

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

K-POP FANFICTION AS A LITERARY GENRE: A DYNAMIC
CONFIGURATION OF HISTORY, CULTURE AND ACTION

by
RANA MAHMOUD BAGHDADI

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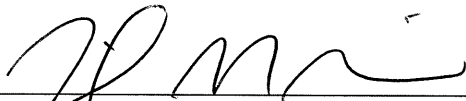
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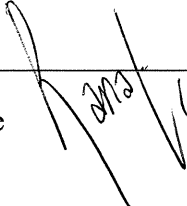
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rana Mahmoud Baghdadi for Master of Arts
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Title: K-Pop Fanfiction as a Literary Genre: A Dynamic Configuration of History, Culture and Action

This project investigates how to read K-Pop fanfiction texts as an example of a literary genre that emerges out of, and operates within, the contexts of history, culture, and action (fandom practice). Accordingly, I attempt to place K-pop fanfiction within the literary tradition and establish it as a legitimate literary genre. This project identifies an emerging participatory literary and artistic culture and a new form of readership and literary production that is crossing geographical and cultural borders as well as erasing language restraints.

I will set out to describe a genre of writing that is gaining momentum and inviting readers from different parts of the world. I aim to identify an emerging literary genre and raise important questions on (literary) genre theory and rhetorical theories of genre and show, in the case of K-Pop fanfiction, that it can be defined by the interrelations between writers, readers, texts, as well as contexts. I then take up a textual analysis of K-Pop fanfiction as a literary text and identify elements that define and distinguish the genre while discussing the strong appeal of slash among women readers. I also discuss how national and cultural norms shape the practices of the South Korean K-fandom and their engagement with their idols and how international (Arab and Lebanese) K-fans remix these cultural norms to establish their own relationship to K-Pop idols through fandom practice, including fanfiction reading and writing. K-Pop, like fanfiction, is continuously gaining momentum and attracting scholarly interest. The increasing growth of the *Hallyu* wave and its spread to many parts of the world, including the Arab region and Lebanon, highlights the relevance of this project to undertake the investigation of growing and emerging fan communities around the world with similar interactive and assimilative attitudes in interpreting, appropriating, and reconstructing forms of entertainment.

I hope that the analysis presented in this thesis regarding global fan communities in general, and K-pop fan communities in particular, will be a valuable contribution to the available literature on the globalization of popular culture.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Technological changes during the last two decades and a half have transformed fandom as we know it today. The introduction of the Internet in the 1990's drastically changed fan communities, as well as their artistic practices, from low-profile, zine-circulating, undiversified fandoms of the 1960's, 70's, and 80's (with "Trekkies," or *Star Trek* fans, reigning supreme) to countless new and diversified fandoms continuously creating and sharing content about their favourite shows, movies, characters, or idols, online. The internet helped resolve the problems caused by the oversaturation of fanzines, or zines, i.e., non-professional publications produced by amateur fans for a niche-market form of entertainment, by introducing technologies such as "messageboards" and "mailinglists" on platforms like Usenet that helped create, share, and organize fan content in groups online. According to Francesca Coppa, "Formerly, most fans had been mentored by older fans or had attended a convention in order to meet others who shared their particular obsession. Now people could just google their favourite show, join the available lists, or start reading fiction – even erotic fiction—on a public online archive" ("A Brief History of Media Fandom" 2006). The Internet also made possible the creation of archives for one of the most prominent artistic fandom creations, fanfiction, which is the center of my study.

According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, the term "fan fiction" appeared in print as early as 1939 and was associated with amateurish science fiction works. Defined and popularized by media fandoms like *Star Trek* in the 1960's,

fanfiction, in its more diversified form, proliferated with the creation of the non-profit site FanFiction.net in 1998, which allowed devoted individuals from any fandom to upload content online. This online platform quickly rose to popularity and made way for the publication of fanfictions, or fanfics, like E. L. James' highly successful *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which was initially written as a fanfiction for the popular vampire trilogy *Twilight*.

There is no single definition of fanfiction or fanfic, as it can be defined in many ways. Therefore, I will use my own definition of this literary genre and cultural phenomenon: Fanfiction is any work that embellishes, changes or rewrites a work by another author (usually a published author, but may also include works of film and TV entertainment forms) with new characters, storylines, alternative endings or beginnings, as well as alternative sets of ideals, morals or sexual politics. A more authoritative definition can be provided by Francesca Coppa who narrowly defines it in her new book, *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales for the Digital Age*, as “creative material featuring characters [from] works whose copyright is held by others” (6). Coppa's definition, however, does not consider works written about real individuals. For K-Pop fanfiction, there is no copyright issue as far as the “characters” are concerned.

While much has been said and discussed about fanfiction written by fandoms of TV series, movies, and novels, there is yet to be any scholarly work on what is known as K-Pop fanfiction, which is a genre of fanfiction that does not revolve around fictional characters, but around real individuals, K-Pop or Korean Pop music performers or idols, as they are called. Here I would like to note that fanfiction about celebrities, performing artists or even actors, does exist on fanfiction platforms, but I choose to focus on K-Pop fanfiction as a fascinating case of fandom practice and dynamics

culminating in an international and transnational phenomenon to be reckoned with. This online (pan)English language presence is worth studying insofar as it is creating exciting modes of literacy and crossing cultural and linguistic borders. It is worth mentioning that fanfiction on female idols does exist and is also very popular. However, male centered K-Pop fanfics constitute a much more widely read variant of the genre. Thus, I choose to concentrate on fanfiction written about male idols for the purpose of focusing my research, and focusing on the social, behavioral, and political elements that are at play between fan texts, readers, writers, and the main artefact of the text, the male K-Pop idol. My investigation is also facilitated by my choice to focus on one strand of this literary and pop culture phenomenon which is the genre of *slash* (homoerotic fanfiction) or *smut*, which takes the male idol as its central artefact, born out of a hermeneutic of intimacy and fan desire that shapes the perception of the idol as an appropriable field.

My first encounter with K-Pop was back in March of 2016 when I stumbled upon a comedy sketch by a Korean American comedian who humorously expressed his frustration because of his inability to sing along to K-Pop songs in public because of words like “naega” and “niga” (Romanized) which sound like racial slurs but in Korean actually mean “you” and “me” respectively. The sketch then showed a few seconds from a number of what I then didn’t know were popular K-Pop music videos. I remember I was absolutely fascinated by the larger-than-life cinematography and the unique styling featured in the videos. What also impressed me was the highly complex choreography performed by the members in perfect synchrony, something I did not observe in Arabic and Western music genres. This was followed by watching interviews and observing how differently Korean idols seemed to behave on TV and on stage,

which, for me, set them apart from other entertainment acts. And the rest, as the saying goes, was history.

Soon enough, I became a fan myself. I initially thought to myself that I had discovered some kind of underground niche genre of music, but judging by the number of views that the K-Pop music videos registered, some in the hundreds of millions, I was surprised to learn that K-Pop was actually a very popular music genre and an international phenomenon. I was even more surprised to later learn that there were other K-Pop fans, individuals like me, in Lebanon, who shared my growing appreciation for not only K-Pop music, but also Korean culture. Even more compelling was discovering that K-Pop fans in Lebanon engaged in reading fanfiction that revolved around the members of their favourite idol groups.

Fanfiction is a popular fan practice in K-Pop, and online platforms abound in creative works written by fans to further their interest in and support of their favourite pop idols. In the seminal work *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, they offer an introduction to the growing field of study of fanfiction and help us understand fandom dynamics by investigating fandom and affect. Kristina Busse further investigates the world of fanfiction in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Busse describes the ways in which the creation of global communities is now possible because of the internet. She also explores both the apparent and underlying purposes behind the world of fanfiction as well as how fans experience and navigate this virtual world.

Recent academic approaches on fanfiction have often paid more attention to “subversive” works like slash fanfiction, in which sexually explicitness is central, to

forward the increasing interest in the discussions of gender politics, media fandom, and their relation to identity and desire. Thus, I take K-Pop fanfiction, which is generally homophilic in nature, as the subject of my analysis. It will serve as an extension to the contemporary interest in slash fanfiction, but within a new scope which is yet to appear in the field of scholarly research. However, I will not only focus on this genre of fanfiction as a cultural phenomenon, but also attempt to consider it from a literary point of view, as one might approach any popular literary genre, an undertaking that is rarely done in fanfiction studies.

Throughout my thesis, I also use the term Korea and South Korea interchangeably to refer to South Korea; North Korea will be referred to as such. Additionally, since one of my aims is to define genre rhetorically, according to the genre's users and how they use and define the genre, I will be using the term "fanfiction" as one word throughout, without internal space, as used by most fanfiction writers, as opposed to "fan fiction," written as two separate words as listed in the Merriam-Webster dictionary. The latter form of the term can be seen elsewhere, in book titles and quoted statements. I based my decision to do so after reading Flourish Klink's "Fan Fiction vs. Fanfiction: When the Dictionary Doesn't Reflect the World" in which they challenge the Merriam-Webster dictionary's listing of the term as two separate words. Klink stresses that they see the term written as "fanfiction" not "fan fiction" most of the time, not as a typo, but as used by active members of the fanfiction community. Klink ran a Google search for both "fanfiction" and "fan fiction" as a preliminary check. "The term "fanfiction" returns 99,600,000 results. The term "fan fiction" returns 13,100,000" (Klink). However, Merriam-Webster's citations come from edited texts, like newspapers, magazine articles and the like. "In other words," says

Klink, “even if every single person on Tumblr used the spelling “fanfiction” every day for fifteen years, it wouldn’t make a difference for the dictionary.” Nonetheless, I will make like the users on Tumblr and most readers and writers of fanfiction and use the term as one word.

