

Radboud University Nijmegen
Master's Thesis Faculty of Arts

**“Pulling Yourself Up by the Bootstraps”: Fandom Self-Referentiality in
Goncharov (1973) – A Case for Meta-Fanfiction**

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Submission Date: 15 June 2025

Word count: 16.930

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Melanie Schiller, as she has been a wonderful mentor and support during this process. I am very grateful for your guidance, patience, and reassurance throughout this project. Your valuable feedback and subject expertise have made it so that this thesis could be improved in ways I would not have achieved had I been without your advice. I would also like to thank my secondary assessor, Dr. Chris Louttit, for his interest in this project and for contributing to my interest in adaptation during the years of my undergraduate education. Thank you to my tutor, Dr. Emily Shuman, for your support during these last two years of education. I would also like to thank the Goncharov fandom on Tumblr for sharing their talents and for the laughs.

I would like to thank my colleagues and friends during my research internship at the University of Antwerp for teaching me what it means to be a researcher. You have led by example and I am honoured to have witnessed it. I would like to thank my friends, my partner, and my mother, who have been by my side during the process of writing this thesis. Late nights and early mornings and everything in between have been made all the lovelier with you by my side.

Lastly, I would like to thank the warm cups of coffee to which I have grown increasingly fond of these last few months. Through their rejuvenation and comfort, I was better able to apply myself to this project.

Kyran Samuels

June 2025

Abstract

How fan audiences organise themselves differs as a result of the affordances of the platform on which they are operating. These differences allow for a multitude of distinct fandom works to be created, one of which is fanfiction. Just as is the case with other forms of fan creations, how fanfiction is written is largely dependent on the context in which it is written and the material and methods available to the writer(s). Fanfiction has academically long been considered a literary practice contingent on the existence of a concrete source text, often in the form of a fictive narrative or some form of (popular) media.

However, in the last few years, other examples of fan-made narratives have been put forward, which are not constructed with a source text as the narrative from which they are derived, such as the case with Goncharov meme on Tumblr. During the last few months of 2022, the Tumblr community came together to collectively create an imagined movie through jokingly insisting that the movie exists and pretending to be people who had seen the movie and commenting on the contents of the movie. I contend that the Goncharov meme challenges the academic understanding of fanfiction, which has been traditionally put forward by demonstrating how narratives can emerge from more abstract sources, such as the collective experience of minority fandom members, rather than a concrete source text in the form of a narrative with an established progression.

By introducing the concept of “meta-fanfiction”, this research aims to more concretely conceptualise the phenomenon occurring with Goncharov (1973) in which meta-references on how minority fandom members typically alter subtextual or lacklustre representation in fanfiction are transformed into creating the base narrative of Goncharov (1973), thus illustrating the evolving and reflexive nature of both fanfiction and how audience members relate to mainstream media. The concept of silosociality will be used to show that there is distinctiveness in how people on Tumblr operate, meaning that fandom on Tumblr does have self-awareness of their operational codes.

Through attention to how queer and female characters are represented in the Goncharov (1973), this research explores the research question: to what extent does the creation of Goncharov (1973) as fanfiction differ from how the creation of fanfiction has been academically described? I argue that Goncharov is fanfiction created by the Tumblr fandom that alters the definition of what fanfiction is beyond the focus which has been kept in academic discourse on fanfiction, in which the emphasis is on an already existent media text. The alternative is that people may draw upon their lived experiences as a foundation to

create fanfiction. The argument is substantiated through the analysis of three works of canon-compliant fanfiction derived from Goncharov (1973) as a source text, as well as one work of fan art also derived from Goncharov (1973).

Keywords: fanfiction, fandom, Tumblr, self-referentiality, meta-fanfiction.

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1. Introduction

How would one go about watching a movie that does not exist? On the surface, this may seem like an impossibility. After all, can what has yet to be constructed be witnessed? To the Tumblr user fan base, the answer to this question is affirmative. By coming together for a few frenzied weeks at the end of 2022, the Tumblr community, the group of people who utilise the social media and blogging platform Tumblr, managed to do the impossible. And they called it Goncharov. In August 2020, a Tumblr user took to Tumblr to post a picture of the label of a pair of “knock-off” boots they had purchased. They did so to share the humour they found in the apparent mislabelling of the shoe. The label contained an advertisement for a Martin Scorsese movie that had never been created; this was titled “Goncharov” and was accompanied by the tagline “the best mafia movie ever made”. As can be seen in Figure 1, the boot label also contains the names of numerous supposed contributors to the film.



Figure 1: Image of Goncharov shoe label by zootycoon.

Initially, there was a reply to this post – a different Tumblr user humorously posting “this [sic] idiot hasn’t seen goncharov [sic]”. As is the case with the majority of humorous online exchanges, the Goncharov joke did not receive much attention past this initial dialogue. In considering the inception of Goncharov, Stacy Lantagne, a professor of Law, states that “in terms of internet phenomena, there was nothing particularly clever about a quick sarcastic reference to a non-existent movie” (19).

Relevant to note here is that, unlike the case with social media platforms such as Instagram or Snapchat, the republication of work generated by another user is a central practice of the Tumblr user experience (Tiidenberg et al. 24). When on Tumblr, most users thus rely on posts that have been shared from other blogs by the people they follow. Because of this reliance on interconnectivity and republication, Tumblr artefacts which have previously fallen out of fashion may be revitalised, as was the case with the Goncharov shoe label.



Figure 2: *Goncharov* (1973) poster by beelzeebub.

Two years after the shoe label debuted on the blogging platform, Tumblr user beelzeebub made a fake movie poster to accompany the shoe. The movie poster incorporated the original names which appeared on the shoe label, namely Domenico Procacci Productions, presented by Matteo JWHJ0715, with Martin Scorsese as the director. The fan-made movie poster also included the original tagline. The poster also established (most) of the characters which would be featured prominently in the imagined storyline for *Goncharov*, such as the main character of the movie, *Goncharov* himself, his wife *Katya*, the two antagonists *Mario Ambrosini* and *Andrey Daddano*, as well as a more minor character by the name of *Ice Pick Joe*. This movie poster made by a Tumblr user was able to bring *Goncharov* back to the attention of the other platform users, which sparked major creative output, with users coming together to describe scenes they thought would be in the movie, or add on to existing scenes, often with little to no coordination (Lantagne 1).

The contributing users also created other fan works, such as art depictions of various movie scenes and music for a movie soundtrack. In this way, the users pieced together a plot they jokingly insisted had always existed. While the shoe label was initially deemed unworthy of Tumblr fame, *Goncharov* eventually took on a life of its own, continuously growing, gaining traction and inciting thoughtful and artistic contributions. Eventually, the year 1973 was added to *Goncharov* as the year in which the movie premiered, though it remains unclear exactly when this addition was made. It is the current speculation that the year 1973 was chosen so that the renewal in attention to the *Goncharov* movie in 2023 could be explained through stating that it was the celebration of the 50-year anniversary of the film. This addition illustrates the deliberate nature of how *Goncharov* was created by the fandom involved. Here, fandom is understood as described by Shannon Sauro, a language researcher and language teacher trainer affiliated with the University of Maryland, as a larger (online) community of fans engaging in cultural activities centring on a common interest (140).

Goncharov (1973) has been characterised in various ways. Lantagne describes *Goncharov* as a meme, with the understanding of memes as a “species of viral internet creativity” (1). Lantagne refers to the meme as “a mutating act of collaborative creativity”

(19), emphasising the nature of non-static communal efforts surrounding the creation and spread of Goncharov. Because of the meme's popularity, online news sites and blogs also commented on the phenomenon, such as Gizmodo, an online tech news blog. Founded in 2002, Gizmodo prides itself in reporting on technology, science and internet culture ("About Gizmodo"). In a piece written by Linda Codega, the Goncharov meme is framed as a game, with a subsection in the article under the heading "How do you play Goncharov (1973)?" (Codega). According to Codega, to participate in this game, you must roleplay as someone who has seen Scorsese's *Goncharov (1973)* and who is posting about it on Tumblr, either by developing and describing concepts of the movie or by adding a visual contribution to the Goncharov fandom space through fanart or gifsets (Codega). From this, it can be understood that Goncharov is a rich tapestry of diverse artistic visions. The imagined plot of *Goncharov (1973)* varies per person, seeing as the participants in the meme focused on adding their own preferred views to it (Lantagne 18).

Both the understandings of Goncharov-as-meme and Goncharov-as-play emphasise the imaginative and creative nature of the Tumblr drive to "make" a Scorsese film. However, an avenue which has yet to be concretely explored is *Goncharov (1973)* as fanfiction.

This is relevant, because it reveals that how fandom reproduces mainstream media in fandom creations is changing, implying that audience relationships to mainstream media are also changing as social media continues to become increasingly prominent in how entertainment media is consumed and discussed. Fan activities offer insight into how people see and understand the world. This is because the canonical characteristics of a source text that fans either choose to alter or keep in their fan works indicate salient features of the original. Through attention to what fans choose to do to a given narrative in entertainment media through fan works, cultural assumptions of what is or is not considered to be correct representation are integrated.

More recently, fanfiction has developed to become what Maria Leavenworth, an Associate Professor of English Literature at the Department of Language Studies in Sweden, describes as a "manifestation of the desire to concretely interact with a pre-existing narrative" (42). Fanfiction is defined as a literary practice contingent on the existence of a concrete source text, often in the form of a fictive narrative or some form of (popular) media like film, music, and television shows (see Kelley 49; Silberstein-Bamford 130; Floegel 785; Leavenworth 40; Barnes 71). Here, a source text is defined as the original textual product from which fans derive the story features to be re-used or reshaped in the fanfiction that is produced. Brittany Kelley, whose research focuses on identity and literacy practices in online

fanfiction communities, describes fanfiction therefore as “a literacy practice whereby a fan takes the plot features, characters, and settings from a favored text...and the fan uses those features to write original stories about that text” (49). Here, the focus lies on what the fan is extracting from an existing media text and how the fan chooses to transform, revise, or add to the text in question.

From these definitions, it can be understood that the academic understanding of fanfiction relies on an understanding of fanfiction as being related to a source text. This definition, however, does not apply to the Goncharov narrative that is created collectively by Tumblr users, because the referentiality to a pre-existing and concrete source text is not present. When it comes to fan works created for Goncharov (1973), the creators cannot refer to an earlier viewing of the supposed movie or an existing movie script on which to base their characterisations. Instead, what they can refer to, are the texts which were created by other Tumblr users. There are certain representations which often come up in the numerous contributions to the Goncharov universe, such as the description of subtextual homoerotic tension between two prominent male characters in the story, as well as the sidelining of Goncharov’s wife, Katya, in the canonical storyline. These depictions could not have been solely informed by the shoe label or the poster from which Goncharov originated, yet they remain the more prominent consistencies in the story as constructed by the fans, despite the instability of the overall story. When considering the context in which fans have been operating on Tumblr concerning the form of queer and female representation that has been shown in mainstream media and the Tumblr fandom habit of recreating canonical texts through fan works for representation that is more explicit, while simultaneously being more positive, diverse, and realistic to the queer experience, it can be said that the way that the story of the fandom-made movie Goncharov (1973) is constructed in fact mirrors Tumblr fandom's understanding of the role of a fan vis-à-vis contemporary media content.

