly became bestsellers because they offered readers, who at the time were primarily female, the light and fun romance stories they wanted, and the series format gave them plenty of books to keep them occupied. Towards the end of the 1980s teens continued to prefer genre books, but instead of sweet innocent romances, horror became the newest trend, satisfying “youth’s eternal desire to shock its elders and a budding interest in all things odd and uncomfortable” (56). Christopher Pike “is credited with creating the bloodcurling stampede with the 1985 publication of his novel *Slumber Party*” (45). R. L. Stine soon followed with *Blind Date* and then perfected the horror trend with his *Fear Street* series (45). Over the course of the golden age the young adult genre went through many different phases, giving teenage readers countless books.

The Decline

However, as the twentieth century started to come to an end, it appeared as though the young adult genre was going with it. In the early 1990s, young adult literature was considered a dying genre (59). This occurred both because the lives of teenagers were changing once again,

and because the teen demographic itself was declining. The low birth rates in the 1970s led to fewer young adults in the 1990s (Strickland 2015). Additionally, the teenagers that were around had “become increasingly endangered by societal and personal problems” (Cart 2016, 61). These problems led the small teenage demographic of the 1990s to stop reading. Teenagers at this time were “becoming increasingly endangered by societal and personal problems that ranged from poverty to homelessness, from fractured families to violence... from increased drug use to sexual harassment and rape, and... an exponential increase... in teenage suicide” (Cart 2016, 61). Those who were reading no longer saw their lives being accurately reflected within the books that were being written due to the devolution of contemporary realism into problem novels which lacked any substance or relevance to teenagers at the time. (35). These factors culminated in a decline in the number of young adult titles being sold: “an average sale of perhaps 1,500 to 2,000 books per [title]” (Eaglen 1990). This sales drop then led to a drastic decrease in the number of titles released with “even the biggest publishers seldom [doing] more than a dozen or so YAs a year” (Cart 2016, 59). It appeared as though publishers had essentially given up on the young adult genre.

The Revival of The Young Adult Genre

The Harry Potter Effect

By the end of the 1990s, those publishers who pronounced young adult books as a dying genre due to their lack of sales were proven wrong. This was all thanks to *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* by J.K Rowling, which was published on June 26th 1997 in the United Kingdom, and was the first book of seven in the Harry Potter series. Over the next decade “the series broke record after record while dramatically—some might say seismically—changing the world of publishing” (Cart 2016, 116). After being rejected by several other publishers, UK

publisher Bloomsbury acquired the first Harry Potter book, paying J.K. Rowling an advance of only £2,500, and setting an initial print run of only 500 books: 300 of which were sent to libraries while the remaining 200 were sent to bookstores (Carter 2017; Hooton 2016). However, before those 200 copies even made it to the stores, the buzz that would help propel Harry Potter to fame was already starting due to the amazing reception by authors, critics, and booksellers who received advance copies of the book. After hearing all of this praise and encountering the book at the April 1997 Bologna Book Fair Arthur A. Levine acquired the US publishing rights for Scholastic for \$105,000, which was an unusually high amount for a children's book, especially from a first-time author (Eccleshare 2002, 13). *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, which was renamed in order to appeal to American audiences, was released in the US a year later on September 1st, 1998 and became an instant hit.

The following two novels, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, published in the UK on July 2nd, 1998 and June 2nd, 1999 in the US, and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, published in the UK on July 8th, 1999 and September 8th, 1999 in the US, were also astonishingly successful. All three novels dominated bestseller lists immediately after publication; they were on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over 80 weeks. In 2000 the *New York Times* decided to create a children's list order to give adult authors a chance to be included (Smith 2000). In spite of Harry Potter's incredible sales records, the asynchronous UK and US release dates were causing some problems regarding piracy issues for Scholastic. American readers had a hard time waiting until the book was released in the US, so many turned to the internet and illegal reproductions in order to read the UK edition. This led to Bloomsbury and Scholastic agreeing to publish the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, simultaneously on July 8th 2000. While this caused many security issues that required some creative solutions, it solved the piracy

issue and managed to increase the hype even more (Carter 2017). Bloomsbury and Scholastic continued this practice for the remainder of the series and the last two books *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, published on July 16th 2005, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, published on July 21st 2007, sold nine million copies and eleven million copies, respectively, during just the first 24 hours of their release (BBC 2007), making Harry Potter the most bestselling series in history.

On November 16th 2001, a film adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, titled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the US, was released by Warner Bros. The movie, and the seven sequels that followed, were all commercial and critical successes and together have grossed \$7.7 billion worldwide (Kim 2012). These films did nothing but enhance “Potter Mania” and cause the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s to be dominated by Harry Potter in almost every aspect of our culture. Yet, even after the releases of the final book and movie, Harry Potter continues to live on. This is due, in part, to J.K. Rowling's publishers and Warner Brothers, who continue to expand the Harry Potter world. Rowling continues to write more about the wizarding world through her website Pottermore.com and supplementary books such as *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, *Quidditch Through the Ages*, and *The Tales of Beetle the Bard*. Rowling also collaborated with playwright Jack Thorne and theatre director John Tiffany to create an original story within the Harry Potter universe which takes place nineteen years after *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. This story was then written into a stage play by Thorne and titled *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. The stage play premiered on the West-End on June 7th, 2016 and on Broadway on April 22nd, 2018 and the script was published by Scholastic on July 31st, 2016. Additionally, Warner Bros. started to release a new series set in J.K Rowling's Wizarding World, the first of which, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to*

Find Them, was released on November 18th, 2016, while the second film, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*, is set to be released on November 16th, 2018. They have also worked with Universal Studios to open The Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme parks in Florida, Japan, and California which are designed to give fans the unique experience of being a part of the magical world. However, the continued life of the franchise, and the success of the series in general, would not have been possible without the immense contributions of members of the Harry Potter fan community.