In the second chapter of my project, “K-Pop Fanfiction as a Literary Genre,” in addition to a brief introductory historical and cultural account of the K-Pop industry, I provide a description and outlining of the theoretical framework which I put into use in my investigation of K-Pop fanfiction as a literary genre. I address the nature of fanfiction, more specifically K-Pop fanfiction, as literature and question, using Pierre Macherey’s *A Theory of Literary Production*, whether this kind of fiction functions within the dictates of traditional narrative. I aim to inscribe fanfiction, and K-Pop fanfiction in particular, into the limits of (literary) knowledge described by Macherey. I refer to K-Pop fanfiction as a literary genre since I intend to raise questions about genre and genre theory, and apply a rhetorical theory of genre, as Amy Devitt does in *Writing Genres*, to literary texts. I shall do so after I attempt to establish fanfiction, and K-Pop fanfiction in particular, as literature that is not only being published in serial form on online platforms but also taking on novelized forms.

I then elaborate and illustrate the essential ideas and aspects of a rhetorical theory of genre as and examine the implications of such a theory. What does the reading of K-Pop fanfiction tell us about fandom? What does reading K-Pop fanfiction in Lebanon say about say about the ability of fans to recode specific cultural, historical and political contexts of a transnational phenomenon to fit their needs and situations?

In this chapter, I also take up the South Korean idol, around which this type of fanfiction revolves and without which it can never be possible, as the central artefact of K-Pop fanfiction. The K-Pop idol emerges, as I will demonstrate in my thesis, as an object of prohibition and desire. The K-Pop idol may fit into what Clara Tuite's analysis in *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (2015) calls "a sensation, an event, a cultural field" (4). I am interested in Lord Byron as an early example of scandalous celebrity emerging in modern celebrity culture that began in the Romantic Period as a response to the industrialized culture of the eighteenth century. According to Mole, "The growth of celebrity culture also eased the sense of industrial alienation between readers and writers." As such, "Byronic celebrity" can be used as a term that anticipates the socio-historical contexts of the South Korean idol, the main artefact of K-Pop fanfiction. It is this history that informs the kind of publicity that surrounds the idol and inspires such fascinating works of fiction. And through it we can understand modern celebrity in relation to mass culture, influenced by capitalist technologies and economies through which fandoms navigate.

As such, considerations of celebrity culture and the fields of culture and capitalist technologies make up the rhetorical situations behind the genre of fanfiction. To talk about them, we have to explore the industrial and social contexts that matrix Korean celebrity culture and trace, as much as possible, emerging parallel contexts in the Middle East and Lebanon in particular (along with other localities where Korean pop culture is popular such as Pan Asia, the US, Europe, and South America).

In sum, this project will question how to read K-Pop fanfiction texts as an example of a literature genre that emerges out of, and operates within, the contexts of

history, culture, and action (fandom practice). Accordingly, I attempt to place K-pop fanfiction within the literary tradition and establish it as a legitimate literary genre.

I shed light on the importance of considering rhetorical situations, and elaborate, in my third chapter, on such situations such as genre discourse, history, society, celebrity culture and consumer culture, as well as language use, to understand the various aspects that shape fanfiction-reading/writing communities in general.

In the third chapter, I provide essential historical background and contemporary cultural accounts about the K-Pop industry in order to familiarize my reader with the context in which I conduct my study of K-Pop fanfiction as well as investigate the rhetorical situations (fandom practice, cultural norms and behavior) that inform this type of literary production. To better understand the transnational phenomenon that introduced the K-Pop idol as desirable celebrity, I use *The New Korea: An Inside Look at South Korea's Economic Rise* by Myung Oak Kim and Sam Jaffe. Kim and Jaffe explore the primary stages of the *Hallyu* wave, or the (South) Korean cultural wave, with the regional success of early K-dramas. *Hallyu* is a term coined by the Chinese press in 1991 after the massive record-breaking success of Korean drama.

In this chapter, I will discuss the K-fandom alongside national cultural norms and beliefs. I will also delve into the special, quite unparalleled, relationship that this fandom has with the idols as well as its agency in the industry. Part of the anxiety around policing male idols' masculinities is connected to the fandom's expectations from the industry (especially in relation to the idols' personal lives and sexualities). Here I am particularly concerned with fandom and cultural agency and aim to analyse

fan practices, consumer practices, underlying psychologies within the local and international spheres, as well as the expanding online K-Pop networks.

In the fourth chapter, “Viewing, Writing, Reading: K-Pop Fanfiction as Participatory Practice (Slash) Literary Text,” I take up a textual analysis of two popular fanfics, *Anterograde Tomorrow* (2012) and *House of Cards* (2015), which are considered classics within the K-Pop fanfiction community, and read them as literature. I undertake a textual analysis of these fan texts as Sheenagh Pugh does in her *The Democratic Genre: Fanfiction in a Literary Context*. Pugh’s work is a rare approach to fanfiction, since most scholarly work on fanfiction has been done, and still being done, in the context of media studies and take it up as a social and cultural phenomenon. She undertakes a literary approach to fan texts from five prominent fandoms in media to focus on “how” fanfiction is written rather than “why” and investigate the particular conventions and histories that have shaped these texts and the writing practices behind them (11).

Thus, I point out some of the distinctive formal features and thematic elements that distinguish the genre of K-Pop fanfiction, and the slash (homoerotic) genre in particular. In the final section of my thesis, which will be in the form of a coda, I discuss the growing popularity of, and interest in, Korean pop culture in the Arab region, focusing on the literary and cultural practices emerging out of this interest, such as the reading and writing of K-Pop fanfiction. Due to the scarcity of scholarly information provided on K-Pop reception in the Arab world, especially in Lebanon, I sometimes rely on my own knowledge, as an active K-Pop fan, regarding the Lebanese K-Pop fandom to garner results concerning fandom participation as well as fanfiction reading and writing practices. I delineate some of the “transported” sensibilities in

Lebanon and the Middle East, as constructed by the remixing of South Korean cultural norms and modes of fan participation and reception. As for the conclusion of this project, in it I provide a sum up and a revision of the basic concepts that I have discussed in my chapters. I also seek to review my study's overall argument and finally suggest directions for future discussions and analysis.

My project will therefore allow us to identify an emerging participatory literary and artistic culture and a new form of readership and literary production that is crossing geographical and cultural borders as well as erasing language restraints. This transcultural and transnational emergence is made possible with the help of numerous media outlets such as social media platforms, English K-Pop-centered, fan-centered, online platforms and fan fiction sites that facilitate the consumption of idols by devoted fans. As for the bigger picture, I address overarching questions about genre and literature, as well as culture and literacy, ultimately allowing us to think more deeply about, and reshape our understanding of, literature, theories of literary genre, as well as genre in general.

CHAPTER II

K-POP FANFICTION AS A LITERARY GENRE

“People classify unique actions under common labels, and we scholars call those labels ‘genres.’” Amy Devitt

A. A Rhetorical Theory of Genre

To study genre from the point of view of language users and participants, we need to look at how, in the case of K-Pop, fans use genres to navigate their experience of consuming their favorite idols and supporting them. From creating fan accounts, to fan pages and official fan clubs that engage in activities that range from lighthearted support to big acts of philanthropy in the name of their favorite artists, this collective activity has allowed the birth of a number of genres, including the genre of the fan meeting, the fan letter, as well as a literary genre, K-Pop fanfiction.

In my study of the K-Pop fanfiction genre as an example of innovative literature, I synthesize a number of theoretical and critical paradigms that will help identify and define a literary genre as one that is made possible as a result of past and present conditions and situations as well as—in the case of fanfiction—actions by readers and writers who are part of a highly dedicated and active fandom eager to

forward their love and support for a musical act. This type of fan practice, often described as obsessive, allows fans to extend their experiences of admiration and consumption through drawing out new dimensions, in the form of imaginary narratives involving their favorite idols, thereby creating new literary forms and encouraging a new type of readership and authorship. This chapter examines, elaborates, and extends a rhetorical theory of genre, which sees that genres are the result of the interaction of multiple fields all of which are connected through rhetorical situations and are both the result and cause of rhetorical actions. This interaction of fields occurs through different types of actions performed by genre users in their everyday lives. These actions are of a rhetorical nature in the sense that they “recur,” or seem to be repeated, in different times and are performed by a specific group of people to serve a specific set of goals.

First, before I address the nature of fanfiction, more specifically, K-pop fanfiction, as literature by questioning whether this kind of fiction functions within the dictates of traditional narrative, I aim to inscribe it into the limits of (literary) knowledge described by Pierre Macherey in *A Theory of Literary Production* in which he discusses literature and literary production, as well as the relations that exist between literary text, ideology, and history. Macherey argues that “there is no a priori limit. It is elaborated and superimposed upon the entire field of the real, so that a knowledge can be inscribed within that limit” (5). Macherey also compels us to acknowledge a capacity to “generate novelty” that exists in literature, and fan fiction, as I propose, partakes in this production of “novelty.” Similar to Macherey’s idea about the capacity of literature to generate novelty, Fishelov, in *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory*, discusses a type of novelty manifested in the ability of writers to “stretch generic rules” (82-83). Macherey later adds that a work of

literature, here fiction, “does not move with the ingenuous freedom and independence that betoken pure invention; it is in fact sustained by a premeditated diversity which gives it both form and content” (39). That is, the work of fiction necessarily submits to precise conditions that make it possible; these conditions are set out due to the existence of previous models. In Chapter 8, “Autonomy and Independence,” Macherey also sees that “[l]iterary works are determined by the history of literary production from which they receive the means of their own realization” (53). Furthermore, quoting Bakhtin’s 1986 essay “The Problem of Speech Genres,” a speaker “is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe” (69). He also notes that, because genres already exist, this enables writers and readers to respond more easily to rhetorical situations and produce informed texts. As such, K-Pop fanfiction texts, or fanfics, are narratives that provide similar reading experiences to a romance, thriller, or mystery does. Thus, the writers of these fanfics are informed by these models of storytelling.