The structure of the Goncharov story is here understood as being reliant on the fandom having an awareness of which aspects of fandom are integral to the creation of a believable story, seeing as the successful imitation of a fandom for an existing movie is indispensable to the Goncharov meme. To expand the Goncharov meme, the Goncharov fandom must have mirrored general Tumblr fandom practices to create the base narrative. Following this, this thesis argues that Goncharov (1973) is fanfiction of fandom practices and constitutes what I will term meta-fanfiction. This means that Goncharov (1973) is made cohesive through fandom self-referentiality instead of the fandom continuously referring to a

canonical source, and this is also what makes it possible to describe the narrative of the movie as meta-fanfiction.

What is interesting in the case of the Goncharov (1973) narrative is that it is fanfiction being written, not drawing from a specific source text, but instead drawing upon the mutual understanding between the fandom members of what occurred in the imagined movie more generally. Consensus is found through the frequency of the appearance of certain tropes and themes, for example, the use of a clock tower in fandom creations dedicated to the Goncharov universe to denote how the characters are doomed to the passage of time. If enough fandom members utilise the clocktower symbolism in Goncharov in their depictions of the movie, this starts to become recognisable as a salient aspect of the movie. The Goncharov story remains variable, but certain aspects of the story are so often reproduced by the participants that they are considered to be “canonical” aspects of the story, regardless of the variation in how these characteristics are realised. An example of this that showcases how Goncharov (1973) references queer fandom member experiences of being media viewers is the presence of homoerotic tension between Goncharov and his antagonist Andrey Daddano, though how any particular fan might depict this in their art remains up to the individual. Once the Goncharov story had been “established” by the fandom through the perpetuation of the key “scenes” and key character dynamics, the Goncharov fandom continued to create fanfiction for Goncharov (1973) to solidify that this is an existing movie with a fandom.

Because Goncharov originated on Tumblr, it will be understood here as a product contingent on Tumblr functionalities. Since its launch in 2007, Tumblr has attracted much interest, most notably recognised as a platform for microblogging (McCracken et al. 2; McCracken 151; Ogden 115). Contemporarily, an increasing number of scholars have given attention to the social aspect of Tumblr, an example of which is Tiidenberg et al., analysing Tumblr as a social space through the affordances of the platform, the platform vernacular, and the platform sensibility. Through their analysis, they argue for the concept of “silosociality” on Tumblr, stating that “Tumblr users experience tumblr [sic] in silos that are defined by people’s shared interests, but sustained through inward-facing shared vernacular and sensibility, made possible by tumblr’s [sic] features, functions, and rules” (Tiidenberg et al. 52). Simply put, Tumblr has a recognisable social landscape which urges certain behaviour and which afforded the creation of Goncharov as meta-fanfiction.

I consider the creation of an unstable narrative by a collective as an embodiment of fandom cultural norms, or in other words, a fictive representation of how real-world fandom members view representation in mainstream media. I argue that fanfiction as a practice has grown to include writing beyond fanfiction writing that is done by fans deriving textual evidence from already-existent media texts to incorporate into their narrative. To account for these shifts, I propose the concept of meta-fanfiction, which I define as fanfiction that draws its foundation from fandom practices. These fandom practices are then expressed through fan-made narrative forms. The relevant features of meta-fanfiction are the focus on self-referentiality, and that it is derived from an abstraction of a practice, in this case an example would be the queer fandom understanding that queerbaiting often occurs, rather than a stable source. As I will show, meta-fanfiction can be considered both a representation of and a preservation of fandom culture. To illustrate my argument, multiple elements of the Goncharov meme will be considered. While Goncharov (1973) is not derived from a specific source text, the fandom products which take Goncharov (1973) as a canon to be altered are here understood to be taken from Goncharov (1973) as a source text. I will utilise the Goncharov fandom and some of their fan products which take Goncharov (1973) as a source text, as a case study. To make the distinction between the canon of Goncharov (1973) and the fandom productions derived from this more easily detectable, the canonical story of the Goncharov movie as collectively envisioned by the fandom members will be referred to as Goncharov (1973), hereby denoted with the year in which the movie supposedly came out, while other non-canonical contributions will not receive the time marker. I will also depart from the concept developed by Tiidenberg et al. of silosociality to explore meta-fandom practices on Tumblr and show how, in the case of Goncharov, meta-fandom has moved one step further from relying on self-referentiality of Tumblr fandom habits for humour and are now also illustrating fandom habits indirectly through the form of fanfiction they are creating. This research will explore the research question: to what extent does the creation of Goncharov (1973) as fanfiction differ from how the creation of fanfiction has been academically described?

An important distinction to be made here is Goncharov (1973) as fanfiction of fandom practices, and thereby meta-fanfiction, and Goncharov fanfiction of the imagined established movie narrative. From Tumblr's collective creativity, a storyline for the movie was created. This storyline is rooted in fandom self-referentiality. In turn, any form of fanfiction derived from the collectively imagined movie Goncharov (1973) as a supposed "canonical text" is

once more fanfiction in a traditional sense, because it is utilising a pre-made textual source to derive from. Fanfiction for Goncharov views the Goncharov meta-fanfiction, alternatively referred to as Goncharov (1973), as a source text.

This thesis is divided into four parts, two of which are analytical chapters. In the first chapter, titled “Fan, Fandom, Fanfiction”, I will trace the developments surrounding research into fandom and fan practices, elaborating on the different waves taken in fan studies and how these position the fan in the cultural landscape. The following chapter, titled “Tumblr, Fandom on Tumblr, and Silosociality”, will discuss Tumblr, the platform on which Goncharov originated and was mainly developed, and how the sociality on Tumblr makes the creation of fandom projects such as Goncharov (1973) possible.

In chapter four, the first analytical chapter, “Canon-Compliant Fanfiction and Meta-Fanfiction”, I will set the foundation for how I referred to fan work remakes of Goncharov (1973) to make out what the Goncharov (1973) canon actually consists of so that this baseline narrative may be referred back to when analysing how fans have integrated their own experiences with the representation of minority characters in mainstream media into the Goncharov (1973) canon. The distinction between meta-fanfiction and fanfiction in its traditional sense will be more clearly illustrated through this. The relationship between audience perception of minority character representation and Goncharov as a fandom creation is the base needed to argue that Goncharov (1973), as created on Tumblr is meta-fanfiction. The analysis will be done through a close reading of three distinct works of canon-compliant fanfiction which use Goncharov (1973) as the source text, which means that these works are fanfiction for the meta-fanfiction of Goncharov (1973). This section will consider a popular work of fanfiction written for the Goncharov tag on Archive of Our Own, colloquially known as AO3, to gain a better understanding of the female character Katya Goncharov, Goncharov’s wife. Through utilising canon-compliant fanfiction focusing on Katya, I will argue that representations of Katya reflect how female characters are often depicted in mainstream media, thereby highlighting the similarities between fandom awareness of how female characters are treated in media texts and how Katya was created.

The second analytical chapter, chapter five, “Alternate Universe Goncharov Fanart and Meta-Fanfiction”, focuses on alternative universe fanart of the romantic pairing consisting of the title character, Goncharov, and another prominent character, Andrey. In analysing this fanart that has taken the meta-fanfiction Goncharov (1973) as its source text through the lens of commodity culture, the main argument that meta-fanfiction is derived from non-textual abstract sources, such as an abstract source as the practices of a collective

fandom, will be solidified. Within the Goncharov “canon”, the homoerotic relationship between Goncharov and Andrey is understood as being purely subtextual. My analysis will contend that the choice to include the queer relationship in subtextual form is a reflection of how queer fans are accustomed to viewing queer representation in mainstream media, with queer representation often not being made too explicit to cause discomfort to non-queer audiences, while still being enough to draw in queer audiences.

2. Fan, Fandom, Fanfiction

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on how Goncharov has been constructed by the contributing fandom, as well as its initial origins and how Goncharov relates to the broader understanding of fanfiction. In the current chapter, I will briefly discuss the different waves that fandom studies have undergone, which will make it possible to understand the relevance of how changes in how fans make textual works derived from media texts relate to a broader understanding of the audience relationship with mainstream entertainment media as a whole.

2.1 Putting the Fan in Fandom

Jonathan Gray et al., fandom scholars, assert that fandom and its products are integral to understanding modern life. This sentiment is captured in the following passage:

...studies of fan audiences help us to understand and meet challenges far beyond the realm of popular culture because they tell us something about how we relate to those around us, as well as the way we read the mediated texts that constitute an ever larger part of our horizon of experience. (Gray et al. 10)

Gray et al. further argue that academic attention to fan audiences facilitates inquiry into the intersection of sociality, political intervention, cultural landscapes, and identity formations (10). As a result of this, it is not only the media landscape which can be explored, but also how emotional connections are formed both in relation to cultural products and interpersonally in a contemporary setting (Gray et al. 10). Online fanfiction practices are a fruitful landscape on which identity, digital technology and writing can be explored due to how fanfiction can show how identity features are “performed into readings of ‘source texts’” and beyond (Kelley 49). Here, both Gray et al. and Kelley make note of the same phenomenon, namely that fandom and fanfiction help us understand ourselves and the world we live in and can serve as a mirror to how personal identities are constructed and shared.

Early in his career, Henry Jenkins, a media scholar and currently Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts, asserted that fandom and the form fandom takes is a result of the historical configuration in which fandom finds itself, not only concerning the media from which it is derived but also in relation to the social attitudes prevalent and the development of technology (Jenkins 3). Following this argument, the Goncharov fandom can also be considered a reflection of the attitude towards the social context in which it originated. Even more so than a typical work of fanfiction, the people participating in the creation of Goncharov had a comparatively higher level of freedom in the construction of the Goncharov narrative in comparison to the level of control fans typically have over their fandom creations due to the lack of stable source text which works of fanfiction must typically adhere to in some way. The culmination of the fandom contributions to Goncharov speaks not only to fandom creativity, but also to the perceived collective Tumblr fandom identity which is projected into Goncharov.

What it means to be a fan is also always in flux. According to Sauro, a more contemporary and non-consumerist definition of being a fan emphasises the productional aspect of fan actions (140). Following this, Sauro draws upon Jenkins, who states that:

One becomes a “fan” not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a “community” of other fans who share common interests. For fans, consumption naturally sparks production, reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable. (Jenkins qtd. in Sauro 140)

However, this definition does not fully encompass the range of activities which may be undertaken by a fan, some being less generative than others, yet still no less invaluable to the circulation of fandom productions. In fandom, both production and consumption have their place. Therefore, Duffett defined being a fan as someone who experiences a “deep emotional conviction” towards a famous person or media text and is driven to explore these emotional convictions by participating in fandom (Duffett qtd. in Sauro 140).

These emotional convictions and explorations may take shape in various forms. Sauro makes the distinction between three forms of fan practices: fan practices that celebrate, fan practices that analyse, and fan practices that transform or critique (140-143). Goncharov (1973) described as meta-fanfiction is an example of fan practices which transform or

critique the representation of minority characters in mainstream entertainment media. An example of fan practices situated primarily in celebration is that of collecting merchandise related to the object of interest and thus enjoying the object of interest through engagement at a level more active than passive consumption (Sauro 140-141). Analysis in fan practices includes the creation of analytical material, such as in fanzines in a pre-Internet age, though this has transformed to become more widespread and diverse since the proliferation of Web 2.0 technology for fandom (Sauro 141). Finally, writing fanfiction pertains to the last form of fandom practices, namely that of transforming or levying critique, though this encompasses much more than simply writing fanfiction. Still, fanfiction has received the most attention out of the mentioned practices (Sauro 142).