A Magical Fandom

The phenomenon of the Harry Potter series has been attributed to many things. This includes the children's and young adult book market at the time of its release, which was sparse following its near death in the 1990s, and J.K. Rowling herself, who has been called a "publishers dream" because she is "good looking, adept at being interviewed in any format, and a gifted author" (Fallon 2017). However, although these are important factors not to be discounted, the most crucial aspect to the series success is the overwhelming support from the Harry Potter fandom.

Around the time the first Harry Potter book was being written, publishers assumed the young adult genre to be dead, (Cart 59), and adolescents were back to square one. Just like the era before the 1960s, publishers weren't making books that young adults were interested in reading, causing teens to stop buying those books (61). This then led publishers to assume that there was no market and to publish fewer books for young adults (59-60). Yet, those assumptions were untrue and there was still a market, it was just an unsatisfied one. This is why readers of young adult fiction have held on to Harry Potter so tightly and for so long after its publication. Even from the beginning Harry Potters story resonated with its young readers, unlike any of the

other books at this time, earning their unwavering and very vocal support. Starting with Bloomsbury founder and CEO Nigel Newton, who gave the *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* manuscript to his eight-year-old daughter Alice. Newton says that he gave the manuscript to Alice and “she came downstairs an hour later, transported as if in a daze and said, ‘Dad this is so much better than anything else. You’ve gotta publish this’” (Carter 2017). Additionally, the new head of Bloomsbury’s children’s division, Barry Cunningham, had recently said to Newton: “Let’s publish books that children want to read, not books that their mothers and fathers think they should read.” Newton claims that “Barry had exactly the right mindset for identifying a book that kids would want to read. Boy did they want to read [Harry Potter]” (Carter 2017). His daughter’s glowing endorsement combined with Cunningham’s philosophy was what led to Newton approving the acquisition of Harry Potter. Showing that the opinions of readers have power.

After the first few Harry Potter books were released they achieved both financial and critical success. This success, along with the unprecedented outpouring of support from the series’ fans, caused many changes in the young adult publishing world. One of these changes occurred in the length of children’s and young adult books. Prior to Harry Potter, it was unheard of to have a young adult novel reach 200 pages (Bearn 2017). Yet, all of the Harry Potter books exceeded that length; the first three by around 100 pages more, and the last four by around 400 more pages in length (Dusty Loft 2007). This “taught publishers that, as long as the books are GOOD, kids will read them, no matter how long they are” (Willison 2017). However, it wasn’t just simple things like page length that changed. Harry Potter’s success also “sparked a new interest in fantasy as a genre,” which led to “an amazing outpouring of new fantasy titles... it also spurred readers to discover long established fantasists whose work had not previously

received its due” (Cart 2016, 118). Some of these titles included classics like *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien, along with new series such as *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series by Rick Riordan and the *Inheritance Cycle* series by Christopher Paolini. Because of this trend publishers decided to market these, and other similar titles, directly to fans of Harry Potter. Advertisements and bookstore shelves and displays dedicated to many of these fantasy series featured the tagline of “What to read while you’re waiting for the next Harry Potter book” in order to attract the series’ fanbase towards their books.

However, it wasn’t just other publishers that began to change to adapt to Pottermania, but Harry Potter’s publishers as well. In response to Harry Potter’s constantly growing and increasingly passionate fanbase, Bloomsbury and Scholastic began creating events specifically designed for fans. The midnight premieres, for example, are one of the most iconic things about the Harry Potter era. Thousands of fans enjoyed these events because they were able to dress up as their favorite character or represent their Hogwarts House, play Harry Potter themed games, talk about the books with their friends, and of course, get their hands on the latest book and read it as soon as possible. However, the things fans now say they loved most about the midnight premieres was “the instant, powerful camaraderie [between the fans] ... as alone as you may have thought you were when you read your Harry Potter books, you were always in company” (Pottermore 2016). Because of how beloved by fans the midnight releases were, and their proven ability to increase sales, the practice crossed over into the Harry Potter movie releases as well. Then it continued to be used for other book to film adaptations, then comic book movie adaptations, and now every blockbuster movie is released at midnight. It’s also now become part of all big book releases in the young adult genre, turning those releases into what is referred to as “event publishing,” which had previously only been a part of the adult publishing world (Cart

2016). Along with the many ways Harry Potter changed publishing, it also managed to “turn young adult literature into an increasingly global phenomenon” (Cart 2016, 118), and even went one step further and turned “book culture into pop culture [and] fan culture into mainstream culture” (Willison 2017). People from all ages and walks of life both read the books and participated in the cultural phenomenon that was Harry Potter. However, this was just the beginning of a new age of young adult literature and fan culture.