Inscribed within these literary limits, K-Pop fanfiction serves, I contend, as a specific kind of literature: an archontic one. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida describes the “archontic dimension” in which a text is placed within an ever-growing archive (3). The term “archontic” refers to an entity that is related to an “archon,” which comes from the Greek *arkheion*, meaning “a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded” (ibid. 2). An archon, in ancient Greece, was a magistrate who represented the law and was responsible for preserving, guarding and interpreting official documents (constituting an archive). As a result, the archive exists, or existed, in a state of “house arrest.” According to Derrida, this term has to do with the practice of gathering as a

desire to “coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (10). However, he adds that the archive passes from one institution to another by giving the example of the last house in which Freud resided, describing it as a case of the archive going from “private” to “public” (ibid.). “Archontic,” then, entails a text such as fanfiction that builds an archive that extends the textual realm, an extension characterized by the transition of a text from a private literary practice to one circulating multiple public platforms dedicated to fanfiction.

Derrida offers, in short, a deconstructive analysis of the concept of the archive and the practice of archiving. According to Derrida,

By incorporating the knowledge deployed in reference to it, the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in auctoritas. But in the same stroke it loses the absolute and metatextual authority it might claim to have. One will never be able to objectivize it with no remainder. The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future.

Thus, in agreement with Derrida’s argument that the archive is a public entity, fanfiction can be said to be engaging in a continuous process of archival entry as it overpasses the state of being a private text into that of the public realm of fan text. Derrida’s concept of fanfiction as archontic literature is discussed by Abigail Derecho in “Archontic Literature, a Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction” in which she notes that to use the term “archontic” to describe fan fiction is to reject the notion that fanfiction is “derivative” or lacking in creativity. The principle of the archontic, then, is about expansion. It is the entrance of fanfiction into the existing, and ever expanding, archive of novels, plays, poetry, essays, and other forms of literature.

Also, in the same manner that archives can be infinite and ever expanding, so is fanfiction. A writer can choose to take up the story of any minor character, change the whole plot, provide an alternative ending to a story, or even cross one universe with another. In the *Harry Potter* franchise for example, Harry Potter can be written to go to space and have lunch with Spock from *Star Trek*. Mona Vanderwaal from *Pretty Little Liars* can even run into Bella from *Twilight*. The possibilities are endless, and so are the diverse tastes of fanfiction writers and readers. What I am proposing thus far is that by accepting texts as being public archives that are continuously growing and always open to new entries, we can consider fanfiction as a literary genre that can be placed within the literary tradition.

To study fanfiction as a literary genre, it means we are shifting our focus to the nature of genre and what a genre entails. Views of genre have changed in recent years, producing new and different ways of defining genre. Genre theorists like Amy Devitt encourage the consideration of the cultural significance of genre, its ability to reveal a specific culture's values and transport sensibilities to different cultures. Using a rhetorical theory of genre as proposed by Devitt helps account for the role of culture and rhetorical action (fandom practices, both textual and non-textual) in allowing the practice of reading and writing K-Pop fanfiction to keep on gaining momentum as more and more fans discover online platforms and extend their appreciation (and consumption) for their idols. By this token, (literary) genre can be defined, I will show, by the interrelations between writers, readers, texts, and contexts, as well as the ever-growing result of the interaction between all these elements. K-Pop fanfiction as such is the product of rhetorical situations (socio-historical, political, fannish attitudes and practices) that are later manifested at the textual level (fannish text).

In the last fifty years, theorisations of genre amounted to a new discourse by a range of theorists who shifted their focus from a formalistic study of classifications defined by critics to a rhetorical study based on a new conception of genre which focuses on the generic actions of people, and, applied to the literary genre, to people who constitute the readers and writers of the genre. Within the field of composition and rhetoric in English studies, Lloyd Bitzer played an important part in this shift in theorisation in his 1968 essay “The Rhetorical Situation.” In this body of work Bitzer elaborately explores the rhetorical situation as well as the connection between genre and situation. He employs the term “rhetorical forms” to refer to genres and argues that these rhetorical forms develop because they respond to repeated situations encountered by readers and writers every day (13). Bitzer also contends that “due to either the nature of things or convention, or both, some situations recur” (ibid.). He gives the example of the courtroom, which is a locus for the generation of different kinds of situations that in their turn generate different kinds of speech types, like the speech of accusation, defence, and the charge to the jury.

What I am doing in this project is extending the example of the K-Pop phenomenon as it generates a set of rhetorical and literary genres, which I discuss more in the next chapter. This rhetorical conception of genre is also apparent in Thomas Beebee’s theorisations of genres and the functions they serve for users as well as the contexts in which they operate. In *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability*, his argument revolves around the main idea that rhetorical genre theories can account for literary genres. What he is suggesting is that genres distinguish themselves by their social function, i.e. by what they do rather than what they mean

(7). As such, a rhetorical theory of genre places much importance on the users of a genre as well as their generic actions.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the discussions that I forward in this chapter is the redefinition of genre rhetorically, focusing on the people who use genre and participate in it. I employ a rhetorical study of genre, that is, the study of the “generic actions of everyday readers and writers” as described by Amy Devitt in her seminal work *Writing Genres* (2). Keeping in mind that the formalistic aspect of genre theory is still important insofar as rhetorical theory of genre is made possible because of previous work and classification by previous theorists and critics. I draw on Devitt’s work, *Writing Genres*, in which she examines and illustrates a history of genre theorizing and both elaborates and critiques the existing scholarship. She synthesizes what has been discussed over the years and extends a rhetorical theory of genre in order to understand where genre theory stands today. Devitt builds on Carolyn Miller’s argument proposed in her 1984 seminal essay “Genre as Social Action” in which Miller defines genre as “typified social action associated with a current situation” (3). What Devitt does is expand from the concept of rhetorical situation to include “an interaction of contexts at different levels, encompassing the impact of pre-existing genres as well as situational and cultural [and historical] context” (ibid.). She explains,

What I wish to capture by adding the concept of culture to our genre definition are the ways that existing ideological and material contexts, contexts beyond the more immediate context of situation of a particular genre, partially construct what genres are and are in turn constructed [and reproduced] by people performing genre actions. (27-27)

Agreeing with Devitt and applying a rhetorical theory of genre to the literary genre, we are able to rhetorically define literature, here K-Pop fanfiction, in terms of the ways in

which individuals use it, read and write it, and engage with it for their purposes. Fanfiction, accordingly, is an example of this “unique kind of rhetorical act” as Miller puts it (“Genre as Social Action” as cited in Devitt 12). To understand these actions, it is required that we understand the contexts (or situations, as rhetorical scholars like to call them) within which they are occurring. The situations in the case of my study comprise post-colonial history, post-colonial production and consumerism, post-cold war politics, economic models, as well as cultural norms and social behaviour, all of which relate to the conditions that have played, and still play, a role in the rise of K-Pop and the genres emerging from it. I focus on these contexts in the second chapter of this project. And in the final chapter, I will also discuss how national cultural norms shape the practices of the South Korean K-fandom and their engagement with their idols then discuss how international (Arab and Lebanese) K-fans remix these cultural norms to establish their own relationship to K-Pop idols through fandom practice, including fanfiction writing and reading.

B. Genre as Classification and Form

When we study genre, we are studying the ways in which language users use this language to achieve specific aims. That is, we must look to fanfiction readers and writers for a more functional definition of the genre they are engaged in. Devitt contends that “where earlier genre scholars were most interested in literary genres as defined by critics, today’s rhetorical genre scholars are more often interested in everyday genres as named by their everyday users” (9, *ibid*). “The classificatory nature of genre,” Devitt continues, “is an essential part of understanding genre and its significance, but such classification is defined rhetorically rather than critically, by the

people who use it, for their purposes of operating in the everyday world” (ibid). Many readers and writers of K-Pop fanfiction refer to the type of text they engage in as literature, or as authors who write in “chapters” or write “novels” in serialized form. They look to the traditional/existing literary texts to inform the writing, reading and classification of their texts while reworking them in accordance with the conventions of fanfiction within a community and online fanfiction platforms. This borrowing is manifested at the level form as writers create texts to be read as novels, stories, romances, thrillers, etc. As such, they work on the level of form to associate their work with pre-existing models.

There is no escaping the fact that classification is largely based on form, even though form does not define genres on its own. Form here refers to the textual features and markers used in and characterizing a literary work. Furthermore, literary genres are associated with formal features, but they cannot be equated with them. However, we would do well to shy away from reductive dichotomies involving genre and form that establish a divide between the two and acknowledge the inseparability of form from content.

This more balanced notion of form is argued for by Michel Bakhtin in his *Dialogical Imagination*. In this book, Bakhtin opens the chapter “Discourse in the Novel” by advising us to overcome the split between the formal and the “ideological,” both equally abstract approaches, and asserts that “form and content in discourse are one,” undercutting simplified views of genre encouraged by the use of dichotomies. Furthermore, literary genres are implicated in form and order so as to create a common ground, enforcing similarity among the groups of readers and writers engaging with them. Fanfiction writers have established shared formal conventions that organize their

writing processes. These conventions are no new invention, as previous genres provide antecedents for writers in their writing endeavors, such as the nineteenth century novel, the contemporary novel, the autobiography, poetry; including (sub)genres like the romance novel, science fiction, the detective novel, to name only a few. As such, fanfic writers look to these examples to sample their work from, often even emulating the style of writing. These writers can be said to be engaging in what Devitt calls “genre writing,” which is writing for a specific genre, informed by pre-existing models of storytelling.