2.2 Making Waves: Fandom Studies and Fanfiction

The view of fans/fandom and how these relate to the media text that they have been consuming has long been theorised. Gray et al. denote three waves in how fandom has been approached as an academic discipline. The first stage in fan studies which Gray et al. describe is the “fandom is beautiful” phase, is the phase during which the academic field turned to the activities and practices often undertaken by fans, such as writing fanfiction, and attempted to recode them from “pathological” to “creative, thoughtful, and productive” (Gray et al. 3). This early stage in fan studies was thus characterised by the attempt to redeem fan culture and render it in a more positive light (e.g. Jenkins) and thus depart from the negative view of fans as obsessive or unnecessary.

The second wave of fan studies turned away from the celebratory lens which the first wave utilised when approaching fandom and instead focused on the replication of social inequality and cultural hierarchies within fandom spaces and acknowledging fandom’s newfound position as non-marginal (Gray et al. 6). While still drawing upon power relations and how these are manifested in fandom, scholars focused on fandom as being “embedded in the existing economic, social, and cultural status quo” (Gray et al. 6) instead of viewing fandom as “a tool of empowerment” (Gray et al. 6). The third wave of fandom studies recognises fandom studies as a mainstream enterprise, with fans no longer inhabiting the same marginal position which the first wave fandom scholars attempted to free fandom from. This wave particularly considers how fandom functions as an interpersonal practice and how these are embedded in the everyday life of contemporary culture (Gray et al. 9). The emphasis here lies in how fandom relates to modern life and contemporary modes of consumption and working and thus made way for increasing attention to understudied fan

communities, such as the fan practices of children (e.g. Hunting) or research into the adult toy fandom (e.g. Heljakka).

In one of the earliest fundamental works on fandom, Jenkins uses the term “textual poachers” (3) to describe the active way in which fans consume the media texts which have gained their attention. The use of the term “poaching” refers to earlier work by Michel De Certeau in which De Certeau describes the relationship between the producer and a consumer of a text as a struggle to possess and control the textual meanings in the text (Jenkins 24). Jenkins builds on this idea of active participation in consumption to introduce his concept of textual poaching to distinguish the active engagement shown by some fans in comparison to other, more passive television viewers (24).

According to Jenkins, fans can “become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings” through their poaching, and in doing so, represent a cultural form of active media consumption and circulation of culture (24). However, in tracing the developments surrounding the contributions fans can make and the degree to which fans can be considered fellow “producers” of cultural texts such as television shows for example. Fandom-scholar Lucy Bennett asserts that the premise of textual poaching is no longer apt to explore digital fandom (12). This is due to the increase in collaboration between fan audiences and the producers of the object of interest (Bennett 12), as well as the fact that fans as poachers departed from the consideration of fans having a marginal and socially weak position, as was the case when Jenkins’ influential work was originally released but is no longer the case contemporarily.

Fandom as an academic concept has thus fluctuated from being seen as something unworthy of academic attention to something marginally championed, and now liberally accepted, especially in combination with attention to changes in technological configurations and how these influence consumption patterns. As was indicated during the discussion on the different waves of fandom studies, the role of fandom in society has also shifted from having fandom as marginal to more openly acknowledged and integrated into mainstream consumptive practices. Fandom has transitioned to being a common place experience following developments in the technological field, as well as changes in social and cultural attitudes (Sandvoss et al. 1). Sandvoss et al. are not the only ones to note that the advancement of digital technology has proven to be integral to shaping the direction fandom has taken. Bennett also notes that the developments in digital technology alongside the proliferation of participatory culture have led to fans “gaining stronger resources and integration within the digital media landscape” (7). The increase in the use of social media for

fandom connectivity and creativity in the later years of the 2000s would also allow more extensive connections to form between the producers and the consumers of a text and even blur the lines between these two groups (Bennett 7). This is driven by increasingly immediate communication between fans (Bennett 7). Fans are thus able to connect, make themselves visible, and participate culturally with steadily increasing ease.

It is not only the technological changes to fandom culture which are relevant here, but also how fandom productions, such as fanfiction, are related to the texts they derive from. Fanfiction has its roots in the analogue culture of science fiction fan practices beginning in the 1960s (Coppa qtd. in Silberstein-Bamford 131). Pre-internet fan practices often took the form of the compilation of fanzines, which is a term that refers to “independent fan publications produced by single fans or fan networks and which might include drawings, photos, news, announcements, ads, analysis, interviews, and fan fiction” (Duffett qtd. in Sauro 141). These fanzines served as a physical compilation in which speculation and discursive analysis of characters and storylines could be collected before online alternatives existed (Sauro 141). Fanfiction writing is a discursive practice in which fanfiction authors are inhabiting a space characterised by a plurality in representational and textual elements, often as members of a global network in which multiple perspectives are present (Black 387).

Departing from the view that the act of reading provides the reader pleasure through allowing them to participate in the narrative, Jennifer Barnes, Assistant Professor of psychology at the University of Oklahoma, argues that the “the fanfiction writer—who actively reinterprets and extends the text in written form—can be seen as providing a written record of his or her participation” (72). Therefore, fanfiction allows for the writer to make their mark, speaking to the active nature of fanfiction production. Creating a tangible record of participation is not the only thing for which fanfiction serves as a valuable resource. Creative expressions may also be used to address and fill gaps in cis/heteronormative representation in canonical popular culture texts (Floegel 786). While this may be the case, fanfiction does not exist in a vacuum, instead, Leavenworth notes that fanfiction “is always overtly written in relation to its canon and depends on readers' knowledge of this relation” (Leavenworth 42). Leavenworth further states that fanfiction is doubly situated: once concerning the canonical text which is being drawn upon and once in relation to the interpretations other fans have made of the same canon (42). This canon is often attributed to entertainment media such as published books or television programmes which are being aired. However, this is not always the case, as can be seen with Goncharov (1973) in which an entire narrative was collectively created without a source text being referred to.

From this chapter, it can be understood that identity and fandom practices are distinctively linked. How a fan constructs fan products derived from a source text can be viewed as being embedded in wider socio-cultural implications. Furthermore what it means to be a fan and how fans have been viewed academically and socially is not static, which means how fans influence mainstream culture is also subject to change. Nonetheless, one thing that has remained a salient feature in fandom culture since its onset is the acknowledgement that fan culture and the products created within this culture contribute meaningfully to the understanding and circulation of culture.

3. Tumblr, Fandom on Tumblr, and Silosociality

3.1 What is Tumblr?

With the digital landscape influencing the way fandom shapes itself, different configurations of online social media platforms also affect how fandom is organised. For an understanding of how the Goncharov meme shifted from a shoe label to a collectively imagined story, it is also integral to take into consideration how the platform on which the meme was developed works. Tumblr was officially launched in 2007 by its original creator, then then- twenty-one-year-old David Karp (McCracken et al. 2). Karp, developed Tumblr with multi-mediality in mind, particularly giving attention to the freedom users experience in being able to create textual posts, combining these textual elements with visual images, or embedding audio or video alongside other possible combinations (McCracken et al. 4). These are all features that would prove to be integral to the creation of Goncharov, as Tumblr users utilised the functions at their disposal to share ideas and art works related to Goncharov (1973).

Tumblr is akin to a blogging platform, most often recognised through the potential to create and post text posts of varying lengths on the site (Attu and Terras 529). According to Attu and Terras, Tumblr also allows six other “specially formatted post types” besides text posts, these being “images, videos, website links, chat transcripts, quotes, and audio files” (529). In addition to these features, in January 2023, Tumblr staff released the statement that they would be rolling out the “poll” feature on Tumblr, which would allow users to create and circulate polls for a limited amount of time and have these be voted on by fellow Tumblr users (“Ok Folks. Everybody Stay Calm”). This feature has been widely used ever since, bringing the specially formatted supported features on Tumblr up to seven, laying the base foundation for how the Goncharov members may communicate with each other.

There are different elements at play regarding how users of Tumblr interact with each other and view the content made available on Tumblr. The dashboard, colloquially known as the “dash”, which Rose Attu and Melissa Terras, whose research focuses on digital culture, describe as “a continually updating stream of content representing each Tumblr user’s tastes” (529), can be considered the focal point of the Tumblr user experience. According to Nicholas Proferes and Katherine Morrissey, “during their time on the Dash, Tumblr users experience each other in bouts of momentary visibility, as ephemeral fragments of content and personality that, over time, may or may not compile into something recognizable and familiar” (25). Just as other social media platforms, Tumblr allows its users the ability to create follower networks (Attu and Terras 529). To show appreciation for content or engage in dialogue with a post, Tumblr users may like each other’s posts, or reblog a post they come across on to their blog (Attu and Terras 529), which will automatically insert the reblogged post into the dashboard of their followers, as well as their dashboard. When a post is created or reblogged, a user may add their comments or tags to the post in question, which may be viewed and reacted upon by other users (Attu and Terras 529). Besides searchability, tags are also often used as a way for Tumblr users to engage in dialogue with each other. The reblog function makes it so that older posts may come to be recirculated through user interaction long after the post was originally made, as was the case with Goncharov.

As was the case for an extensive period, Tumblr did not allow users control over the audience which would be reached by their content. All content was public, and the level of interaction a post would receive depended on whether the followers of the poster were active at the right time to come across the post and whether they would linger while scrolling (Proferes and Morrissey 29). The possibility of the post being censored by Tumblr’s “safe mode” was also an influential factor in whether or not a post would be seen (Proferes and Morrissey 29). However, the introduction of “Tumblr Blaze” in April 2022 did allow for more control over the audiences which could be reached by a post. With Tumblr Blaze, a user can increase the reach of their post, or a post made by someone else, for a sum of money depending on the size of the intended audience (Blaze FAQ). According to the official Tumblr Blaze Page, the audience can be chosen based on a selected location, language, size of audience, and relevant communities.

In the last few decades, social media has gained prominence among the youth through its potential to facilitate personal expression, social interaction, and engagement with the public sphere (McCracken 152). Tumblr has not been exempt from this and has been particularly relevant in the fandom practices of more marginalised audiences, such as girls,

people of colour and people who identify as LGBTQIA+ (McCracken et al. 151). Unlike Instagram or Snapchat, where the focus remains on connecting new users with existing ones, Tumblr is made to operate in such a way that a sense of community will be fostered through an emphasis on the users utilising the platform to engage with content that speaks to them (Proferes and Morrissey 24). Through coming in contact with relevant content, Tumblr users can make connections with like-minded individuals, through which a sense of community and inter-user connectivity is stimulated (Proferes and Morrissey 24). The emphasis of user content on the website is evident through multiple aspects of the website. Already within the registration process for Tumblr, immediately upon providing the necessary personal information, the new user is prompted to select terms which describe what they are “into”, effectively bringing attention to the content Tumblr has to offer (Proferes and Morrissey 24).