The Second Young Adult Golden Age

Fans Sink Their Teeth in

In the wake of the Harry Potter series, there was a rise in the number of young adult book series being published. After realizing the power of young fans and seeing how incredibly successful young adult books could become, publishers were eager to discover another phenomenon: “publishing became relentlessly—some might say obsessively—focused on finding the next Harry Potter.” (Cart 2016, 119) Luckily for these publishers, Harry Potter wasn’t just a one-time occurrence, and the newest YA blockbuster was right around the corner. In 2005, even before the end of the Harry Potter series, Little, Brown and Company published *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer and a new phenomenon was born.

While the stories of the Harry Potter series and the *Twilight* series were vastly different, there were some surprising similarities between the two authors and their franchises. Stephenie Meyer was an attractive, stay-at-home mother who had never published a book before, but had a dream so vivid she was compelled to write it down. This backstory was very marketable, and also not unlike the backstory of J.K. Rowling. After the release of *Twilight*, the media quickly began to compare the two authors and their works. Articles titled “Stephenie Meyer: A New J.K. Rowling?” and “Harry Potter and the Rival Teen Franchise” were published by *Time* and the

Wall Street Journal, respectively. (Grossman 2008; Schuker 2009). *The Washington Post* also wrote that “the creation of Stephenie Meyer’s ‘The Twilight Saga’ series, and its subsequent arc toward fame, recall J.K Rowling’s ‘Harry Potter’ success story to no small extent” (Yao 2008). However, the authors aren’t where the similarities end, and in the beginning, *Twilight* itself was even considered to be a “spiritual successor to Harry Potter.” (*The Telegraph* 2008) This praise was given to the series by fans and critics alike because of the strong response both series managed to evoke from their readers: “People do not just want to read Meyer’s books; they want to climb inside them and live there... There’s no literary term for the quality *Twilight* and *Harry Potter*... share, but you know it when you see it: their worlds have a freestanding internal integrity that makes you feel as if you should be able to buy real estate there.” (Grossman 2008). This feeling of investment in the world and characters of *Twilight* was the driving force behind why fans connect to the series with a vengeance: “There is something that sucks you in... Once you are gripped you cannot get ungripped.” (Gold 2009). And just like Harry Potter before it, millions of readers soon became absolutely enthralled by the *Twilight* books.

However, while there were similarities between Harry Potter and *Twilight*, there are also many differences between the two series, and one of those main differences was that the *Twilight* books were romance novels. This led their primary fanbase to be comprised mostly of teenage girls and their mothers, which was vastly different from the all-encompassing fanbase of Harry Potter. And while having an implicit fan base of romance readers has advantages, it also has drawbacks, especially when that audience “sways heavily female” (Klassen 2012). As the subsequent *Twilight* novels, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*, were released, that female fandom grew. While a growing fandom would appear to be a good thing “anything that tends to have a strong teenage girl fanbase often gets looked down on and thought of as not really quality

content.” (Maldonado 2017). Because people treat media that is popular with women as if it is lesser, the tides eventually turned against the female-centric audience and *Twilight* fans began to be vilified by the public instead of validated like their Harry Potter counterparts: “When you start to read the criticism of *Twilight* it’s just vitriol, it’s intense, the contempt.” (Silverstein 2012). And while some of the criticisms against *Twilight* and its fans were valid because “Rowling is clearly the superior... writer” (Cart 2016, 121), most of these critiques about the series’ writing quality “is what [made] slinging so much criticism at it, founded and unfounded, so easy, but the fact that women liked it so much just somehow fed into this mentality that women are vapid and like vapid things.” (Weekes 2018). Another common problem people found with the series was its tendency to “play into plenty of gross cultural stereotypes about stalking and controlling behavior being sexy.” (Ahlin 2018) however this is true of many other types of popular culture, which “feels a bit of a double-standard” and obviously demonstrated that “the hatred of *Twilight* was clearly wrapped up in a hatred of teen girls.” (Ahlin 2018). So, while the fandom grew, so did the mostly unfounded distain towards the series and its young female fans.

The incredible thing about the *Twilight* fandom, however, is that in spite of all of this negative feedback, the fans were undeterred from their love of the series. *Twilight* mania dominated our culture, just as much as Potter mania had a few years before. Just like the Harry Potter books before it “each new title was embargoed until one minute after midnight on the official publication date... no advanced review copies were released” (Cart 2016, 120) in order to keep the books an absolute secret until the fans could get a hold of it. This caused bookstores to continue the tradition of holding midnight release parties for each new installment, which were just as popular and beloved as the Harry Potter midnight premieres and were attend by “hordes of costume-wearing fans (many of whom called themselves... Twihards)” (120). These

Twihards were also just as active in their fandom, taking part in online forums, writing fanfiction, creating fan art and songs dedicated to the series (120). In 2007 fans also held an *Eclipse* themed prom, and there were several conventions held throughout the life-cycle of the series, as well as the Forever Twilight festival in Forks Washington, the small town where the series is set, which continues to be held each year (Meyer 2007; Ditzian 2009; Forks Washington Chamber of Commerce 2018). The popularity of the *Twilight* series also led to its adaptation into a major film series. These films were stylized as *The Twilight Saga*, produced by Summit Entertainment and comprised of five films: *Twilight* in 2008, *New Moon* in 2009, *Eclipse* in 2010, *Breaking Dawn: Part 1* in 2011, and *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* in 2012. All of the films were box office successes, grossing more than \$500 million worldwide (Ross 2015). The series also “kicked off what those in vampire academia... call the Vampire Renaissance. [Causing] a massive influx of vampire-related entertainment, mostly based on books” (Ross 2015), including HBO’s *True Blood*, CW’s *The Vampire Diaries*, and movies such as *Dark Shadows*, *Beautiful Creatures*, and *Vampire Academy*.