On formal aspects, Devitt discusses the aspect of reciprocity, in that “a genre is named because of its formal markers; the formal markers can be identified because a genre has been named.” “The formal regularities we can observe in genres,” she continues, “do not alone create the genres; they result from the genres” (*Writing Genres* 9). As for readers, they often do not concern themselves as much with form; i.e. formal markers and conventions like linguistic choices, sentence structure, or grammar, but focus on the content offered by the genre, i.e. the finished product. For example, if a reader chooses to read a fanfic with an m/m (male/male) pairing (involving a male homosexual protagonist couple), then they expect to read a romantic story about a specific male/male pairing often including erotic scenes. If the reader’s interests and desires are fulfilled in terms of characterization and plot, typos and grammar may not highly affect the reading process or the reader’s attitude towards the fanfic. This is also because it is quite easy for readers to engage in helpful discussions with the writers on online platforms through comment sections to give feedback and offer corrections and suggestions on grammar. As such, what matters most to readers is

that writers gratify their desires and fulfill their generic expectations in terms of characterization and plot.

C. Genre and Rhetorical Situations: History, Society and Culture

What can be safely said is that the genre has gone beyond the point where experts and users can agree on what constitutes it. Devitt argues that historical events and culture, and other existing genres are essential components of genre (25). More importantly, she adds, quoting Miller, that genres can reveal our culture's values and "help constitute the substance of our cultural life" (as quoted by Devitt *ibid.*). By this token, we must examine genre from historical, cultural, and social perspectives.

Genres, according to Devitt, stem out of recurring situations that call for a standardized practice in order to organize daily life. Applied to the literary genre, a rhetorical theory of genre looks at the historical circumstances as well as cultural and societal norms and situations that have made and still make way for the birth of new genres and the maintenance of others. In *Outside Literature*, Tony Bennett dedicates the chapter "The Sociology of Genre: A Critique" to undertake a historical sociology of literary forms in which he focuses on how underlying processes of social transformation play an important role in genre change and, I would add, genre production. He cites Lukács' position on the matter in which he contends that,

The forms of the artistic genres are not arbitrary. On the contrary, they grow out of the concrete determinacy of the particular social and historical conditions. Their character, their peculiarity is determined by their capacity to give expression to the essential features of the given socio-historical phase. Hence the different genres arise in particular stages of historical development [...]

Lukács' argument allows us to think of literature on sociological and historical premises, giving more precedence to the situations surrounding genre production as well as the people involved in this process, and less to formalist literary analysis. As such, Bennett emphasizes that "a socio-genetic conspectus on the order of appearance and succession of genres thus brings literary forms down from the world of atemporal essences and archetypes to the mundane ground of variable social and historical realities" (79). If this is so, then we are able to interpret the concept of genre, both literary and non-literary, in terms of social and historical factors.

Rhetorical scholarship has dubbed these factors "rhetorical situations," which specify the pre-existent and surrounding conditions that facilitated rhetorical action and made possible the construction of genres. The social significance of genre is manifested in its reciprocal interaction with social structures and groups of people whose needs incite rhetorical situations. To consider the example of the K-Pop genre, K-Pop fanfiction fulfills the function of appeasing fantasies and policing/de-policing of idol performativity. The people involved in this situation are the fans of the K-Pop genre, the writers and readers of the fanfic genre, and the consumers of the central artefact of consumption, the K-Pop idol. In addition to that, other functions are fulfilled through participation in fan meetings and partaking in philanthropic acts in official fan clubs. Fans communicate to organize their assemblies ahead of time, write petitions, send gifts for their idols, organize fan chants to be sung during concerts and fan meets. On the textual level, they participate in fanfiction writing and reading, classify their writing topics, discuss pairings and analyze the plots, and write in serialized form to stir up anticipation. Their actions reflect their beliefs and how they view their

relationship between each other on the one hand and between them and their idols on the other.

Hence, to fully understand the genres associated with K-Pop, including K-Pop fanfiction, we must recognize the social structures involving the readers and writers of the fanfic, the complex relationships involving their relationship to their idols and the entertainment industry, as well as understand the cultural setting encompassing all of them, that is, in this case, a straitjacketed industry in a morally strict South Korea with boundless consumption of the entertainment industry. More broadly, understanding the cultural setting reflects the existing power relationship between fans and the industry as well as that between the industry and the idols themselves, which I will discuss at length in the second chapter. Going back to the example above, it shows that through people's use of discourse, they create rhetorical situations in response to rhetorical situations. At the level of genre, Devitt sums up this idea by saying that "a genre constructs and is constructed by cultural values, beliefs, and norms as well as by material culture. A genre constructs and is constructed by the set of existing genres surrounding it" (*Writing Genres* 29). As such, people are also capable of altering and creating genres. It is worth mentioning that as genres are the nexus of interaction of different contexts and situations, different genres interact too, creating what Devitt calls genre systems, that is, when different genres perform different roles to achieve a common purpose within an activity system (56).

The social and cultural nature of genre lies within the groups of people using the genre. Hence, rhetorical situations reinforce their identity and pass on the genre for new participants to interact with it. The situations are not recurring per se, as Miller believes situations cannot recur—no two situations are identical—but they make up an

interactive web that only expands the use of the genre even more, which, in its turn, constructs recurring situations; reading fanfics, writing them, and participating in other K-Pop related activities. This interactivity reinforces what composition theory would call “discourse community,” which is a social group of members who are both creators of the group and created by it. The members of this community can be defined by their shared goals and genres used (ibid. 40). This definition is not to homogenize the groups, as these groups are richly diverse in culture, nationalities. This diversity exists on multiple levels. On one hand, the K-Pop industry borrows a lot from Western music models as the first (90’s) era of K-Pop featured the heavy influence of American Hip hop, R&B and pop up until the 3rd era with acts that have sprung up in 2010 and after. On the other hand, with the increasing spread of K-Pop around the world, this seemingly culturally specific phenomenon attracts a transnational fandom from very distinct parts of the world, ranging from East Asia, Europe, the Americas, to the Middle East.

To sum up what I aim to accomplish thus far, K-Pop fanfiction is to be placed within the literary tradition by employing a rhetorical theory of genre that extends to literary texts. I agree with most rhetorical and literary theorists that literary genres are dynamic and contextual in that they are situated in specific historical and cultural circumstances. I also agree with Amy Devitt that genres reconstruct and reproduce cultures while simultaneously being constructed and reproduced by cultures themselves. That is, in the same way K-Pop fanfiction is a product of celebrity culture and the dynamic relationship between history, national and transnational culture and context, it is also producing a literary and artistic culture in its own right. And at the

literary level, fanfiction simultaneously creates a genre while resulting from one, both in terms of association with textual form and content.

D. K-Pop Fanfiction: Between Derivative and Deserving

Although my theorization of the genre allows for the consideration of fanfiction as literary, that is not to say that fanfiction is not met with opposition and criticism. Discussing this genre as such raises compelling questions around what counts as literature in general as well as who can produce it, especially with globalized digital media blurring the lines between who produces literary works and who is an audience for them. In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins provides an excellent introduction to looking at fandom and exploring its general practices. He addresses the disruption of dominant cultural (and literary, I will add) hierarchies caused by fans. Jenkins contends that,

Fan culture muddies those boundaries, treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts. Reading practices (close scrutiny, elaborate exegesis, repeated and prolonged rereading, etc.) acceptable in confronting a work of “serious merit” seem perversely misapplied to the more “disposable” texts of mass culture.

Fanfiction is often looked down upon and regarded as derivative work by many a literary advocate and some authors whose works have been taken up as artefacts for fan remakes on major fanfiction websites. Bill Tancer, New York Times bestselling author and the general manager of global research at Experian Marketing Services, who has a book about how web statistics affect our daily lives, shared shocking statistics for authors who are still having trouble accepting fanfiction. “There’s no way

to stop people from interacting with your content. You can ignore or embrace it ... to complain about it isn't going to make it better." Fanfiction makes up 33 percent of all content revolving around books [on the web]" (Boog).

Considerable effort goes into fanfiction written by avid fans of a particular form of entertainment. As a matter of fact, an impressive number of literary works can be readily observed as fanfiction, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the canonical material can be easily spotted. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is essentially a remake of *Jane Eyre*, and Milton's "Paradise Lost" is a work of fan fiction on the Bible, to name only a few.

Another argument presented by literary purists is that essentially the difference between inspiration and fanfiction should be made clear. This argument holds that if a writer takes from the world that another author has already created, a significant part of the writing process has been neglected—that is, the level of "creation" and originality. However, it is unclear how different this kind of creation is from other literary works inspired by previous ones. Also, K-Pop fanfiction differs in that aspect, as there is no prior plot for the writer to be inspired by, neither is there a preset number of characters to abide by. In the case of fanfiction written about an idol group or individual K-Pop idol, fans draw upon the "character" that the idol seems to play when presenting themselves to the public, be it on stage or on television, either performing a song or upholding a certain type of performative masculinity and idol quality. If fanfiction writers take to specific "universes" to develop alternative plots, such as the *Harry Potter* universe, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Pretty Little Liars*, *Twilight* among many others, K-Pop fanfiction writers seek the fantastical universe of K-Pop idols, as it abounds with "characters" portrayed as part of the dreamy idol persona.