Tumblr has also garnered academic interest since its initial release. In an attempt to evaluate the research which has been produced on Tumblr in English up until the point at which their work was written, Attu and Terras evaluated 61 research outputs on the social media platform in question (See Attu and Terras 528). They evaluated the research focus regarding Tumblr at the time, along with determining the most frequently used methodologies and the subject matters most commonly discussed. Attu and Terras found that, in the earlier works, Tumblr was largely studied in relation to its concept, with research focusing more on how Tumblr functions as a social media website (535). Though the earlier works considered Tumblr more in passing, by 2012, Tumblr “had become the focus of an increasing number of academic publications” (Attu and Terras 530), illustrating that the platform had been able to garner an increasing level of interest within the academic community.

Like many social media platforms, Tumblr has come to be culturally significant. Comparing Tumblr to the magical place of Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, McCracken et al. describe Tumblr as “an alternative world, where disparate people come together over mutual passions and desires in a queer, carnival-like atmosphere that distinctly dispenses with normalcy” (2). This comparison places Tumblr as a distinct location, functioning within social media practices but with its own recognisable atmosphere. This has particular implications for how fandom on Tumblr is organised. However, Tumblr distinguishes itself in how it is used, with Tumblr being used more so “as an individualized personal space” (McCracken 153), often with the attribution of a pseudonym to retain anonymity as the user interacts with a wider environment beyond their immediate physical scope (McCracken 153).

3.2 Tumblr's Sociality and Its Silos

The different features of Tumblr previously mentioned have been further considered so that scholars may better understand how it feels to experience fandom through the Tumblr interface. One such group of researchers to do this were Tiidenberg et al., who eventually developed the theory of silosociality on Tumblr. The concept of silosociality was developed by Tiidenberg et al. as they attempted to theorise what they viewed as the distinct social landscape of Tumblr, and by extension, lead to a critical rethinking of how scholars view the sociality of social media as a whole. By branching into Tumblr as a social space, they argue that Tumblr sociality is built up of a shared vernacular, a shared sensibility, and attention to the affordances made possible by how Tumblr operates. Affordances denote “how people’s practices and platform structures interrelate” and are at their core the perceived possibilities of what can be done with a material artifact, such as media technologies (Tiidenberg et al. 42). Gibbs et al. state that every social media platform has its own set practices of how users may communicate, taken from the affordances of the platform in combination with how these affordances are realistically used (qtd. in Tiidenberg et al. 45). Each social media vernacular must be recognisable as belonging distinctly to a particular platform (Tiidenberg et al. 46). Finally, Tiidenberg et al. describe Tumblr’s sensibility as “the dominant way of making sense of, and assigning, moral value on the platform (Tiidenberg et al. 49).

In a general sense, Tiidenberg et al. take the word “silo” and use this at its most stripped down meaning to indicate “something deep, intended for storing valuable stuff”, highlighting the felt and imagined aspects of these silos (52). However, the silos and subsilos in which Tumblr users operate were not intended to be thought of as being closed off from each other. While the silos are separate from each other— this is through not the separation of content but a separation of context. An example of this would then be how “fandom” can be considered one of the major silos on Tumblr, another one would be “artblr” for example, where the focus is on spreading art. Tiidenberg et al. note that silos “are defined by people’s shared interests, but are sustained through inward-facing shared vernacular and sensibility, made possible by tumblr’s [sic] features, functions, and rules” (52). These silos are the (social) bubbles in which Tumblr users operate, typically based on some form of shared interest, such as gender identity, a romantic pairing/triad/etc. Within a fictive work, or a show to name a few possible examples (Tiidenberg et al. 54). Within these silos, distinct ways of communicating and participating within the social landscape vis a vis other users are evident. A Tumblr user may participate in as many silos and subsilos as relevant to their interests, yet each silo has its own recognisable social and operational code and can be viewed as an

individual space (Tiidenberg et al. 54–55). Within the social landscape of silosociality, Tumblr users are not bonded together through real-life connections or arbitrary markers such as personal facts along the lines of age markers, but are instead primarily bonded through “common, passionate affective and progressive interest” (McCracken 153) which are contained within silos.

As previously noted, silos are not secluded; Tumblr users are free to roam from silo to silo as they see fit, participating in multiple separate spheres with their own rules of conduct. This freedom to explore has been picked up on by others as well, with McCracken et al. asserting that Tumblr’s interface and affordances are that which have served to attract a crowd of users who value “more creative agency and a more egalitarian, nonhierarchical, uncensored media environment, as well as those who did not want to be easily surveilled or identified” (McCracken et al. 5). These features all return to affordances noted by Tiidenberg et al., such as high pseudonymity, high multimodality, and high interactivity to name a few (43-44).

3.3 Meta-Fandom on Tumblr

Tumblr has also been marked as a fannish space, facilitating fandom interactions (McCracken; Tiidenberg et al.). Within this fannish space, interactivity is key, after all, silos are only leverageable through “being a part of them” (Tiidenberg et al. 57), and through having the correct literacy which is developed in a particular space as a result of immersion (Tiidenberg et al. 57). While fandom is only one of the many silos present on Tumblr, it also features subsilos, like that of the Tumblr meta-fandom, which Tiidenberg et al. describe as being “the fandom of tumblr’s [sic] silosociality” in essence (117), attributing the focus of the meta-fandom on Tumblr culture and the community involved. The concept of meta-fandom within Tumblr’s silos is relevant because it broadens the scope of what can effectively be considered a fandom and how fandom appreciation may look. One example of Tumblr meta-fandom is the fandom of Tumblr feels, denoting the fandom which harbours a feeling of undying loyalty toward the social media platform despite the shortcomings of Tumblr and continuous disappointment felt by the users towards the Tumblr staff (Tiidenberg et al. 118). This is meta-fandom, because the main object of interest which is constantly referred back to is the feelings Tumblr users exhibit towards Tumblr as a social media platform on Tumblr itself, hereby making direct reference to Tumblr’s social landscape.

Another example is the meta-fandom of Tumblr folklore, which is evident through Tumblr thread collaborations, and which encompasses appreciation for the Tumblr

vernacular, the Tumblr reblog function through which Tumblr posts are shared from user to user, and a love of Tumblr users outwitting each other (Tiidenberg et al. 119). Through these examples, it is made evident that a fandom does not need to be tied to “something or someone” famous, as denoted in earlier definitions of fandom.

The most integral aspect of the argument for the necessity of meta-fiction as a distinct form of fanfiction is the acknowledgement that non-stable sources, such as experiences, can be drawn upon when creating fanfiction, like how the Goncharov fandom members utilised aspects of queer subtext when making Goncharov (1973). I will illustrate this sentiment by utilising Tiidenberg et al.’s concept of silosociality as a foundational theory. Within silosociality, there is the recognition that the fandom silo on Tumblr has its own sociality, which is contained within the silo in which people belonging to fandom operate. Because of how Goncharov is freely circulated, shared, and expanded upon by the fandom members, the fandom is foundationally different from other fandoms which have less ‘ownership’ over their object of interest. The deliberate use of fandom expectations towards how showrunners will go about portraying minority characters when creating the Goncharov (1973) canon that makes Goncharov (1973) meta-fiction. I will take the concept of meta-fandom as described by Tiidenberg et al. one step further and illustrate that, in the case of Goncharov, fanfiction also has self-reflexive connotations in a way not previously theorised. This is distinct from other fanfiction, which draws on inspiration from canonical media texts such as a television show or a film, rather than “the concept of Tumblr fandom”, as meta-fandom does for example. This will be indicated with the term meta-fiction, which conceptualises fanfiction representing fandom characteristics through fan-made narrative forms.

4. Canon-Compliant Fanfiction and Meta-Fanfiction

I have previously discussed the details on how fanfiction has been conceptualised academically and the role identity plays in how fanfiction is shaped, as well as the Tumblr functions which made the circulation of Goncharov content possible. This was related to the concept of Tumblr’s silosociality, which denotes that each silo on Tumblr has its own distinct and recognisable social landscape. I have used this concept in order to make the distinction between fanfiction and meta-fiction. Though meta-fiction is a form of fanfiction in the sense that it is a textual product created by fans, meta-fiction differs from fanfiction as the term is traditionally used. This difference lies in the text from which meta-fiction is derived. As was previously stated, meta-fiction is here defined as fanfiction that draws its

foundation from fandom practices, which are then expressed through fan-made narrative forms. In this section, how fandom experiences are reintegrated into a narrative form, specifically the narrative for Goncharov (1973), I will illustrate through the analysis of three works of canon-compliant fanfiction written for Goncharov (1973). In other words, meta-fanfiction is taken as the source text for the canon-compliant works of fanfiction that will be analysed here. I will do this to clearly illustrate the difference between the storyline for Goncharov (1973), which is meta-fanfiction, and fanfiction written derived from this.

4.1 Canon-Compliance in Fanfiction and Goncharov

While both canonical and non-canonical representations of Goncharov (1973) were written by the same group of people, namely the Goncharov fandom, the distinction lies in how the work is presented in order to distinguish which category the text belongs. Also relevant is that, in the case of Goncharov (1973), it is the canonical aspects of the work that are simultaneously the attributes which make Goncharov meta-fanfiction distinct from canon-compliant fanfiction. This is due to how fandom experiences are integrated in the layer of Goncharov which is viewed by the fandom as canonical. Goncharov (1973) draws upon Tumblr fandom experiences and Tumblr silosociality, making it self-referential in the sense that Tumblr fandom is the foundation for a fandom-produced work made on Tumblr. This makes Goncharov (1973) distinct from other forms of fandom textual productions, illustrating the need for the concept of meta-fanfiction. However, the Tumblr fandom did not stop there, and instead continued to make fanfiction, but this time utilising Goncharov (1973) as a source text. This can be visualised as follows:

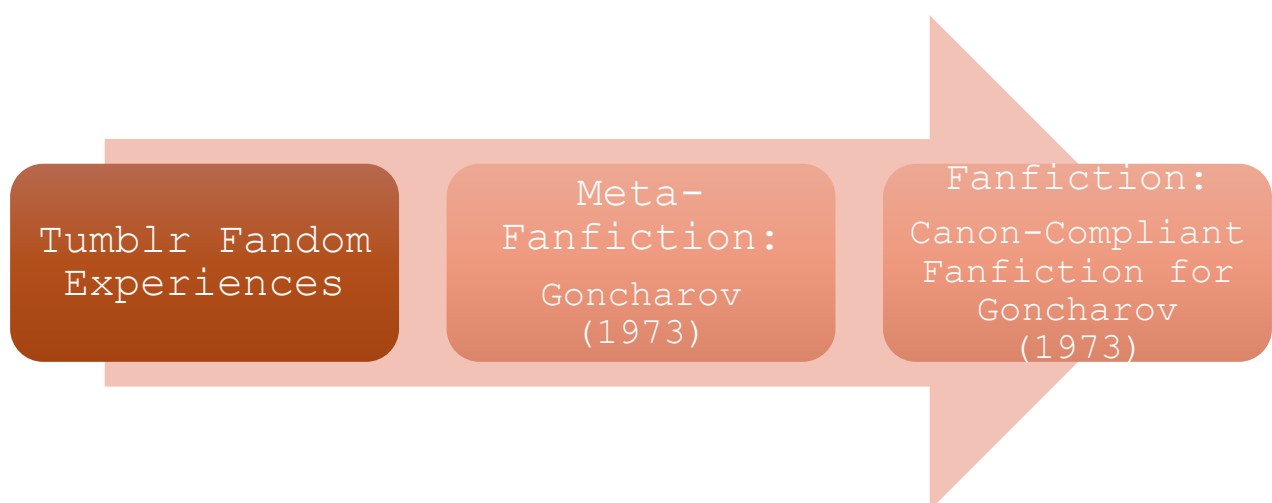


Figure 3: Process of material integration into canon-compliant Goncharov fanfiction.