In spite of all the bad press and public opinion, the fans continued to propel *Twilight* and its genre’s success. The books have sold over one hundred million copies worldwide and have spent over 235 weeks on the *New York Times* Bestseller list (*The Telegraph* 2011). *Eclipse* even managed to knock *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* off the bestseller list, although it had been released just two and a half week weeks earlier. (*The Telegraph* 2008). Barnes & Noble also began to dedicate an entire section in their stores to young adult paranormal romance novels (Cart 2016, 121). The films, although they were considered critical flops, have grossed over \$3.3 billion at the box office. *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* currently hold the record for the highest grossing midnight release in history, making over \$30 million in its first evening. (*The Telegraph*

2011) All of these achievements in the face of extreme criticism signifies how strong fanbases have the power to make or break literary phenomena and create long lasting cultural trends.

Short Lived Revolutions

Despite all the negativity in the media towards *Twilight*, the young adult book market continued to hold strong and churn out many other successful books. The publishing world continued to search for its next blockbuster series, which they found in *The Hunger Games*, written by Suzanne Collins and published by Scholastic in 2009. However, unlike the last transition between phenomena, the publishing world was treading on new territory, as *The Hunger Games* and its author were completely different from the last two young adult powerhouses. Firstly, unlike Rowling and Meyer before her, Collins was not a first-time author; she had previously written a little-known YA series titled *The Underland Chronicles*. This first series by Collins consisted of five books which were released between 2003 and 2007 and were also published by Scholastic. Another major difference between *The Hunger Games* and its successors was its genre. Both Harry Potter and *Twilight* were fantasy books, while *The Hunger Games* was dystopian science-fiction. Yet, it also had elements of adventure like Harry Potter, with both protagonists engaged in a life and death conflict. And, like *Twilight*, it also had romance and a love triangle with two different men vying for the protagonist's heart. These familiar and beloved story components combined with a very different genre helped *The Hunger Games* appeal to fans of Harry Potter and *Twilight*, while also capturing new fans, which helped it become a massive bestseller.

Although *The Hunger Games* series was different in many ways from its successors. Selling over sixty-five million copies, each volume was a *New York Times* bestseller, and by 2012 it had “become the all-time bestselling book series, surpassing even the success of the

Harry Potter series” (Cart 2016, 122). *The Hunger Games* was inevitably made into a series of four films which were released by Lionsgate between 2012 and 2015. And, like the *Twilight* series before it, *The Hunger Games* trilogy also started a trend in dystopian books and movies (Craig, 2012). Following *The Hunger Games* there were many other dystopian YA series published; the *Delirium* series by Lauren Oliver, the *Matched* series by Ally Condie, and *The Selection* series by Kiera Cass are just a few examples of young adult series inspired by the success of the popular dystopian franchise. A few of the most popular dystopian YA series that were published in the wake of *The Hunger Games*, the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth, *The Maze Runner* series by James Dashner, and *The Mortal Instruments* by Cassandra Clare, followed in its footsteps and were adapted into their own movie series. However, none of these adaptations were nearly as successful as their predecessor and were considered “dead on arrival in terms of box-office clout” (Perez 2016). And, although *The Hunger Games* movie franchise grossed \$2.9 billion worldwide, the series and its genre peaked in 2013 and then rapidly declined and fell out of favor, causing YA dystopian movies to suffer greatly. The domestic box office sales for *Allegiant*, the third film in the *Divergent* series, fell a massive 46.8% from the first installment (Perez 2016). Because of this extreme decline in sales, Lionsgate planned to turn the last film into a made for television movie or even a television show. However, neither of these decisions were finalized and Shailene Woodley, the lead actress, announced she wouldn’t be involved in the project unless it was released theatrically, leaving the project in limbo (Johnson 2016).

Fans became tired of dystopian young adult books so quickly due to their being “so prevalent as to be a cliché.” (Grady 2017). They had reduced “relationships, passion, and rebellion into a simple recipe...[underlining] their own sameness” with predictable plots,

unnecessary love triangles, and two-dimensional characters (Schager 2014). What began as empowering female role models quickly devolved into Mary Sue characters who were more of “a superhero rather than a well-rounded human being.” (Harrison 2016). The love triangles that previously provided lighthearted romance to otherwise darker novels became “love via connect-the dots” (Schager 2014). And every reader knew exactly how the stories would end, with a victory, yet not one without sacrifice. Overall the genre “became the home of cheap cash grabs that didn’t understand what made the dystopian fantasy compelling in the first place.” (Grady 2017). Fans were then quick to move on, becoming tired of both the genre’s clichés and of the factory like way the books and movies were being churned out, in search of something more grounded.