Others may indeed regard fanfiction as literature, since it borrows from universes that already exist, but it performs a similar function to the work it is inspired by. However, this acceptance is accompanied by the dismissive convention that rejects some fanfiction works in favor of others depending on the level of literary merit that they may hold, such as type of plot, level of “creativity,” grammar, quality of diction, and form. The issue of language persists, as genre is at some level constituted by language. Devitt contends that “both genres and language standards are sets of conventionalized expectations for using language” (*Writing Genres* 141). While there is no escaping that there is fanfiction that is “badly” written in the sense that it may violate linguistic etiquette, fanfic writers, a considerable number of which are not native English speakers, still try to their best ability to operate within language standards, employing a “Pan-English” that is widely used and read by fans from different parts of the world, including the Middle East and Lebanon. By Pan-English I refer to an English that is written, read and understood by writers and readers who are not necessarily native speakers of the language and is a common language used in writing and reading K-Pop fanfiction, facilitating its circulation and further widening its readership. It is also important to note that language usage here still establishes expectations of what “good writing” dictates, as readers and writers engage in discussions about “correct” English usage, and writers use these interactions to edit their work.

Readers, who vary in their knowledge and usage of, as well as conformity to, the English language standards, may notice the variations and violations of textual features and engage in productive conversation to improve the quality if the work produced. Interestingly, avid readers would also argue that what the work may it lack

in grammatical correctness, it makes up for in creativity. And Devitt states quite matter-of-factly that “the most highly valued literature is typically prized for some degree for its ‘originality,’ its ‘novelty’” (176). Many fanfiction readers do acknowledge that some fanfiction may be rife with grammatical incorrectness, or that it may not operate at a high formal level, but they tend to focus on the exciting plots and the characters that they admire.

With the increasing amount of fanfiction being produced every year, and the increasing readership it is garnering, authors of original works are starting to shift their attitudes in regard to this phenomenon. “The biggest question facing new writers today isn’t how to protect their work; it’s how to find a readership for it,” states Doctorow, science fiction author and prolific fanfiction writer. “It makes complete sense that so many Wattpad writers are gravitating toward Creative Commons licenses: by giving others permission to share your writing, you can open doors to new audiences and new creative opportunities” (as quoted in Dilworth).

Fantasy novelist R.A. Salvatore, author of *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, *The Hunter’s Blades Trilogy*, *The Crystal Shard* (his work has also spawned countless stories written by fans and an entire Lavender Eyes site dedicated to his fan fiction) and many other popular fantasy novels, answered questions in a popular “I am a” interview on Reddit, addressing the question facing many popular novelists: “What is your position on fanfiction?” The writer replied:

I am supposed to tell you that it’s evil and wretched and destroys anything and everything I’ve ever tried to accomplish. Truth is, this is supposed to be fun and entertaining, and when I hear about fan fiction using my characters, or when I see variations of my characters running around in an MMO (short for MMORPG, which stands for Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-

Playing Game), I think it's the coolest thing ever. Truly flattering. Now, I can't read the fan fiction, for obvious reasons, nor can I consider it 'canon,' but I'm still flattered.

Just as different genres develop and are altered with time, different reading publics develop at different historical periods. This is also affected by the type of commercial and social forces at work that encourage reading some works or genres over others. After the decline of mailing lists and the increasing interest in fanfiction, something had to fill the gap. Hence, the creation of new literary platforms specifically for fanfiction followed such as popular and widely used websites Fanfiction.net, ArchiveofOurOwn.com (of AO3), LiveJournal.com, Wattpad, and AsianFanfics.com.

The Web has been host to myriad fanfictions, as communities of devoted fans have created digital spaces to share, analyze and critique each other's work. Sites devoted to particular fandoms, such as harrypotterfanfiction.com and Twilighted.net, now exist. The Web's largest fan-fiction site, Fanfiction.net, hosts several million works, including pieces based on the Bible, Shakespeare, TV shows like "Lost," as well as cartoons like "My Little Pony" and videogames like "Final Fantasy X" and "Halo." The site hosts more than 600,000 pieces of *Harry Potter* fan fiction, and more than 200,000 based on "Twilight."

Popular digital writing community Wattpad has also made it easier for writers to put up their works for readership and display for potential reworking in the form of fanfiction by tagging their stories with the Creative Commons (CC) 4.0 licensing option. This enables their stories to become searchable by site visitors who are looking for works to expand upon (Dilworth). The social network has even expanded its Creative Commons licensing option to level 4.0, which essentially means that they are

giving writers more options to rework and remix the work of other writers. Wattpad now has more than 500,000 stories which include this distinction. Cory Doctorow, who has shared five works on Wattpad under these licenses, including *Homeland* and *Little Brother*, helped promote the launch of CC 4.0 by making his first novel *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* available for other writers to rework on Wattpad (“Wattpad Expands Creative Commons Options Enabling Fan Fiction,” Dilworth).

It is apparent that fans cannot get enough of their favourite shows, movies, and novels, and the rising number of fanfictions being written as well as the increasing readership worldwide have encouraged entertainment companies to invest in this growing phenomenon. In an effort to accommodate the growing fanfiction reading base while taking into consideration the rights of the authors of the original works, Amazon reached out to fanfiction writers and revealed the Kindle Worlds program in 2013 in which fanfiction writers are allowed to write fanfics based off of someone else’s work but be able to share royalties with the original rights holders. This new partnership between Amazon and Kindle means that writers can choose from a selection of more than 20 different licensed “worlds” to write about. Fans of several authors and works can sell fanfiction based on selected books from these writers’ works on Amazon. Content included in the Kindle Worlds program includes works like *G.I. Joe*, *The World of Kurt Vonnegut*, *Gossip Girl*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *The Vampire Diaries* and many more. This has been facilitated by the partnership between Amazon and Warner Bros. Television Group’s Alloy Entertainment division as well as Hasbro, Valiant Entertainment and others (“Amazon Adds New Romance Titles to Fan Fiction Worlds,” Dilworth). Writers can visit this page to start writing for the Kindle Worlds program.

Explaining more about how royalties are paid, Dilworth adds that “Amazon Publishing will pay royalties to the rights holder for the World (we call them World Licensors) and to you. Your standard royalty rate for works of at least 10,000 words will be 35% of net revenue.” Some authors, including J.K. Rowling and Ms. Meyer, have wholeheartedly endorsed fanfiction, while others, such as fantasy writer George R.R. Martin, author of the very popular *Game of Thrones* series, novelist Anne Rice and Diana Gabaldon, author of the best-selling *Outlander* series, resent and discourage it. “They're stealing an audience they're not entitled to,” Ms. Gabaldon says of fanfiction writers. Rice warns on her website: “I do not allow fan fiction.” While some see fanfiction as free marketing, others regard it as derivative junk at best and copyright infringement at worst. Although fanfiction has made huge strides in terms of readership and recognition, it remains a controversial subject for authors and publishers.

As I discussed earlier, K-Pop fanfiction differs from fanfiction written about other entertainment forms in that it goes beyond fictional characters, as the central artefact of this genre is not a fictional character, but a real person. For most fans, the K-Pop idol within the K-Pop industry emerges as a character in a play, a character in a fantastical story, one that is also riddled with scandal, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. As such, the scandalous celebrity makes for a compelling artefact to appropriate as an actual fictional character in a fanfic.

E. Scandalous Modern Celebrity: The K-Pop Idol as Byronic Celebrity

My purpose at the outset of this chapter has been to rethink the concept of genre and interpret it by means of socio-historical and cultural situations as well as classify and describe K-Pop fanfiction as used by the readers and writers of this genre. At this point, I would like to draw attention to the main artefact of this genre of fanfiction, and that is the male K-Pop idol. I focus on the male K-Pop idol only, first, in order to focus my research, and second, because the power and fan dynamics surrounding the male and female idols differ, and third, because the specific genre of fanfiction that I will read and discuss in a later chapter takes the male K-Pop idol as central artefact. The South Korean K-Pop idol constitutes a cultural artefact that is put under constant scrutiny and is the subject of the extreme consumption of fans. Hence, I describe this idol as “scandalous celebrity” and take them up as a kind of filter through which we can observe history, and in this case, the history of an emerging literary genre, one that is embroiled in the workings of culture and society. This will allow us to view the history of this genre through the prism of the consumable celebrity.

The K-Pop idol emerges, as I will demonstrate, as an object of both prohibition and desire. The K-Pop idol is what Clara Tuite’s analysis in *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (2015) calls “a sensation, an event, a cultural field” (4). I am interested in Lord Byron as an early example of scandalous celebrity emerging in modern celebrity culture that began in the Romantic Period as a response to the industrialized culture of the eighteenth century. I also take “Byronic celebrity” as a term that anticipates the socio-historical contexts of the South Korean idol, the main artefact of K-Pop fanfiction. It is this history that informs the kind of publicity that surrounds the idol and inspires such fascinating works of fiction.

The consumption of the K-Pop idol, however, has less to do with excessive indulgence and more with repressed desire, in regard to which there “can be no satisfaction or fulfilment,” as Clara Tuite contends while describing “Byromania,” or the obsession with the scandalous celebrity of Lord Byron in the early nineteenth century (*Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity*, xviii). It also has to do with practices of commodity consumption. Similarly, the emergence of the K-Pop idol following the K-drama wave presents an object of obsessive desire, prohibition and consumption.

In *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy*, Tom Mole applies contemporary theory of celebrity and commodity culture to Romantic-period literary production and reception. He also traces the emergence of modern celebrity, before photography or film, in the industrialised print culture of the late eighteenth century before looking into Byron’s career in detail. Mole describes celebrity as a “powerful force for structuring public information and private imagination” (xiv). The early nineteenth century was witness to the historical processes of “democratization, decline in organized religion, and the commodification of everyday life” (Rojek 13). As a result, celebrity, according to Rojek, must be understood as a modern phenomenon (ibid. 16).