While meta-fiction is distinct from fanfiction in the source that is drawn upon, the ability to distinguish these two forms of writing in the case of the Goncharov case study is reliant on comprehending how the Goncharov storyline is shaped. This is because there must be an understanding of what the storyline looks like to understand how Tumblr fandom experiences were integrated into it. Because of the instability of the plot for Goncharov (1973) due to the collective nature of the way it was created, establishing what can be considered to be a main storyline for the supposed movie must be done indirectly. One way to piece together the Goncharov story is by looking at fanfiction for Goncharov (1973). Relevant here is fanfiction set during the assumed “canonical” storyline, referred to as canon-compliant fanfiction.

Kenneth Kidd, a Professor of English associated with the University of Florida, refers to the term canon-compliance as both a “disciplinary term” (9) and a term of “communal participation and accord” (9). These terms are integral to the inner functions of fandom because they allow fandom participants to uniformly and concretely communicate the subject matter that their works encapsulate. The term canon-compliant refers to those works of fanfiction which “[do] not change the original storyline and whose main purpose is to explain and elaborate on certain aspects of the plot” (Kobus qtd. in Matlas 43). Canon-compliant fanfiction is thus a subgenre of fanfiction and may be realised in different ways. A writer may choose to set their story either before or after the events of the canon narrative, or to expand on an event which occurred during canon without altering the canon occurrences (Matlas 43). In the case of canon-compliant fanfiction written for Goncharov (1973), the source text, which is Goncharov as envisioned by the fans on Tumblr, is expanded upon and altered in order to make fanfiction for the narrative which does not make claim to being a part of the canonical plot of Goncharov, but does assert to reflect the happenings of the film.

Canon-compliant fanfiction is particularly apt for the analysis of the construction of Goncharov because it simultaneously encompasses that which is considered to be canon, as well as the expansions which were done underlyingly. The aspect of retelling is especially important when it comes to writing canon-compliant fanfiction, because of the heightened dependency on canon in comparison to other works of fanfiction which are written to diverge from canonical occurrences. In the case of Goncharov specifically, the canon-compliance is not expanding upon a canon as the term is typically used to denote that which occurs in a narrative and instead expands upon the assumed main storyline pieced together by numerous

posts on Tumblr. Through canon-compliant fanfiction set during canon, the author is simultaneously asserting that their representation is a direct reshaping of the main storyline, as well as the fact that they are taking liberties in expanding upon the occurrences to include a deeper interpretation than what was visually shown in the movie, or what would have been visually shown in the movie had it been presented in a traditional sense.

This chapter will focus on the analysis of three different works of canon-compliant fanfiction elaborating on Katya Goncharov, Goncharov's wife, to illustrate how the canonical narrative of the imagined film *Goncharov* (1973) can be pieced together through understanding the occurrences in the fanfiction derived from *Goncharov* (1973) as a source text. Once a representation of the main storyline for *Goncharov* (1973) has been pieced together, I will argue that the construction of Katya as a female character is reliant on fandom's experience of how female characters are typically represented in mainstream media. In other words, I will show to what extent the canonical representation of Katya as can be reconstructed from canon-compliant fanfiction refers back to audience ideas on how this 'should' be done based on popular depictions of female characters, such as the lack of development of Katya's personality and her reliance on the male characters in her life.

While canon-compliant *Goncharov* (1973) fanfiction does expand upon occurrences in the main storyline which were not seen but are assumed to have happened, the intention is still that they serve as complementary puzzle pieces to expand upon that narrative. These expansions cannot be done carelessly. Katarzyna Matlas states that "in canon-compliant fanfiction, any additions to the plot must be implemented convincingly to ensure the reader understands how they improve upon the original" (Matlas 43). Canon-compliant fanfiction written for *Goncharov* (1973) thus offers access to the fandom interpretation of the *Goncharov* world in a way that other types of fanfiction, such as the alternate universe fic, do not. This is relevant because it speaks to how writers of canon-compliant fanfiction must strive to keep the occurrences of the original source text intact, even as they make alterations for the purpose of their interpretations.

Through considering canon-compliant fanfiction in this chapter, I will specifically focus on how female characters are depicted to illustrate how the depictions of these characters align with discourse on how female characters are treated in mainstream media and by fans. I chose Katya for this analysis because of her role as the sole significant female character in the fictive *Goncharov* universe. Approaching Katya as a representation of female characters in wider media culture, serves as an indication of how fannish debates interrelate with real-world issues, while simultaneously illustrating how fandom members think about

these issues and integrate them into their practices when reworking these ideas into a more artistic representation. This also reflects the self-referential aspect of meta-fanfiction. After all, the fandom theoretically has full control over the depictions they allow, yet the fandom members remain constrained by their ideas of accurate representation. Katya's prominence as a female love interest to the title character in the canonical representation makes her portrayal particularly interesting for analysis, because of the fandom interest in the subtextual homoromantic/homoerotic relationship between Goncharov and the prominent male character Andrey. The tension between canon depictions and the interpretations made by the fans written into the canon-compliant fanfiction is particularly striking considering that, in the case of Goncharov (1973), it was the same group who developed both canon and fanon. While the contributors to Goncharov could have chosen to align the competing visions, the deliberate choice was made collectively to forgo this.

Although the argument can be made that the Goncharov fandom is drawing upon the movie poster made by user beelzebub for inspiration in their additions to the Goncharov narrative, which would thus categorise Goncharov as fanfiction in a traditional sense because the image could be considered a textual source in a loose sense of the word. However, this does not account for all the liberties which were taken in how the fandom crafted Goncharov during the height of fandom activity for this tag. The poster, which was informed by the shoe label, did establish the inclusion of certain actors and roles within the film, but the poster cannot be said to be a constraining force on how the underlying relationships between the characters came to be developed, or even on how the story progressed. Through their creativity, the fandom members for Goncharov (1973) independently chose and elaborated on the roles each character depicted on the poster would receive in the movie. That Katya was sidelined in the way that she is said to have been in the canonical universe was deliberate. That the fandom favoured expanding upon Katya's thoughts and actions through non-canonical means, such as fanfiction, is also a result of the fandom's intention to construct Katya in this way.

Katya's characterisation remains ambivalent as a result of the diversity in contributors to the storyline, although it is almost unanimously agreed upon that Katya either dies in the conclusion of the film or is faking her death in an attempt to escape the life she has known. On Tumblr, certain portrayals of Katya remain dominant. In fanart for the movie, for example, Katya is often depicted wearing white, often with an air of melancholia, and she is often framed as being a doomed character whose time is running out, following the central themes of Goncharov (1973). The fandom has also taken a keen interest in Katya, which is

evident in the amount of non-canonical works written for her. On Archive of Our Own, more works of fanfiction have been written for Katya than any other character in the Goncharov universe, with the Katya (Goncharov (1973)) tag having 366 works as of the end of April 2025, surpassing the number of those works written for the title character at this time. From this, it is evident that the fandom has taken an interest in this character.

4.2 Fandom Self-Referentiality through Portrayals of Female Characters in Goncharov

Katya Goncharov is more abstract than how female characters are typically represented in existing films. Seeing as the film in which the character was introduced, *Goncharov (1973)* would never come to fruition beyond the material on Tumblr which was developed by the related fandom. *Goncharov (1973)* does not exist as a movie that was released; the character storylines and plot were never actually portrayed. However, this did not stop the fans participating in fandom from copying the habitual patterns of behaviour of Tumblr fan discourse to create a solid representation of fandom practices (Lantagne 29). What this means in this case is that the Tumblr habit of seeing underdeveloped female characters and developing them through fanfiction is reintegrated into how Katya is depicted in *Goncharov (1973)*. *Goncharov* exists as a patchwork of collective effort, imagination and collaboration, deriving its validity in the personal interpretation of all who participated. As such, no one specific person can claim to truly know the story behind the characters, such as Katya or *Goncharov* (Lantagne 29). However, the users of Tumblr do not need a “true” version of the events of *Goncharov*, considering their familiarity with the customary ways in which fandom debates surrounding objects of fandom interest habitually occur (Lantagne 29). This statement supports the assertion that *Goncharov* was not constructed based on a source text and is instead a product derived from perceptions of what is typical in the Tumblr fandom silo.

Despite the precarious nature of how Katya came to be constructed, she still retains her status as a female character and must therefore be considered in relation to the typical discourse surrounding audience understandings of female characters. Through citing their predecessors, fandom scholar Neta Yodovich, notes that fans often use fannish settings to express their political or social views (115). Fan discourse surrounding fictional characters thus possesses the quality of potentially being politically charged, with characters functioning as fictional representations of current debates. According to Yodovich, “through the ways in which women characters are written, portrayed, and received by the general audience,

feminist female fans learn about their own position in the fan community” (118). How female characters are represented and received says something about how an audience may expect these characters to be treated. Representation matters, and representation is not constructed arbitrarily. Just as the fandom representations of the (romantic) relationship between Goncharov and Andrey may reveal something about how fandom is accustomed to seeing queer representation on screen, so too does the fandom portrayal of Katya reveal something about how fandom understands female characters.

As has been previously noted, Tumblr has been marked as a fannish space which can be described as having a sociality in which the users operate within silos relevant to their interests. Tiidenberg et al. note that social justice and activism are of significant importance in many Tumblr silos (129). This is not to be confused with the presence of a single silo in which Tumblr users dedicate themselves to social justice. Instead, “social justice underpins tumblr’s [sic] shared sensibility, thus leading to most silos being explicitly concerned with social justice” (Tiidenberg et al. 129). Relevant issues that social justice on Tumblr frequently concerns itself with are those related to feminism, as well as racism, sexual diversity, gender diversity, ableism, and intersectionality (Tiidenberg et al. 130). Focusing on the case of feminism in media, the two main issues that researchers often extensively zoom in on when analysing the portrayal of social groups in entertainment media are the recognition that the related group receives, and the respect that is afforded to the members of the relevant social group (Ward and Grower 179). Recognition “addresses the quantity of representation and, in terms of gender, has often focused on underrepresentation of girls and women” (Ward and Grower 179), while respect addresses “whether persons of each gender are presented in a way that reflects their complexity and humanity, or whether portrayals are reduced to one dimensional stereotypes” (Ward and Grower 179). Yodovich states that the choice to focus on representation “is motivated by the idea that through unpacking whose stories are told, by whom, and from what standpoint, we can reveal and challenge the power imbalance in society, which permeates into our cultural worlds” (116).

It is beyond the scope of this research to fully articulate the complexities in the historical portrayal of female characters, but it has been noted that sexist content is notable in entertainment media, for example with regards to how women are often sexualised or are shown to be either verbally or physically dominated by men (Sink and Mastro 8). According to Warner and Grower, in comparison to men, female characters often get the short end of the stick in their portrayals, with women being defined based on their physical appearance or primarily in the context of their (romantic) relationships (179). This paves the way for

women being portrayed with limited personality traits and a lack of range in the roles they inhabit in mainstream entertainment media (Ward and Grower 179).