Realism Returns and Reforms

As young adult readers started to move on from the blockbuster genre series that had defined YA for the past two decades, authors and publishers began to wonder what the newest trend would be: “We’ll go on to the next trend and we all wish we know what it was so we could go out and write it.” (Riley 2014). However, the next trend wasn’t new at all, but had in fact been around since the beginning of YA itself: realistic fiction. While realistic young adult fiction had definitely evolved since the days of *Seventeenth Summer* and even *The Chocolate War*, it had quietly continued to be a mainstay of the genre since its resurgence in the late 1990s.

In 1999, only a few years after the revival of young adult fiction, Laurie Halse Anderson, a nonfiction and children’s book author, published her first novel, *Speak*. *Speak* became a *New York Times* bestseller, received critical acclaim, and won several awards and honors including the 2000 Golden Kite Award and was a 2000 Michael L. Printz Award Honor book. It is also considered “one of those books that opened the gates for other so-called ‘serious’ books to be

published.” (Corbett 2014). That same year, MTV Books published *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky. It sold 100,000 copies in its first year, making it the most successful title by MTV Books at the time, quickly becoming a cult favorite of many young adults (Bing 2000; Ryzik 2011). Although these books were eclipsed in the media by Harry Potter, they have been a staple for YA readers since their publication. Because the subject matter is highly personal, fans were able to truly connect with the stories in a way that doesn’t diminish. *Speaks* readership increases each year and Laurie Halse Anderson credits its staying power to the fact that “everyone has had a bad thing happen to them and has struggled to figure out how to speak up. Everyone has felt alone and not heard.” (Jensen 2014). Chbosky claims that he’s “seen the effect the book has had on certain kids who’ve seen bad things. Some of their stories... would break your heart.” (Ryzik 2011). These books, and other realistic YA published at the time, were quiet favorites among readers because of their intensely emotional connection to the material. However, it wasn’t until a work of realistic young adult fiction became the next phenomenon that the genre became the new face of YA literature.

John Green has been a mainstay in young adult fiction since his debut novel, *Looking for Alaska*, was published in 2005 and won the Michael L. Printz Award in 2006. He continued to write several other novels including *An Abundance of Katherines*, *Paper Towns*, and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, which he co-authored with David Levithan. *An Abundance of Katherines* was a Printz Honor book in 2007, and *Paper Towns* and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* are both *New York Times* bestsellers. However, in 2012 he wrote another book titled *The Fault in Our Stars*, which skyrocketed him to the forefront of the realistic YA fiction movement. Even before its publication it reached the number one spot on Amazon’s bestseller list (Talbot 2014). It then debuted at number one the *New York Times* bestseller list, where it remained for

forty-three weeks and it was also “the best-selling book in America in 2014,” selling over seven million copies (Talbot 2014; Cart 2016, 126; Corbett 214). It was praised by critics as “elegantly plotted” and “damn near genius” (Sym 2012; Grossman 2012). Soon, *The Fault in Our Stars*, also referred to by fans as *TFIOS*, became the newest young adult phenomenon: “people loved, cried and crazed over it, just as much as they had *The Hunger Games* or *Harry Potter*” (muchbooks 2015). Young adult readers began flocking towards *TFIOS* and other realistic YA novels because they could “so easily relate to the characters; characters who are often flawed, imperfect, and facing similar problems to those of the reader” (muchbooks 2015). In 2014 *TFIOS*, was adapted into a film, as has become tradition for young adult literary phenomena, by 20th Century Fox. However, unlike the recent YA book to movie adaptations that had caused fans to be skeptical of whether or not their favorite book would get the treatment it deserves, John Green was as involved in the process as he possibly could be. Green states that he: “got to spend a lot of time with the actors, and we talked about the story and the characters. And there were times where I got to be part of conversations about beats and structure... There were certainly a few moments that I advocated for, because I knew they were popular with readers or they were fanatically important, but they all ended up in the movie” (Vineyard, 2014). So, with an author approved, faithful adaption, “legions of its fans rushed to the epically popular film... this translated into equally epic box office receipts” (Cart 2016, 127). The film grossed over \$307 million worldwide in box office sales and \$42 million in domestic video sales (The Numbers 2014). John Green’s fanbase, which had previously been moderate yet loyal, grew to a fan kingdom of millions of obsessed readers, turning Green into a “literary rockstar” and making him the driving force behind the “renaissance of realistic fiction” (Walden 2014; Cart 2016, 126).

However, John Green's massive fanbase cannot be attributed simply to the success of his novels. Green also has a YouTube channel, called the Vlogbrothers, that he started in 2007 which has amassed over three million subscribers and loyal fans (vlogbrothers n.d.). Since its founding it "has become the anchor of an online empire" (Talbot 2014) and has grown to include educational channels such as *Crash Course*, *SciShow*, *The Brain Scoop*, *Sexplanations*, along with scripted web series *The Lizzie Bennett Diaries*, *Emma Approved*, and *Frankenstein MD*, all of which are modern takes on classic literature. John Green's massive online presence has heavily impacted the way Green's fans read his books: "In a different era, 'The Fault in Our Stars' could have been that kind of cultish book. For many young people today, however, reading is not an act of private communication with an author whom they imagine vaguely, if at all, but a prelude to a social experience." (Talbot 2014) And while fans are now expecting a more social aspect to the books they read, John Green is able to comply, as "his works straddle and unite the worlds of YA publishing, YouTube, Tumblr, and fandom" (Romano 2014). This kind of engagement has set the bar for the way young adult fans read and interact with the books they read. Before, YA fans just wanted to find a book they enjoyed reading and could relate to in some way. And while some readers took this a step further by actively searching for places they could interact with other fans, that was a personal choice, not a requirement. Now, young adult readers expect the whole package, a great book and fan engagement, to be readily available to them.