In this modern era, it became possible to be famous “simply for being yourself” (“Lord Byron and the End of Fame,” Mole 347). Whereas celebrity initially coupled fame with achievement and social eminence, celebrity culture later seemed to grow out of “a fascination with the individual subjectivity that was radically privatized” (ibid.). As a result, the Romantic era saw the transition of “celebrity” to become something that someone *is* rather than *have*. As such, readers of Byron engaged not only in privately reading his poetry but also read aloud, borrowed, bought, annotated and discussed it

individually and in public groups (ibid.). These activities aimed at looking into the individual behind the poems in order to know more about them and relate to them on a more intimate level. In a similar but augmented manner, the K-Pop idol occupies a highly commodified field of cultural production within an industry that allows such modes of consumption. These modes are driven by technologies of marketing and commodity distribution that facilitate the identification and emotional engagement of fans and consumers with their idols. The rapid industrial developments of the eighteenth century allowed infatuated readers to “fangirl” over a literary figure in an unprecedented manner.

As a result, Byron anticipates the prototypical pop star, as can be seen by comparing the type of celebrity/notoriety that surrounds the K-Pop idol with that which did Lord Byron, pointing out a number of common historical conditions and social characteristics which these two characters/artefacts lived through, identifying a similar social base that called for such scandal.

I will now allow myself to draw some comparisons between Byron the celebrity and the K-Pop idol, constantly causing (purposely or otherwise) scandal and always under scrutiny. A number of scholars have attempted to draw the similarities and describe the relations between modern celebrity culture and earlier phenomena. In her 2002 biography *Byron: Life and Legend*, McCarthy tries to understand “Byron’s transformation into the first European cultural celebrity of the modern age” (x). She is among many cultural theorists to believe so. Lord Byron is considered the first literary celebrity to gain notoriety even outside the literary scope.

Lord Byron was arguably the first literary figure to garner attention to his private (and quite public) life. And unlike many of his contemporary canonical romantics, he was famous even at the time of his death. Apart from his poetry, Byron was a peculiar individual in his own right. The 18th century figure was notorious for sodomy, incest and lasciviousness. Moles adds that “[t]he scandalous celebrity that enunciates itself across these realms combines social effrontery, sexual transgression, emotional affect, religious impiety, political dissent, and scandals of literary form and propriety” (*Byron’s Romantic Celebrity* xxi). Byron also explicitly assumed the role of protagonist in his works and the kind of success he began to enjoy prompted him to write to his readers expectations. In canto 3 of “Childe Harold” Byron even opens with an invocation *in propria persona* to Byron’s own infant daughter, Ada (Heinzelman 494). In “Lord Byron and the Invention of Celebrity,” Heinzelman adds that “[the modern idea of celebrity] resides in the wish of the reading public to derive meanings from a work of art in large part because of the way that work represents the life of the artist; and inversely, in the willingness of the artist to engage with, one might even say to manipulate or exploit, that consumer demand” (494-495).

Heinzelman also differentiates being celebrated as a literary figure or celebrating a literary work from “celebrity” as a concrete entity—as in being *a* celebrity—pointing out that the latter is a much later invention associated with “a new set of values, expectations, and cultural associations.” (489). Byron’s celebrity was often rather pejoratively associated with “notoriety” as in Lady Blessing’s account upon meeting him in 1823, “His portraits; the complex and fascinating intertwining of his personal celebrity and literary reputation; [and] his bitterness when fame turned to notoriety” (as quoted in Heinzelman 491). Some of Byron's most well-known self-

portraits show him dressed as his fictional heroes. A reverse process in fanfiction takes up the idols as heroes and further portrays them in the fiction.

If Lord Byron emerges as a (transgressive) cultural producer but also as a cultural product, so too, does the K-Pop idol. This transgression is recoded in the Korean context (and Arab and Lebanese after that) where idols present themselves as objects for continuous surveillance and multiple levels of policing both by entertainment agencies and devoted fans. I also borrow the phrase “Byronic branding” in the way the K-Pop idol is branded so that they produce songs that meet the fan’s expectations and carry out their celebrity personas accordingly. Inversely, Byron actively made use of the public interest in his person and private/public life and appeased this interest by making himself part of the literature being read and consumed by the public, as his literature came to derive its appeal from its association with Byron the celebrity. Thus, the difference here is that the K-Pop idol concedes artistic control to the socio-economic dynamic of production and consumption that shapes the industry.

Keeping the idol as an object of both prohibition and desire in mind, we can understand “celebrity” in relation to mass culture as a matrix of capitalist technologies and economies in which fandoms are present and through which they are constantly navigating. This field, paired with focus on the celebrity, makes up the rhetorical situations behind the genre of K-Pop fanfiction. To talk about them, we have to explore the industrial and social contexts that matrix Korean celebrity culture and trace, as much as possible, emerging parallel contexts in the Middle East and Lebanon in particular (along with other localities where Korean pop culture is popular such as Pan Asia, the US, Europe, and South America). In doing so, we can observe how K-Pop

fanfiction plays out as English language text that is shared and enjoyed in these transnational contexts.

CHAPTER III

RHETORICAL SITUATIONS: HISTORY, CULTURE, CELEBRITY CONSUMPTION AND POLITICS OF DESIRE

A. Rhetorical Situations: History, Geo-Politics, Culture and Action

In the previous chapter, I engaged a range of theoretical paradigms for the purpose of taxonomizing their linkages and understanding the importance of the social processes that precede, accompany, and interact with and allow the emergence and development of literary genres. In this chapter, I will trace the relationships between contexts and the genres produced as a result, leading to my characterization of these relationships. I aim to draw attention to the preexisting historical circumstances and sociological conditions that enable genre production, both literary and nonliterary genres, in the case of K-Pop and K-Pop fanfiction.

These conditions or “situations,” as I will discuss in this chapter, distinguish the K-Pop industry and set the K-Pop fandom (both Korean/Asian and international) apart from all other existing fandoms. Ultimately, they also set K-Pop fanfiction from other fanfiction genres written by and dedicated to other forms of entertainment. The K-Pop genre, as any literary or nonliterary genre, owes its birth to a range of specific social, historical and geopolitical contexts. A rhetorical theory of genre suggests that we look into these contexts. And along with the K-Pop genre emerged a number of rhetorical genres based in the consumerist practices of local and international fans, such as the fan meeting, the fan letter, the fan chant, and fan service, which I will briefly

discuss later. I also consider how the capitalist-technological field and celebrity commodification contextualize the study of fanfiction rhetorically and aim to capture the complexity of the conditions and situations that culminate in the emergence of K-Pop and the continued interest in this genre of fanfiction in different parts of the world, including the Arab world and Lebanon specifically. I will address Arab world reception in my coda. In this chapter I also focus on the male K-Pop idol, whose masculinity is put under the radar, as a scandalous celebrity that forms the central artefact of this literary genre.

My analysis thus seeks to identify principles of social organization as well as cultural beliefs and attitudes in the music industry that allow the support of what Bennett calls the “generic dominant,” which defines genres by “locating them historically and accounting for the orders of their historical appearance, repetition, and/or succession” in the different contexts of the genre’s distribution (*Outside Literature* 84). Therefore, I will outline the historical, geopolitical and cultural situations that make up the rhetorical situations behind the emergence of the K-Pop phenomenon leading up the birth of a literary genre that is K-Pop fanfiction.

If we take the genre of the 19th century novel for example, we see that it is rooted in socio-historical conditions that allowed it to flourish. It is viewed as a modern genre which originated and evolved with the rise and development of capitalism. In *Outside Literature*, Tony Bennett specifies the aspects of social organization that exist in capitalism which “therefore [give] rise to the need to identify mechanism of connection through which the influence of the social dominant within literary sphere can be accounted for” (87). The social dominant is usually construed as a set of real social relations which exist prior to and independent of the genre, be it the novel or the

fanfic. In the case of the novel, the evolution of the genre coincided with changes in the organization of literary production as well as the organization of the reading public. A parallel social dominant can be said to exist for fanfiction, what with the growth of an extended reading public armed with social media and myriad online platforms for production and access of fanfiction, enabling the genre to evolve in response to the diverse tastes of readers and writers.

I will delineate the cultural elements necessary to understand K-Pop fanfiction as a genre and the “situations” informing its production, applying a rhetorical theory of genre as outlined in the previous chapter by looking into rhetorical situations that surround, inform and allow the emergence of this type of literary tradition. What will follow, then, is an account of the K-Pop industry’s emergence as well as the social, cultural, economic, and geopolitical levels to which it is tied and through which it continuously navigates, as well as its characteristic elements (i.e., idol production, promotion, fan service, and dissemination.)

B. The Birth of K-Pop

K-Pop, or Korean Pop is a genre of music that emerged in the 1990’s with groups such as Seo Taiji & Boys, H.O.T, Sech Kies, S.E.S, G.O.D, and a number of others, some of whom have recently made comebacks and are considered legends in the field. According to Jung-Bong Choi and Roald Maliangkay:

The focal points of these groups were their visual and choreographic presentations on- and off-stage, with much less attention given to music itself. Nonetheless, their songs set the tone for the present form of idol-centred K-pop music: fast, mostly cheerful contemporary R&B dance tracks

with a heavy beat and rapped bridge sections interspersed with random English phrases. (3)

Influenced by Western, mostly American, music genres and aesthetics, K-Pop reprocesses and reproduces these genres and aesthetics through putting particular spins to the modes of presentation, and ultimately altering modes of production and reception. K-Pop does not only refer to Korean Pop music; the term is only a popularized all-encompassing one which in itself includes a number of diverse music genres. It is often reduced into a poppy lighthearted genre of music. However, “K-Pop” serves as an umbrella term which includes K-Hip-hop, R&B, alternative rock, even indie music, along with the specific “ballad” genre, which refers to slow tempo romantic songs, a large number of which are usually released as OSTs, or Original/Official Sound Tracks, for Korean dramas and become very popular as a result. K-Pop is an expanding phenomenon that is garnering more and more success and popularity locally (South Korea and Pan-Asia) and internationally. Characterized by the strong musical and visual appeal of its idols and their performances, K-Pop has recently entered “the lexicon of global popular cultures,” drawing in millions of fans from all across the world and captivating the attention of international media (Choi and Malingkay 1).