By delving into Katya not just as a female character, but as a cultural embodiment of Tumblr fandom culture, I will explore how this culture derives significance from the dominant culture of entertainment media portrayals. The focus on how female characters are constructed in media and then reconstructed fans is relevant because it subtly indicates what audience members deem necessary inclusions and exclusions in the representation of female characters to make them believable. Representation does not exist in a vacuum, but instead reflects real-world discourses. If the only way a female character, in this case Katya Goncharov, can be realistically rendered is through marginalisation, then that says something about how fandom members on Tumblr view the representation at play in mainstream media.

In this case, multiple works of fanfiction derived from Goncharov (1973) will be examined to understand how the character Katya Goncharov is constructed and how she fits within the discourse on how female characters are treated in media texts and by fans. As of the end of April 2025, there were 671 works available under the “Goncharov (1973) dir. Martin Scorsese - beelzeebub” tag on Archive of Our Own (AO3), a fan-made and fan-run repository used for housing works of fanfiction. This repository was used to locate fanfiction written for Goncharov. Works under the related tag were then filtered using the available filter system to allow only those works which are tagged as “canon-compliant” and which include the character Katya Goncharov to some significant extent. The filter was also set to exclude those works which were written as a “missing scene” to the film. This was done to ensure that, in a theoretical sense, the scene expanded upon in the fanfiction could realistically be considered one which appears in the “canonical” universe of Goncharov (1973) as conceived by the fanfiction writer. Once this process was completed, 48 results were available, which were then manually sorted through so that those works which functioned specifically as a character study of Katya could be selected. The three most relevant works of fanfiction were ultimately chosen to be analysed. The three works of fanfiction which were qualitatively analysed were presented as point of view (POV) rewrites, switching the focalising character from Goncharov to Katya in prominent scenes in Goncharov (1973) and elaborating on her thoughts during these key occurrences.

Interestingly, all three works refer to a clock or watch in some way, framing Katya’s thoughts against the central theme of Goncharov of tragedy once time has run out, this being a theme which plagues the title character for the entire duration of the film. By switching the POV of the narrating character, it is truly emphasised how Katya is assumed to be sidelined

in her canonical representation, either deliberately or not. Two of the works to be analysed here have Katya represented in more passive settings, while the remaining work shows Katya in more agentive positions.

4.3 Analysis

In the fanfiction titled *A Moment in Time* by writer unconventionalturtle, Katya watches as Goncharov and Andrey argue. This fanfiction was written to explore how Katya views herself (unconventionalturtle). It can be understood as a self-reflexive exercise on womanhood. In this work, Katya is written as being aware of her positionality at the mercy of the men in her life, as is illustrated in the following passage:

Neither Andrey nor her husband even look at her. They are looking at each other which means she no longer exists at all. She could say something, pull their focus... Instead she lets it play out as it was meant to. The shadow of a woman in the corner of a room, bleeding in silence from the anger of men. (unconventionalturtle)

Had Goncharov (1973) existed as a film and had this scene existed therein, all the audience would have seen is Katya standing in the corner of a room as the two more prominent male characters argue in a world of their own. Katya is quite literally sidelined, instinctively knowing that her presence is of no prominence when the men are in contact with one another. While this may be equated to the homoromantic subtext often associated with Andrey and Goncharov, the following line indicates that Katya is “a shadow of a woman” (unconventionalturtle), indicating that Katya’s construction is as a diminished character, lacking influence at the hands of her male counterparts.

In the second character study in which Katya is depicted more passively, titled *Il Pomo* by skye_of_stars, biblical elements appear to frame the relationality between the characters. In *Il Pomo*, Katya is described to be peeling apples in the supposed split-second scene before the climax of the film. The act of peeling apples is equated to a senseless endeavour meant to signify a wifely act in the absence of her husband's presence. Katya herself notes that “she has so many apples to peel. There’s no reason for it. She knows there’s no reason for it. Maybe it’s something a good wife might do, in the long hours at home. Waiting for her husband” (skye_of_stars). This indicates that, according to the author of this fanfiction, a possible thought which fits with this character's thought lies in the action done to retain the image of the dutiful homemaker.

In *The Walls At Home Make Up the Right Tone* by JennyDyn Katya is given the focalising position in the scene in which she attempts, and fails, to kill her husband by shooting him. Katya is depicted as being one step ahead of her husband; she is aware of how he has been betrayed by Andrey and how he has kept this from her, stating that "Andrey and mine's [Goncharov] business is nothing you need to concern yourself with, darling" (JennyDyn). Once again, what would have been shown to the audience is the canonical layer of the narrative. Katya does indeed pull a gun on her husband in this scene. While the external/visual aspects of the scene are considered canonical, because it is canon-compliant fanfiction, the non-canonical aspect of this scene is the writer's interpretation of Katya's thoughts, namely that here Katya is written to have been considering the differences between her and her mother as she solidified her resolve to kill her husband.

In the case of canon-compliant fanfiction written derive from Goncharov (1973), it is the "canonical" aspects of the scenes which illustrate the meta aspect of Goncharov (1973), because it allows someone outside the fandom to understand what the canon looks like and how the canon relates to fandom expectations. Canon-compliant fanfiction for Goncharov (1973) operates on numerous layers. Canon scenes (according to the individual fandom members writing these works) are those which are shown in the movies. When it comes to the preceding works, it is Katya peeling an apple, standing in the shadows, or holding up a gun that is considered canonical for the sake of writing fanfiction based on these scenes. It is in the "canonical" depictions of Katya and the situations in which she finds herself that the self-referential aspects of Goncharov, necessary for it to be categorised as meta-fanfiction, can be found. While the character studies expand on Katya's inner world, the fact that she is continuously dismissed by her husband and the other prominent male character signals a pattern in the treatment Katya supposedly would receive in a hypothetical canon as decided by the fandom. Constructing a character, specifically a female character, in such a way that the fandom retellings supersede the canonical depictions in depth and attention to detail showcases the fandom's habit of having to create more accurate depictions of female characters through their own efforts.

When given full control of the narrative, and thus full control over how the female character will be depicted, the fandom still chooses to have Katya relationally dependent on the male lead in her characterisation. It is in the canon-compliant fanfiction that the injustice Katya faces at the hands of the men around her is explored more liberally and her feelings on these matters are elaborated on. There are certain depictions of female characters that fandom members are used to seeing in entertainment media. It was within the space of writing

fanfiction that the fandom members more comprehensively elaborated on Katya's character. It has been well-documented that both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical representations of gender roles have the potential to influence the beliefs of the audience, as well as their expectations of how a gender should be represented (Taylor and Setters 36). When it comes to stories written about women, it is the case that the film industry is still shaped by the bias prevalent in gendered social hierarchical structures (Akhtar and Rasul 2).

Overall, the fact that Katya was created by the Goncharov fandom in this way in Goncharov (1973) serves the purpose of creating the ideal situation in which the fandom will have ample space to fill in the blanks in Katya's characterisation through fanfiction. This is not only to have ample flexibility in how fan interpretations of Katya can be done, seeing as this flexibility was already present in Goncharov (1973), but also to ensure viability in what the fandom looks like. The self-referentiality necessary to categorise Goncharov (1973) as an example of meta-fanfiction can thus be seen in the characterisation of Katya. The initial portrayal of Katya is based on how fandom is accustomed to seeing women portrayed in mainstream media and how fandom members typically react to these portrayals. As such, the understanding that fandom is a space in which one-dimensional female characters are elaborated on as an act of active participation is ingrained in how Goncharov (1973) was shaped. The Tumblr fandom took what they know of the treatment of women in entertainment media, that these characters are often belittled, dismissed, or shown one-dimensionally, and incorporated these attributes into the canonical representations of Katya. To stray away from the habit of underdeveloped female characters, canon-compliant character studies were written to fully develop Katya in a way that the assumes would not occur in a real-world portrayal of the character.

5. Alternate Universe Goncharov Fanart and Meta-Fanfiction

Research into fandom has circled through numerous configurations to reach a point at which fandom as a concept can continue to be expanded. With the concept of meta-fanfiction, this research aims to change the way that fanfiction and fan works more generally are conceptualised. This is to account for fandom productions that occur independently of a source text. This is beneficial because it will allow a broader understanding of how dominant images are reintegrated into fiction, thereby further denoting how audiences are influenced by mainstream images. In the case of the Goncharov case study, this is done through the assertion that self-referentiality is an integral aspect of how the story of how Goncharov (1973) came to be, as well as attention to the fact that this self-referentiality came to be as a

process of continuous exposure to certain kinds of representation. As was indicated in the introduction, the academic understanding of fan works has tended to focus on fanfiction derived from stable sources. Through attention to the innovative ways that a fandom may come to be, I argue that fandom culture, and through this audience culture as a whole, can be explored from new avenues.

It was not only media texts which the Goncharov fandom contributed that led to the development of Goncharov as a fandom artefact. To complete the façade of Goncharov being real, a fandom for Goncharov (1973) also has to be acted out. This includes people creating fanart for the “original” production. Goncharov (1973) was born of a blend of occasionally inharmonious narratives. Cohesion between the contributions of the fandom members can be located in the narrative aspects such as the characters, the setting, and some major themes which gained prominence, but beyond this, the contributions remain largely limitless. Goncharov remains a child of Tumblr, being contingent on those affordances most integral to the platform. Two of which being the high scalability of Tumblr, which refers to the “high potential for content to spread and reach various audiences” (Tiidenberg et al. 43) and the non-linear temporality of Tumblr, allowing for a distinctive temporality of Tumblr posts in which older posts may continuously be recirculated (Tiidenberg et al. 45). As noted in Tiidenberg et al. these affordances contribute to the chaotic nature of the fandom silo on Tumblr, while simultaneously ensuring that a more diverse range of fan communities can be reached (Fathallah qtd. in Tiidenberg et al. 100).

Because of the instability of Goncharov (1973), what the fandom considers to be canonical aspects of the main storyline must be grappled with both through the fandom contributions to the Goncharov storyline that is considered canon, as well as fandom creations related to Goncharov which are not meant to be considered canonical and instead belong to the Goncharov fanon. The original fandom contributions to the canon are largely brought forward as personal reflections on the source material, or as direct recreations of the canon material of Goncharov (1973).

5.1 Alternate Universe in Fanart and Goncharov

One way to explore how the Goncharov fandom views the canonical aspect of the storyline created for Goncharov is by considering the fan works in the fandom which do not assert themselves as belonging to the Goncharov (1973) storyline, and instead are written for the purpose of being fan retellings of the story. One such work is a fanart alternate universe image created by a user on Tumblr. This user posted the image along with the caption, “Au

where Goncharov and Andrey survive everything, grow old together and sit on a street all day somewhere in the south of Europe” (onemagpie). In this image, the title character, Goncharov, can be seen sitting contently with another prominent character in the story:

Goncharov’s foil as well as an antagonist in the narrative, Andrey Daddado. This fan work is a form of slash, which is a term that denotes the transformation of heteronormative content into content which includes queer themes, specifically between men, and storylines (Floegel 785).