Today's Young Adult Fiction Fans

Online

The internet has long been a place for fans of all walks of life to come together and share in common interests. However, it has also played an essential role in fostering the fan activity

that has become synonymous with the biggest books in young adult literature. The Harry Potter and *Twilight* fandoms in particular, would not have been the same without the online communities that helped unite their fans.

The publication of the Harry Potter series perfectly coincided with the spread of internet technology across the United States. Particularly during the largest gap between Harry Potter books between the publication of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* in 2000 and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in 2003, also called the “Three-Year Summer.” This is known as the time when fandom grew exponentially online as fans gathered to discuss, create, and collaborate on all things Harry Potter (Burt 2017). During this time “fan sites popped up everywhere, the most prominent being MuggleNet and The Leaky Cauldron... they became an extensive archive for quotes, images, essays, and literally anything else... There was now a place for fans to discuss burning fan theories with anyone, the world over” (Khosla 2017). One of the most popular fan activities, was the writing, sharing, and reading of fanfiction. Fanfiction has always existed in some form or another because “fans have long been inspired to become creators in the fictional worlds they love” (Burt 2017). However, thanks to the internet, it was now easier than ever to both create your own fanfiction and discover someone else’s: “Websites like Fanfiction.net, FictionAlley, and LiveJournal gave Harry Potter fanfiction writers and reads a place to gather with like-minded fans.” (Burt 2017) For these fans, fanfiction was “a way of better understanding the world and their own identities” (Burt 2017). And over the years, the Harry Potter fandom “became more powerful than Harry Potter canon itself” for many fans because it had “crafted a legacy of modern engagement and creativity” (Burt 2017; Bennett 2017). An achievement not paralleled by any other fandom.

When the *Twilight* fandom started forming in the mid 2000s, its fans also found themselves gathering online. However, while the Harry Potter fandom used the internet as a place to connect with other fans, discover themselves, and be creative, the *Twilight* fandom was dominated by the massive creation and consumption of fanfiction. While the Harry Potter communities did have fanfiction, and plenty of it, *Twilight* managed to take fanfiction to a whole new level. The *Twilight* fandom wrote a staggering amount of fanfiction with hundreds of thousands of stories on fanfiction.net as well as on websites just dedicated to *Twilight* fanfiction. Many fans felt as though certain works of *Twilight* fanfiction were “just as gratifying as reading the originals,” and some even went so far to consider certain stories “even better” than Meyer’s original works. (Ventre 2009). “The fandom’s most popular fics – works like ‘The Office,’ ‘Master of the Universe,’ ‘Wide Awake,’ ‘Emancipation Proclamation,’ ... ‘The Submissive,’ ‘The University of Edward Masen,’ and a number of others – had readership that dwarfed most *New York Times* bestsellers” (Jamison 2013, 181). Many of these fanfiction writers published their stories on Twilighthead.net, a website that housed thousands upon thousands of works along with discussion forums for writers to connect with both their readers and each other. These forums allowed users to “get to know people beyond their love of books,” and it also “became a community of women supporting other women. Of women who inspired their own creativity, and who encouraged other people to do the same” (Bryce 2015). The coming together and motivating of women was a theme among the *Twilight* fandom: “These women didn’t just write fic; they built an industry... The story of the *Twilight* fandom is a story of mostly nonradical women who came together in a radical and original, creative, self-sustaining global community” (Jamison 2013 179-180). These intelligent and successful women were able to find their voice

and share it with each other in this small, niche online community thanks to their shared love of *Twilight*.

However, the dynamics in the world of technology and the internet in our society and in fan culture have continued to change. Readers are no longer confining themselves to their specialized fansites, and they now want to be engaged with their fandoms, authors, and publishers through the same avenues they engage with everyone else. Participating in online culture and social media has become entirely mainstream, and, in cases of industries such as the publishing world, a necessity.

This shift has prompted publishers, especially those in the young adult market, to begin using the internet as a resource in order to stay in touch with their fans. Many young adult publishers are now creating their own websites and web initiatives. Scholastic launched I Read YA in 2015 after a successful series they had started on Twitter. This initiative spans multiple platforms including Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube and has over 175,000 followers. Penguin Teen established their social media very early on by creating Twitter and Facebook accounts back in 2011; they then cultivated a following on Tumblr and afterwards launched their own YA website in 2016. This has helped their brand reach more than half a million readers at various fan events including BookCon and Comic-Con. HarperCollins created their Epic Reads community website in 2012, Macmillan created their initiative called Fierce Reads that same year, with Little, Brown Books for Young Readers following a year later with their own site NOVL. All three publishers consider their websites very successful and helpful tools for them and their readers. Simon & Schuster launched their site Riveted in 2016 as, not just a corporate website, but “the voice of [their] true love of YA,” while the Random Houses web initiative, Underlined, launched in 2017, posts a mixture of lifestyle and literary posts. Underlined has been

a massive success, amassing over 100,000 subscribers across all major social media platforms in just three months (Kantor 2017).