In *K-Pop: The International Rise of the South Korean Music Industry* by Inkyu Kang, “The Political Economy of Idols: South Korea’s Neoliberal Restructuring and its Impact on the Entertainment Labour Force” narrates the events and precursory enterprises that led to South Korea’s interest in the entertainment industry, namely the music industry (along with the film industry before it). This interest ultimately resulted in the culmination of a music genre, and the rise of a massive transnational industry, later dubbed and marketed as K-Pop, as part of a “state-initiated campaign to

accumulate soft power.” Kang’s account extends into an analysis of the geopolitics that also served as a catalyst in the rise of this phenomenal industry. He explains that K-Pop was perceived by the South Korean government as a necessary way for the country to break into the market and fight for a geopolitical presence next to the likes of Japan and China. Kang notes that:

At the turn of the new millennium, the idea that Korea is “a shrimp among whales” led its government to embrace the “sandwich theory” that saw Korea as being squeezed between high-tech Japan and an emerging China armed with inexpensive labour. Something had to be done – soon. (52)

This geopolitical status was a factor in the realization that the country needed a new “growth engine” as Kang puts it (ibid.). As a result, the perception of culture shifted, and culture would then be allowed to become a commodity, something to be sold for profit, contrary to the country’s previous beliefs that it is something to preserve and pass on to generations.

This shift to cultural commoditization is taken up by Myung Oak Kim and Sam Jaffe in *The New Korea: An Inside Look at South Korea’s Economic Rise*, where they explore the primary stages of the *Hallyu* wave, or the (South) Korean cultural wave, with the regional success of early K-dramas. *Hallyu* is a term coined by the Chinese press in 1991 after the massive record-breaking success of the Korean drama *What is Love?* (Sarang-iMwugille?) in China in the same year. This term refers to the regional (and more recently international) popularity of South Korean cultural products such as music, cinema, television drama, as well as fashion. The *Hallyu* wave was pushed another level with the success of yet another K-drama, *Winter Sonata*, which swept the Japanese nation by storm in 2001. And from 2002, the year in which the World Cup

was co-hosted by South Korea along with Japan, K-dramas exploded in popularity and were exported to Japan, South Asia, the Middle East, as well as the Americas. A wide variety of K-dramas has also been airing for more than a decade in different countries throughout the Arab region, including Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and many more.

Not only did the television series *What is Love?* (Sarang-iMwugille?) garner an immense regional viewership but also presented a new element of consumption, and that is the soft masculinity of its lead actor Bae Yong-Joon, prompting the production and selling of merchandise, from household items to food, under the actor's brand. Bae Yong-Joon later represented a type of masculinity that became coveted in Japan and China. It was this very masculinity that was enough ground for an incredible increase in economic activity (music, trade, tourism) between Korea and Japan. Bae Yong-Joon, with his soft-spoken demeanour and an even softer masculinity make up the precedent of the consumable and desirable celebrity in South Korea, along with the K-Pop idol in the early 2000's.

Alongside this increased economic interaction between the two countries was the birth of a new Japanese consciousness towards South Korea which was, till the late 1990's, still seen in the dark and unfriendly light of a newly liberated country still affected by the aftermath of the Korean War, while Japan basked in its long-standing position as industrial leader. However, South Korea was able to advance in this respect, developing enough economic strength to later become a commanding presence in global trade. The country was able to achieve this incredible feat less than fifty years after a devastating war with North Korea and Mainland China. As a result, according to Christopher Salter, South Korea later came to be described as one of the four East Asian

“dragons” or “tigers” due to its impressive economic performance and steady economic growth (*South Korea* 85). Salter adds that “South Korea has been able to bring its level of per capita purchasing power up to two and a half times the world average” in such short amount of time (47). In *Measured Excess: Status, Gender, and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea*, Laura Nelson explores the emergence of consumer nationalism in South Korea, historically situating it against industrial giant Japan in order to provide insight on the impetus to the rise of Korea as an economic power as well as the rise of consumer nationalism and a consumer culture the primary agents of which, according to Nelson, are women (28).

One of my arguments serves as an extension to Nelson’s discussion concerning the strong consumer agency of women, especially in their consumption of K-Pop and special attention to male idol groups. Here it is also important to note that most fanfic writers are women, and nearly all slash (homoerotic fanfiction) writers are women (Pugh 91). I also highlight the argument that after years of low par production, South Koreans were finally able to enjoy a more diverse and higher quality market of goods and services and become part of a cosmopolitan consumer culture. The development of such market was made possible with the Korean government’s economic development strategies. This newly enjoyed consumerism, especially with the rise of K-Pop, I observe, went overboard, as the K-Pop fandom is characterized by extreme consumer practices which have, in time, granted it a powerful position of agency in the music industry. I talk more about this agency in a later section.

It is helpful at this point to go a little further back in history in order to account for the geopolitical circumstances altering Korea’s economic strategies which made

possible the later rise in consumer culture. Robert Bedeski, in *The Transformation of South Korea*, offers a thorough analysis of the governmental institutions in South Korea and the ways in which they have been transformed by the introduction of political pluralism beginning from the late 80's, as well as the attempt to "liberalize without undermining economic success" (78). According to Bedeski:

To make up for weak domestic savings, Korea relied on foreign loans. International export markets made up for small domestic markets. Mass production technology provided a substitute for low productivity. Foreign technology was borrowed and adapted to Korean needs. To accomplish economic growth, Korea has relied on a mixed economy. (81)

He adds that after the 1997 Financial Crisis where neoliberalism engulfed the Korean society, "the government decided to build an export-oriented strategy, rather than import substitution, which was popular with economists in the 1950s and 1960s" (ibid.). It is worth mentioning that the United States played a key role in the dissemination of neoliberal ideals, which South Korea in due time welcomed wholeheartedly. Thus, the country's loosened grip on cultural exception between 1980 and 1985 was paired with a readiness to be more open to an economy based on export. South Korea's export, for one, of sensational drama was followed by what is now one of the country's biggest and best-known cultural exports, K-Pop.

South Korea's geographical presence at the crossroads of Japanese and Chinese strategic interests as well as a half century of Japanese domination has forced it to be part in an international power politics. The new emphasis on culture as commodity discussed above was reflected in active national and governmental support of the Korean music industry as the variable functionality of K-Pop and K-Pop idols garnered attention. This functionality made these idols involuntary yet powerful representatives

of the nation. Choi and Maliangkay contend that “the idols are as much a ‘common property’ of the Korean culture industry in its entirety as the crux of the K-pop enterprise” (5). As such, K-Pop idols and groups have often been employed as political envoys and national representatives in various state and market affairs and events held by local and national governments.

One exemplary instant of the importance of K-Pop idols as agents of cultural diplomacy can be observed in the context of recent political developments which saw the momentous meeting between North Korean supreme leader Kim Jung Un and South Korean president Moon Jae In during the April 2018 inter-Korean summit which took place on April 27, 2018 on the South Korean side of the Joint Security Area, or demilitarized zone. The summit was the first time since the end of the Korean War in 1953 that a North Korean leader set foot on South Korean territory.

Ahead of this historic meeting, a South Korean delegation of taekwondo demonstrators, government officials, reporters, and artists, most notably popular girl group Red Velvet, was sent on a cultural visit to the North on April 1. The most important highlight of the trip was Red Velvet’s highly anticipated performance at the East Pyongyang Grand Theatre in front of an audience of 1500 North Korean nationals, including the surprise attendance of the North’s Kim Jung Un. The girls performed two of their latest hit songs, wearing clothes less revealing than their usual looks. They also performed the song “Our Wish Is Unification” alongside South and North Korean artists. Furthermore, it is important to note the absence of any popular boy group from participating in this historic event, as North Korea is extremely conservative and still un-accepting of males singing and dancing, and so a group of young men performing

dynamic dances on stage would have been too much for the people of Pyongyang to handle. Despite political and cultural differences between the two nations, K-Pop provides a space for diplomatic negotiation and measured cultural exchange.

Nonetheless, boy groups play an equally important role in representing the South Korean nation on a large scale. Popular K-Pop boy group and international phenomenon BTS have achieved unprecedented milestones for a Korean act at the national and global levels. The boy group has been able to break multiple records in album sales, musical charting, and winning of prestigious music awards not only nationally, but also internationally. BTS are the first K-Pop act to ever be nominated for an American Billboard award, and they are the first to take the stage to perform at the Billboards and AMAs (American Music Awards, prompting the broadcasting of the award show in Korea for the first time ever) in 2017 and 2018.