Figure 4: Image of Goncharov AU fanart by Tumblr user onemagpie.

Within fanfiction, a broad range of genres and tropes can be located, with some being more widely used across fandom as a whole, while others pertain more exclusively to specific fandoms or specific digital platforms (Sauro 143). In the case of the fanart created by onemagpie, the subgenre of fanfiction known as the alternate universe (AU) fanfiction is particularly relevant and explicitly mentioned, which denotes fanfiction in which “one or more major components of the source material are changed” (Sauro 143). This may refer to altering the setting of the work, for example having the characters of Goncharov participating in the Hunger Games, or issuing substantial changes to the characters within a story themselves, for example changing their race or ethnicity, or portraying these characters as having a different gender identity than in the source text (Sauro 143). The concept of a fan AU retelling is contingent on there being an explicit deviation from the reality in which the canonical story is set. In the case of the art image created by Tumblr user onemagpie, the deviation lies in the title character Goncharov and another character, Andrey, growing old together and explicitly getting to share a romantic connection. The fandom portrayal of the relationship between Goncharov and Andrey is one marked with subtextual attraction and ultimately ends in loss and betrayal. It is often stated by the Tumblr users creating the story that the movie is full of queer subtext surrounding this pairing, but this is never canonically realised. This means that the queer aspect of Goncharov is said by the fandom responsible for its creation to not be further explored in the plotline for Goncharov (1973) beyond subtext.

There is much interest in the exploration of homosexual relationships within the Goncharov (1973) universe, as can be seen in the amount of fanfiction written for queer pairings from the story. This alternate universe fanfiction is distinct from the canonical base storyline created by the fandom. Within the canonical storyline for Goncharov (1973), the queer relationships are understood by the fandom as being purely subtextual. It is only

external to that canonical foundation that these queer interpretations are realised. This can be visualised utilising a similar figure as in the previous chapter:

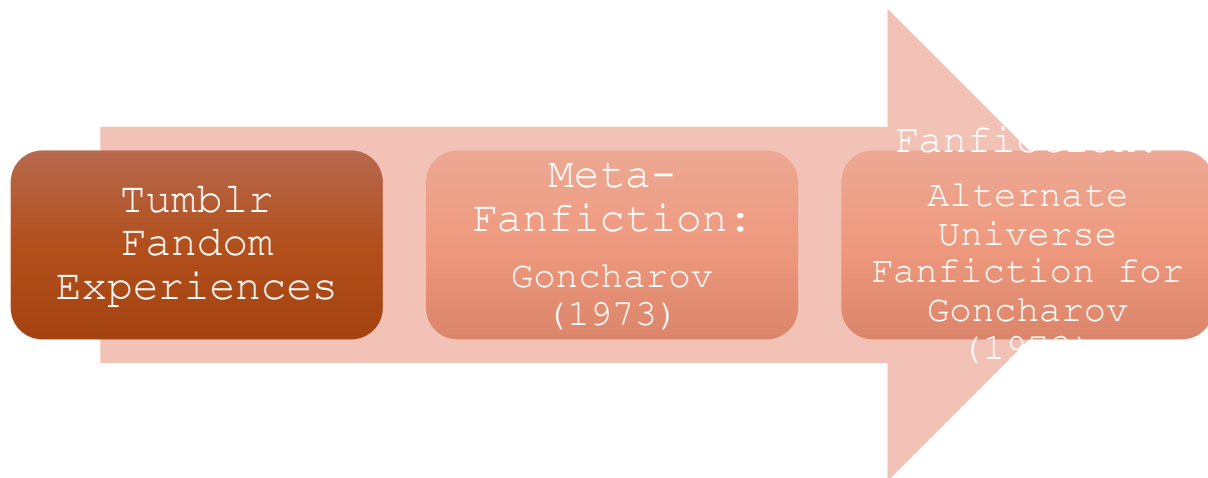


Figure 5: Process of material integration into alternate universe Goncharov fanfiction.

As of the 10th of April 2025, of the 712 works of fanfiction written for Goncharov (1973) on Archive of Our Own, 235 are for the pairing of Andrey/Goncharov, while 73 are for Katya/Sofia, with these being the two most popular pairings within the “Goncharov (1973) dir. Martin Scorsese - beelzeebub” tag. Fanfiction for Goncharov (1973) thus follows the typical patterns of fandom prioritising queer depictions. However, the Goncharov fandom is distinct from the typical fandom because they do not have to adhere to the choices made by the copyright holders of a source text, seeing as the story remains a collective enterprise. The demographic writing fanfiction for Goncharov and those who created the canonical narrative remain one in the same. If it is queer representation that was desired by the fandom, why was this not included in the canonical text of Goncharov (1973)?

5.2 Fandom Self-Referentiality through Queer Subtext in Goncharov

Queer representation in media has its roots in negative portrayals of queer individuals. The relationship between representation and economic gain remains relevant. In their essay written to analyse the portrayal of queer relationships in media during the last decade before the turn of the century, Rosemary Hennessy, a Professor of English, attempted to illustrate that the commodification of queer representation plays an integral role in the level of visibility of sexual identity (31). Hennessy argued at the time that the visibility of queerness was done to create lucrative markets (32). Hennessy went on to state that “visibility in commodity culture is in this sense a limited victory for gays who are welcome to be visible as

consumer subjects but not as social subjects” (32). What this entails is that the observed increase in queer images in marketing nearing the turn of the century was indicative of a growing interest in the appropriation of homosexual imagery for mainstream audiences with monetary purposes in mind rather than genuine appreciation or acceptance of queerness (Clark qtd. in Hennessy 32). As Hennessy puts it, “...money, not liberation, is the bottom line” (32). In other words, early instances of the adoption of queer visibility were thus marked with capitalistic notions of monetary gain rather than respect for the identities and communities involved. These notions are still prevalent in more contemporary ideas surrounding queer representation, such as issues of queerbaiting in entertainment media.

Queerbaiting is a term often noted as having negative connotations (Fathallah 491; Woods and Hardman 586; McInroy 632; McDermott 844, Brennan 189), while still being a term in flux depending on how exactly queer visibility takes shape in media. Brennan describes queerbaiting as “a fan-conceived term that describes a tactic whereby media producers suggest homoerotic subtext between characters in popular television that is never intended to be actualised on screen” (189). Michael McDermott, a researcher affiliated with the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, refers to queerbaiting as “the perceived intentional practice of ‘baiting’ audiences with the promise of queer representation, through marketing, or subtextual hints and gestures, but ultimately failing to meet expectations” (844). In this definition, the focus lies on the actions which occur within the work of entertainment media itself, or on the information given from the producers to the consumers of the product outside of the textual canon, such as in interviews.

Queerbaiting remains a subjective experience (Woods and Hardman 585), with the line between what is considered queerbaiting, homosexual subtext, or simply fan interpretation remaining blurred. However, fan judgement on the quality of homosexual representation is not monitored purely through subjective appeal, instead, fans rely on comparisons between media which is circulating or have circulated, as well as an understanding of the social climate surrounding acceptance. McDermott states that when fans approach and engage with issues of queerbaiting, they utilise “representational politics by drawing on a history of queer images on screen and evaluating contemporary media contexts of queer representation, taking into account both cultural and economic restrictions and incentives” (845). Historical and political configurations thus strongly influence how fans determine what constitutes positive representation and what constitutes queerbaiting. (McDermott 845). Though depictions of non-cisgender and non-heteronormative identities are increasingly gaining more prominence in entertainment media, these depictions still leave

to be desired. Earlier queer characters were often depicted negatively (McInroy et al. 631) and while stereotypical representations have made room for a range of characterisation beyond explicitly negative stereotyping, shows and films created primarily with profit in mind still often adhere to depictions of LGBTQ+ characters lacking in nuance and reinforcing more subdued stereotypes (GLAAD qtd. in McInroy et al. 631).

As previous research has illustrated, audiences and especially queer audiences, have a long history in being treated unfairly with regards to canonical and subtextual representations of non-heteronormative relationships. A majority of the romantic and sexual relationships depicted remain in line with hegemonic structures, privileging that which is in accordance with the dominant heteronormative status quo. This is where fandom has been particularly valuable. Fandom comes in as an exploratory and expansive site. Fandom provides a location in which non-canonical romantic relationships between characters can be explored, this includes queer relationships which may have not been present in canon (Church 214). This is further exacerbated by the rise of social media for fannish purposes, considering fans can contemporarily navigate their fandom interests on a bigger scale through platforms such as Twitter or Tumblr (Church 215) in comparison to the early fandom days of fanzines, during which fandom material was more limited and less widely circulated. Tumblr has been especially notable in this regard. Building upon their predecessors, Tiidenberg et al. note that "...tumblr's [sic] platform sensibility has created a fandom culture that centres diversity and uses fan activism and call-out culture to argue for more and better representation of queer people and people of color..." (101).

In other words, within the silo of queer fandom on Tumblr, issues of audiences having to contend with harmful or lacklustre homosexual representation in media are uniquely present. According to Tiidenberg et al., the sensibility opted by the users of Tumblr, which also makes up a part of Tumblr sociality, is the orientation toward social justice (50). Tiidenberg et al. describe Tumblr as a site on which the users practice "curatorial activism", a term coined by Maura Reilly to denote curatorial endeavours done to purposefully promote marginal positions through highlighting lesser-known stories to "encourage strategies of resistance" and de-centre institutionalised racism, sexism, and homophobia (22). Participating in the queering of existent entertainment media is one way in which queer fans have been able to carve out spaces for themselves to experience queer relationships as they see fit. Diana Floegel states that people who participate in the creation of slash fanfiction "do not form a monolithic queer 'community'; instead, they construct multiple communities relevant to their identities, interests, and the contexts in which they create" (795).

Participants operating in the silo of queer fandom can collaborate with and connect with material and other authors who share their interests in slash content. However, in the case of Goncharov, the members of this silo are going one step further and are integrating that which they are accustomed to into the canonical layer of their depictions, effectively creating a direct reference to the contemporary landscape of dissatisfaction surrounding queer representation. The “canonical” Goncharov (1973) text is intended, above all, to remain realistic, meaning that a queer canonical storyline cannot be realised due to fan understanding of how queer storylines have largely been portrayed in the last few decades. Besides this, Goncharov must also be considered in relation to the Tumblr user experience and how Tumblr fandom members view mainstream media. The prevalence of this idea can be viewed in how Tumblr user *turntaxesgayer* posted “Goncharov was special because not only did we establish canon, we created a whole fanon gay interpretation and proceeded [sic] to ignore the (not even real) original in favour of it. And that’s [sic] what tumblr [sic] is all about”. What is necessary to keep Goncharov (1973) realistic relies not only on following the script of 1970s Hollywood, but also making sure Goncharov relates to the contemporary queer fandom silo practice of latching onto and expanding upon lacklustre queer representation to address gaps in media or levy critique. Through creating a subtextual queer canon within the subsilo in which the Goncharov fandom operates for explicit deviation, the members of the fandom are contributing to the acknowledgement of the second-rate position queer people are still allotted in many contexts. Queer love may be visible, but only in certain ways. Far from subservience, this practice by Tumblr users contributes to the understanding of how minority audiences position themselves vis-à-vis broadcast content.