This online participation helps publishers “[engage] readers in ways that many traditional avenues of marketing can’t” (Christensen n.d.). These websites become a “mediator between reader and publisher”, letting readers query publishers directly and share their views about books and authors, and then help publishers “draw up strategies to sell their books to their target audiences in a more effective manner” (Exeter Premedia Services 2014). This process is mutually beneficial to both publishers, who want to promote their books best as they can to as many people as possible, and readers, who want to find new, quality young adult books to read. The presence of publishers in these online spaces also helps to legitimize the influence online fan culture has on young adult book publishing.

In Real Life

While young adult fans have changed the face of young adult publishing, that’s not all they have changed. These fandoms have managed to change the lives of their fans. Along with bringing fan culture to the forefront of our society, fandoms have also given people a place to be themselves, connect with likeminded people, make lifelong friends, all while giving them a place to create fan art and fan films and write fanfiction and music, along with a host of other activities. However, these skills aren’t just being contained in their respective fandoms anymore but transitioning into the real world.

The Harry Potter fandom, known for its legacy of fan creativity, has propelled many talented fans towards recognition and even stardom. The musical theatre group Team StarKid was founded at the University of Michigan in 2009. That same year they put on a production of their Harry Potter parody musical, *A Very Potter Musical*, on their campus and uploaded it to

YouTube, and followed it with a sequel called *A Very Potter Senior Year* in 2012. These musicals became viral hits, accumulating over 100 million views on YouTube and propelling the cast to fame. Since then they have produced a number of original musicals and toured the country. However, it also produced a star: Darren Criss. Criss, who unsurprisingly played the role of Harry in the *Very Potter* productions, went on to be cast in the Emmy and Golden Globe award winning show *Glee*. Since then he has been in several films and television shows including *Girl Most Likely* and *American Horror Story: Hotel*, released his own album titled *Human*, and played the lead role in two Broadway productions: *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Hua 2015). However, the *Very Potter* musicals aren't the only Harry Potter stage works worth mentioning. *Puffs: Or Seven Increasingly Eventful Years at a Certain School of Magic and Magic* is an off-Broadway production written by Matt Cox. His play parodies what it must have been like for the Hogwarts house Hufflepuff, known simply as Puffs for copyright reasons, during the turbulent years that Harry Potter attended school. The play began its run at the People's Improv Theatre before moving to the Elektra Theatre where it enjoys an open-ended run due to its success. So successful, in fact, that Matt Cox is currently writing two sequels that parody *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. (Fierberg 2017).

The success of Harry Potter's fans has not been limited to the stage. There have been many live action Harry Potter fan films made along with a few animated ones. The content of these films has a wide range, including prequels, sequels, missing moments from the series, head canons, and even original work set within the universe (Spry 2018). The most recent and successful film to be released is *Voldemort: Origins of the Heir*. It began with funding from a Kickstarter campaign that found the attention of Warner Bros., who issued a takedown notice.

However, they eventually came to an agreement and the film was released to YouTube on January 13, 2018, and in under three months has gained over 13 million views. (Liptak 2018; Tryangle Films 2018)

One favorite fan activity of the Harry Potter fandom was writing music based on the series. During Harry Potter mania, many Harry Potter themed bands began emerging and formed a genre called wizard rock, or wrock for short. Many of these bands became very popular within the fandom including, Switchblade Kittens, who released the first documented song about wizard rock, The Whomping Willows, The Remus Lupins, and The Ministry of Magic. While the majority of these bands have broken up or moved on from wizard rock, many bands, like Harry and the Potters and Draco & the Malfoys, still continue to write music. Some even tour together such as Tonks and the Aurors, Kirstyn Hippe, Swish and Flick, and Tianna and the Cliffhangers, who completed their *Yes All Witches* tour in 2015. (McNally 2015). Instead of writing music, some Harry Potter fans wrote fanfiction. One famous young adult author, Cassandra Clare, who wrote the *Mortal Instruments* series, started out as a Harry Potter fanfiction writer. In 2002 she began writing her fanfiction *The Draco Trilogy* which took over six years to complete and consisted of “almost one million words spanning three, novel-length stories” (Burt 2017).

While *Twilight* fans did participate in many other fan activities such as fan art and fan music (even Tianna and the Cliffhangers from the wizard rock community also writes *Twilight* fan songs), fanfiction was so deeply engrained in the *Twilight* fan culture that it’s no surprise that fanfictions are the main works that have transitioned into the outside world. The fandom gave writers “the opportunity to explore writing styles and techniques using a template in which the relationships and logistics have already been decided and proven enjoyable to the fandom” (Ventre 2009). However, they soon grew past exploration and after a few years in the fanfiction

community, a large number of fanfiction authors began to pull their works from fansites in order to edit them and re-release them as original fiction; and some of the most popular *Twilight* fics were among them. The first of these re-released fanfictions was *Master of the Universe* by Snowqueens Ice Dragon, more commonly known as *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E. L. James. The re-worked fanfiction was released as a trilogy by an independent Australian publisher called the Writer's Coffee Shop in early 2011, and quickly climbed to the top of the *New York Times* e-book and print bestseller lists without a single printing in the United States. This success prompted an imprint of Random House to offer James a seven-figure deal, allowing them to acquire the rights to the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy. The books were re-released in 2012 and skyrocketed to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller lists. The trilogy has sold over 100 million copies worldwide, making E.L James the highest paid author in the world in 2016. During the books peak the publisher claimed two copies of the trilogy were sold every second. (Flood 2014; Skurnick 2012; Cuccinello 2017)

After the success of *Fifty Shades*, many other *Twilight* fanfictions-turned-original fiction were released, including *The Office* by Christina Hobbs and Lauren Billings, written under the pseudonym Christina Lauren, which was acquired by Simon & Schuster and made into two books, *Beautiful Bastard* and *Beautiful Stranger*, published a few months apart in 2013. However, these titles received little attention and were simply passed off as “porn without plot” imitators of *Fifty Shades*. (Kellogg 2012). In 2013 an imprint of Penguin acquired the rights of another fanfiction adaptation about a BDSM relationship, *The Submissive* trilogy, but it was soon forgotten just like the *Beautiful* duology (RT Book Review 2013). Then, in 2012, fanfiction writer Sylvain Reynard's fanfiction *The University of Edward Masen*, was rewritten and released as two books, *Gabriel's Inferno* and *Gabriel's Rapture*. The books were acquired by an imprint

of Penguin for a “substantial seven-figure deal” and were predicted to be “the next ‘it’ book” following *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Acuna 2012). Yet, while the books appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list, they didn’t even come close to their predecessor. Despite the authors and publisher’s best efforts, none of these books managed to reach the success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which, despite its humble beginnings as *Twilight* fanfiction, had become a publishing phenomenon in its own right.

However, not all of these fan culture projects are creative endeavors that lead to fame and fortune. Groups within the Harry Potter, *Twilight*, and John Green fandoms have come together to try and make the world a better place. The Harry Potter Alliance, with more than 100,000 members in 90 chapters worldwide, makes efforts to address “such diverse issues as marriage equality, immigrant rights, labor issues, environmentalism, teen suicide, and food justice” (Jenkins, DeLaure, and Fink 2017). *Twilight* fans and fanfiction authors of *The Office* started the charitable organization The Fandom Gives Back with the hope that “the frenzy” surrounding *Twilight* could help benefit an organization called the Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation (ALSF), which raises money for pediatric cancer research. During their first fundraising event in 2009 they raised \$87,640 for the cause, then in 2010 raised \$147,537 at their second event, passing their goal by almost triple the amount. The Fandom Gives Back continues to run and as of 2013 has “raised over a quarter of a million dollars for ALSF and pediatric cancer research, along with other causes such as autism awareness and natural disaster relief” (Jamison 2013, 220-223). John Green himself, along with his brother Hank, founded the Project for Awesome, an annual 24-hour charity even where Nerdfighters, their fans, come together to “decrease world suck” by raising money for various charities. The Green brothers and their fans have raised over

\$2 million each year for the past two years and have raised an estimated \$4 or \$5 million more since the projects founding in 2007 (projectforawesome.org 2018).

While all of these projects directly stem from participation in fan culture, they have managed to reach well beyond it. Because of their participation in fan culture fans have been able to start their careers as philanthropists, activists, musicians, actors, directors, writers, and more. And as online communities and fan cultures continue to grow, fans will continue to have an opportunity to thrive in industries they're passionate about.

Conclusion

The young adult book genre has had a long and winding history. Beginning with a rocky start as the young adult demographic emerged in the 1930s, publishers first struggled to discover what kinds of books teenagers wanted. Then, after many stumbling attempts by adults and publishers to create books for this new market, young adult writers like Maureen Daly and S. E. Hinton published their groundbreaking novels that established the young adult genre. Thanks to many great writers following in their footsteps, who gave young readers content they could enjoy and relate to, young adult publishing became a successful market. In the 1970s, the golden age of young adult publishing ushered in a boom of YA books that catered to each teenagers' individual tastes. However, two decades later the teenage population dwindled, and their literary needs changed once more, leaving the publishers struggling to create books that appealed to their market yet again. This caused the genre to hit a sharp decline and towards the end of the 1990s it was considered dead.

In 1997, the first Harry Potter book was published, and it soon became a phenomenon that captivated the world and resurrected the young adult fiction genre. The series not only changed the way publishers made and marketed young adult books, it changed our culture as

well. Harry Potter helped fan culture become part of the mainstream and paved a way and set an example for the other young adult books that followed. In the wake of Harry Potter, young adult publishing has gone through many different trends and launched other literary phenomena, such as *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Fault in Our Stars*. These books have had their own impact on both publishing and culture as a whole, while also helping to solidify the young adult genres place in the publishing world.

Throughout all of this, young adult readers have sometimes been misunderstood and underestimated. However, they have always given their unwavering support to the books that matter most to them. The support of these fans has since proven to be a powerful tool for publishers, as well as for the fans themselves. Participation in these fandoms, both online and in the real world, has created numerous other projects that have helped launch many of their careers. These fandoms have also provided fans with an emotional outlet and the opportunity to form lifelong friendships. The prevalence of the internet and participation in fan activities has also changed the publishing world in its own way. Readers now expect a more engaging experience than ever before. They not only want to read a book, they also want the opportunity to interact with the author, publisher, and other likeminded fans. This has led to publishers starting online initiatives in order to interact with their fans in new and exciting ways.

Since the beginning of the young adult genre, fan culture has been an integral part in all of its developments and successes. And, as the publishing world evolves, fan culture will continue benefit not only young adult publishing, but the fans as well.

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