5.3 Analysis

Fandom has been characterised as being “subversive on a societal level, changing gender and relation norms and existing power structures” (Larsen qtd. in Church 214). Fandom thus celebrates more freedom than mainstream media and may express this more liberally when creating fan works with textual deviation from the source text. An example of the use of Tumblr to explore queer fandom themes is that of the creation of Goncharov (1973) and fanart derived from Goncharov (1973) as an “established” movie. In the chosen image, Goncharov and Andrey are seen engaging in conversation on a sunny day, resting somewhere in Southern Europe. From this fanart, a desire for a happy relationship between Goncharov and Andrey can be identified. The watch situated on Goncharov’s left wrist is particularly striking in this image. The watch is situated almost centrally to the entire image, with a slight

glint being reflected. One of the most prominent themes within Goncharov (1973), as indicated by fandom interpretations, is that of the clock tower symbolism. In the movie, the passage of time casts a shadow over the characters, the clock tower an indication of the upcoming deaths of the main characters in Goncharov (1973). By including the clock in a more subdued way, the artist responsible for this work is expanding upon the themes prevalent in the canonical source text through their AU representation of the relationship between Goncharov and Andrey, though still subverting the expectations that the fandom members have come to associate with the clock tower. Goncharov is consistently portrayed as a character plagued with the moment when he will run out of time. In the moment of positive queer representation is embedded within the image, Goncharov never ran out of time as his canonical counterpart did, instead, Goncharov and Andrey were able to live out their romantic inclinations towards each other in a way that historically most queer pairings in television or films have not been allowed.

It is the subtle distinction between pertaining to canon and existing outside canon which is particularly relevant when considering works created for the Goncharov tag on Tumblr. Fan work additions not intended to belong to the Goncharov (1973) canon are often explicitly marked as such. A distinction must be made between the treatment that the homosexual relationship between Goncharov and Andrey receives within the storyline as envisioned in the canonical text, so Goncharov (1973), and the AU depicted by onemagpie, which exists as an alteration to Goncharov (1973) and is not considered to be canonical by the fandom. Unlike the case with most fandoms, both canon and fanon exist within the same Tumblr (sub)silo of the Goncharov fandom. Within the AU image brought forward by Tumblr user onemagpie, the relationship between Goncharov and Andrey is given a different configuration than the treatment it would have received had the user been creating something to add on to the storyline of Goncharov (1973). This is because the queer representation which exists in fanon receives more liberty than that which is often the case in more canonical depictions. In the case of Goncharov (1973), the distinction between canonical additions and fanfiction derived from these is recognisable through how the work is presented. For textual canonical additions, and thus meta-textual additions, the text is often presented as being an individual's thoughts on certain occurrences in the movie, with these thoughts either being preceded or followed by descriptions of the scenes in question with differing levels of detail.

To reiterate the question posed earlier, if it is the case that Goncharov originated in the liberal landscape of queer fandom on Tumblr, why is the case that the contributors to the

narrative agree upon a subtextual depiction of homosexual themes? I argue that this is because the fandom must adhere to their understanding of what queer representation is like. The fact that a distinction has to be made between the “happy ending” of the AU and the canonical tragic outcome for the characters lies in the fact that, realistically, non-heteronormative fandom members have often not received positive representation.

An interest in queer subjects and the progressiveness when it comes to depictions of marginalised groups is at the heart of Tumblr fandom interests. Moving past the last decade and into the last few years of the 21st century, there has been more room for more explicit depictions of on-screen queerness, queer characters are often still “punished within the narrative for their transgression via death, suicide, loneliness, and/or misery” (Bridges 116). With this being the case, the Goncharov fandom took inspiration from how queer fandom has historically worked hard in order to create the representation that they want to see in the world. That the Goncharov fandom practices follow this typical pattern of canon being more conservative and less open to homosexuality than the fanon interpretation illustrates that Goncharov (1973) is contingent on fandom culture and strengthens the argument of Goncharov (1973) as fanfiction of fandom, and thus Goncharov (1973) as meta-fanfiction of queer Tumblr fandom experiences distinct from fanfiction from a source text.

The fanart that was created derived from the storyline of Goncharov (1973) follows the common pattern of fan works, insofar as it is based on an established source text, which is then expanded and transformed for the artistic, social, cultural, or political purpose of the creator. The fact that there is something integral to the Goncharov (1973) storyline to be treated this way speaks to the distinction between the two forms of fan works to be located here; the work by onemagpie is fanart in a traditional sense considering it draws upon Goncharov (1973) as its stable source text, while Goncharov (1973) is meta-fanfiction, which has been previously described as fanfiction which draws its foundation from fandom practices that are then reintegrated and expressed through fan-made narrative forms. Goncharov finds its cohesion and operates distinctly from how typical works of fanfiction, or the fanart by onemagpie, operate. The self-referential layer of Goncharov is that the fandom responsible for the narrative continuously refers back to historically marked fandom behaviours and experiences which characterise the queer fandom silo. The participants of the queer fandom silo are accustomed to queer representation either remaining subtextual, or the queer representation being a form of queerbaiting to draw in queer audiences without alienating the cis/heteronormative audience demographic. As a result of this, fandom

members must then reconfigure subtextual queer representation and make it explicitly tangible through non-canonical creations, as is the case with fanart created by onemagpie.

In this case, the self-referentiality present in the Goncharov fandom to make Goncharov (1973) qualify as meta-fanfiction, which reintegrates these fandom practices into a form of folklore, lies in the use of subtextual homosexual clues. Whether this is queerbaiting or simply subtext remains up to the sensitivities of each fandom member, yet it is still worth acknowledging that this practice lays in the historical context of negative depictions of queer characters and the continuous attempt at drawing in queer fans for monetary profit through “empty promises”.

In this chapter, I have argued that the Goncharov fandom writing and interpreting the relationship between Goncharov and Andrey as subtextually queer yet expanding on this reading and making the homosexual subtext explicit in the main text of fan works derived from Goncharov (1973) is a result of fans following habitual patterns of reinterpretation of mainstream media in fandom. Alternate universe fanart made by Tumblr user onemagpie was used to confirm that the main storyline of Goncharov (1973) does not feature homosexual main text, as well as to illustrate the wishes of the queer fandom silo for the characters. That which is integral to the fandom experience is replicated in an attempt to fortify the illusion that the Goncharov (1973) fandom is congregating around an existing film and sharing their thoughts on Tumblr. What follows from this is that contextual cues as to what needs to be present for a fandom to be reminiscent of how queer fandom typically operate on Tumblr are adhered to. In order to imitate the practices of the silo for queer fandom, the fandom responsible for creating Goncharov (1973) must not break away from the tradition of lack of explicit canonical visibility of queer identities, even when having the power to do so.

6. Conclusion

By analysing the relationship between how marginalised character groups are depicted in Goncharov in relation to the contemporary landscape of representation of the groups in question, this thesis has shown that self-referentiality can be used as a foundational resource from which fanfiction may be crafted. The resulting fanfiction has been termed meta-fanfiction and is particularly apt for the purpose of illustrating audience experience of the depictions of marginalised characters, in this case female characters and queer characters. How Goncharov (1973) was created differs from how the canon-compliant and alternate universe fanfiction was created, because these two forms of fanfiction did have a source text,

namely Goncharov (1973). Goncharov (1973) was a valuable case study because of the lack of ownership of the creation, yet the humour in the joking assertion that the movie had been created. This situated Goncharov (1973) in such a way that the exploration of recurring themes seemed a valuable resource into content creation. The Goncharov meme challenges the academic understanding of fanfiction, which shows how narratives can emerge from more abstract sources, such as collective experience, rather than a concrete source text. By introducing the concept of “meta-fanfiction”, this research will more concretely conceptualise the phenomenon occurring with Goncharov (1973) in which meta-references on participatory behaviours are transformed into a fandom narrative and thus illustrating the evolving and reflexive nature of fanfiction and how audience members relate to mainstream media.

The choice for alternate universe and canon-compliant fan works made for Goncharov (1973) was done for the purpose of piecing together the main storyline as accurately as possible, despite the multiplicity in participant accounts. While the focus on female characters and queer characters specifically limits the generalisability of the results, this approach provides new insight into how fanfiction evolves as a consequence of audience relations to entertainment media changing and the technology by which these changes are processed evolving. Taking how Goncharov (1973) was created as an example, it has been indicated that fanfiction can come about through greater levels of abstraction than is typically indicated in cases where fanfiction has been academically discussed.

Through this thesis, I have situated the Goncharov meme within the social and cultural context in which it was created. What started out as a misprinted shoe label on a pair of knock-off boots led to creative participation in which a fandom came together using the social media platform Tumblr to collectively tell a story. Despite the multiplicity in accounts of how the story progressed, the fandom was able to somewhat consistently hold on to central key characteristics of the storyline, two of which being the position of Katya as a marginal female character and the queer subtextual relationship between the title character Goncharov and Andrey. I have argued that the prominence of these themes is not coincidental or merely reflective of Hollywood themes in the supposed year in which Goncharov was released and instead also reflect audience awareness of how mainstream depictions of female characters and queer characters is lacking. Through Goncharov, audience sensitivity to recurring images is made evident through the narrative aspects which were included in the canon. The experiences that are considered to be integral to fandom experience, such as queer subtext and underdeveloped female characters, is replicated in Goncharov (1973) in an attempt to fortify the illusion that the Goncharov (1973) fandom is congregating around an existing film.

The reintegration of these images into Goncharov speaks to the persistence of fandom expectations on featured images of queer love and female agency.

One key limitation of this research is the lack of comparison between similar instances of internet-dependent bouts of collective creativity for the purpose of creating a narrative. Other examples of crowd-sourced media to be potentially looked into in a similar vein is *Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical*, which was originally developed on TikTok. This musical is a fan-made expansion on the original Disney movie, with different creators on TikTok coming together to create tributes to the characters and the original story. While Goncharov (1973) and the related fandom are a prominent case study for exploring the relationship between mainstream depictions of certain groups and audience expectations, the research focus of the current analysis remains confined to the sociality of Tumblr, though it would be possible to explore collective creations beyond this. This research did touch upon the fact that Tumblr's silosociality is also influenced by the affordances of the platform, as this was not a main focus of the research. To better understand the implications of the results of this research, future studies could address how (social media) platform affordances make it so that meta-fictional works can be created, either successfully or unsuccessfully, through potentially comparative research into similar works.

Research into fandom and fan works has had different focus throughout the years. As a continuation to previous research, how fan works, specifically fanfiction, can be conceptualised can continue to be expanded. This research aimed to broaden understanding of how self-referential artistic products in fandom function in relation to the reality they are departing from through considering how Goncharov (1973) as fanfiction relates to audience engagement with mainstream entertainment media. The Goncharov fandom on Tumblr illustrates the processes by which audiences reintegrate portrayals of representation as a form of critical engagement. The main argument underlying this research is that, through changes in audience engagement with media, the current academic understanding of fanfiction falls short of fully encompassing the multitude of ways in which fanfiction is created. In order to illustrate this, the term meta-fanfiction was introduced and applied to the relevant case study. With meta-fanfiction, the emphasis is not on what was transformed from a source text, as in traditional fanfiction, but on what is retained from the abstract source which informed the creation of the narrative.

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