In an interview with Time Magazine in 2018, BTS expressed how humbled they were seeing their popularity and influence spread so much across different parts of the world. The idols stressed their national pride and the importance of representing their country well. “As Koreans we love our country and we are proud of our country so much. And it’s even just an honor to be called an ambassador of Korean K-Pop [sic],” says Namjoon, leader and spokesperson of the group, who spoke in English. The group has also performed for president Moon Jae-in and other notable figures in Paris at a special concert held back in October of the same year to represent friendly relations between France and South Korea. And in September of last year (2018), BTS spoke before the United Nations General Assembly (the first ever K-Pop group to do so) in New York to promote their “Love Myself” campaign as part of UNICEF's global

partnership Generation Unlimited, which targeted the youth around the world and encouraged them to speak their own convictions and voices. In a seven-minute speech delivered in English by the group's leader Kim Namjoon, he said, "No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin color, your gender identity, just speak yourself." Kim's most likely professionally written speech (written at a highly formal level of English language) promotes a number of progressive values that become associated with the nation of South Korea. To go back to the Time magazine interview, group member Min Yoongi, otherwise popularly known as Suga, explains:

Many of our parents' generation were born right after the Korean War, and so they grew up not being able to eat or dress well. But in our generation, we –our parents' sons, are spreading Korean culture as its representatives and seeing how much of Korean culture we are able to spread these days. Those from my parents' or my grandparents' generation, even more so than those of our generation, are very proud of us. They love seeing us on the news. And so for me, it's enjoyable to see my father proud of things like that.

This account by Min, who himself struggled with parents who initially strongly disagreed with and opposed to his career decision to work in music, reflects the increasingly diminishing attitudes of skepticism towards and rejection of cultural commoditization. Cultural commoditization, then, proves to offer opportunities for positive international representation and becomes a source of national pride, further strengthening Korean consumer nationalism and the faith in globalized industrial models.

C. The K-Pop Model

Concepts in political economy, such as "commoditization," "standardisation," and "rationalisation" provide valuable insight into the revolutionised production system

of K-pop. Delving deeper into the industrial processes within K-Pop, I examine the manners of idol production that distinguish K-Pop as a music industry with a business model that is difficult to be emulated. Soo Man Lee, pioneer of global idol culture and founder of SM Entertainment (one of the largest entertainment companies in South Korea and part of “The Big Three” alongside YG and JYP Entertainment) addresses his famous business model in 2001, contending that:

Even America has been unable to establish a management system like ours. Recruiting young trainees, signing them long-term contracts and putting them through years of intensive training – this just can’t happen there. (Kang 57)

Lee obviously does not offer more detailed insight into the type of contracts offered to trainees or the level of intensity of the training that prospective idols are put through. However, it has become well known that these long-term contracts include restrictions regarding the trainees’ personal lives. For example, one of the most important contractual conditions is that idols do not date, at least in the first three to four years of promotion. This goes to show how much importance is placed on keeping idols’ personal lives from interfering with their public image. The public image of the idol is then standardized and commoditized, to be displayed and marketed. This commoditization of the image can be best explained in terms of Karl Marx’s notions of “alienated labor” and “externalization.” Marx notes that:

The externalization of the worker in his product implies not only that his labour becomes an object, an exterior existence but also that it exists outside him, independent and alien, and becomes a self-sufficient power opposite him, that the life that he has lent to the object affronts him, hostile and alien. (79)

Marx continues to address the state of the laborer becoming a commodity in that “[l]abor does not only produce commodities; it produces itself and the laborer as a commodity” (78).

This standardized mode of Korean idol production has been compared to that of an assembly line. Though it may sound harsh, the South Korean idol production model can be described in terms of Fordist concepts. In *Post-Fordism, Gender and Work*, Andrea Wigfield analyses the emergence of early as well as newer, more flexible modes of production. First, she describes Fordism, which entails that the “unskilled” workforce is responsible for performing highly fragmented tasks. Indeed, the comparison can be made, especially for second generation idols, since entertainment company CEOs, such as SM’s Soo Man Lee, have often had to address claims that some of their idol group members are untalented. Idol groups are assembled according to a concept outlined by the entertainment company, and each member is selected according to the task they are set to fulfil.

A textbook example of an idol group comprises a leader (or the spokesperson and caretaker of the group), a lead singer (the most talented singer in the group), a rapper, an exceptional dancer, a visual (literally the pretty face of the group), and a member with a poppy personality who does especially well on variety shows. While each one of these members is still able to sing and dance well, this goes to show how these trained performers can be easily replaced when there is a need for it without affecting the production process. More recently, however, third generation prospective and debuting idols are being trained under a post-Fordist production model, as they are made to excel in all of the aforementioned skills, allowing more flexibility in potential

appeal to the fans' diverse tastes and increasing expectations. As the K-Pop industry becomes more and more competitive, entertainment companies realize the importance of a highly skilled and increasingly adaptable prospective idol who is equally skilled in all aspects of entertainment including singing, dancing, rapping, and even writing and composing music. Nevertheless, de-individualization is emphasized. Even though idols are stylized to give each member a unique look and character, the members "must not be distinctive enough to threaten the unity of their group" (Kang, as qtd. in Choi and Maliangkay 57). In other words, the members must be replaceable, or at least, in the event of a member leaving the group, their absence should not hinder the group's future activities.

Earlier this year, a dating controversy took the industry by storm, involving popular solo artist Hyuna and label mate E Dawn (member of boy group Pentagon) who were "outed" as a couple during an interview where they revealed they have been secretly dating for two years. The couple made the revelation without consulting with their agency, in an effort to quell the increasing rumors surrounding the two. This revelation caused uproar among fans and prompted the idols' label, Cube Entertainment, to terminate their contracts after delaying any public announcement or comment on the matter for days. Even though E Dawn was among Pentagon's most versatile talents and arguably the group's most prominent members, the label was still willing to let him go, in an effort to salvage the group's image and prevent it from escaping the charm circle. In industrial terms, this is common procedure for entertainment companies in order to maintain the integrity of their product and prevent it from being compromised. As such, the contemporary "K-Pop model" produces an idol who is highly trained in many aspects of performance, including music and stage

performance, public/social conduct, and gender (masculinity), making up the perfect artefact for appropriation in the process of fantextual creation.

D. The K-Pop Idol: Appropriation, Hybrid Masculinity and the Dual (De)Policing

To better understand Korean celebrity as the main artefact of the growing genre of K-Pop fanfiction, it is essential to consider the industrial processes within K-Pop, shedding light on the characteristics that distinguish it from other entertainment, mainly music, industries in the West (especially since it draws considerable inspiration from the American entertainment industry in cultural aesthetic and music style and features an impressive presence of Scandinavian song writers). These characteristics include innovative, yet sometimes extreme, consumerist practices, almost “cookie-cutter” methods of idol production, as well as a very special dynamic of idol-fan interactions and relations that is difficult to be found anywhere else –other than Japan and China (which also have J-Pop and C-Pop respectively) and a few neighboring Asian countries where K-Pop is very popular.

The methods of idol production mentioned above are the basis of the K-Pop industry. These methods include providing trainees (prospective idols) with extensive training whose intensity parallels that of military training. Trainees are “adopted” by entertainment companies who house them and take care of almost every detail in their lives. These companies end up policing different aspects of these young aspiring trainees’ daily lives, from education, nutrition, accommodation, personal lives, and even gender performativity. I am particularly interested in examining the gender performativity of male idols and male idol group members as seen in stage

performances and popular variety shows, as it creates the persona of the idol that is taken up as the central artefact for various works of fiction a significant portion of which upholds homosexual and homoerotic, or *slash*, themes. And because the Korean celebrity life is incredibly sheltered and policed, it breeds a rabidity in fans that can only be satisfied through the appropriation of the androgynous idol persona which presents itself as a suitable character for slashing.

In this industry there is a policing of gender performativity (as seen in stage performances and popular variety show appearances) at work, imposed by entertainment companies to appease particular fan fantasies and create and maintain a high, and unparalleled, level of engineered appeal, culminating in fascinating patterns of reception and consumption as well as a high level of fandom agency and involvement in the industry.

The Korean entertainment industry is notoriously known as extremely high-pressure. It fosters a survival-of-the-fittest work environment in which every trainee is a competitor for the covetable chance to debut in a group or as a solo artist. Talented youth are often scouted or recruited at a tender age at which they often lack the emotional and physical maturity to handle the gruelling promotion hours as well as the discipline of the industry and the scrutiny of a very harsh and involved fandom. The Korean public sets incredibly high standards of physical appearance (Koreans in general pay much attention to appearances) and behavior for idols and is armed by a plethora of social media platforms to pass instant judgment. Korean citizens of the internet or K-netizens (K-nets for short) are very involved when it comes to their favourite idols. They are also extremely harsh when it comes to idols or groups whom they perceive to be competing with their favourite acts. As a result, social media platforms, sites and

news outlets dedicated to K-Pop are rife with online criticism and attacks, often targeted at the idols' appearances, musical performance, even personal lives.

These attitudes are connected to the Korean culture and its emphasis on strict social correctness and decorum, which manifest in the language (using honorifics in speech), behaving differently around elders, even if the age difference is a few months. In speech for example, individuals of different ages will often reach a mutual agreement in order to start speaking "informally" with each other, that is, to drop honorifics on the junior's side and formal language on the elder's. Tattoos are also still considered taboo, and they are usually blurred if broadcasted on television. There is much emphasis on prohibition and clean appearance and living, which is generally reflected in Korean people's cultural "uptightness" as it is often called by non-Korean or Asian audiences, especially Western ones.

The pressures of the industry have been a hot topic numerous times in the past. Since the late 1990s, when K-Pop, film and TV dramas grew into an Asia-wide phenomenon, many young Korean talents have committed suicide as a result. Many have left behind notes about how harmful the industry is. The most recent case is the suicide of Kim Jung-Hyun, the front man of K-Pop sensation and one of the most popular K-Pop groups of all time, SHINee, an incident which has shocked and devastated millions across South Korea, Asia and the world. A farewell note written by the late pop star was made public a day after his suicide. It pointed to the crushing pressure that he felt from being a celebrity in South Korea. "I am broken from inside," Kim wrote in his note, "The depression that had been slowly eating me up finally devoured me and I couldn't defeat it. Maybe I wasn't supposed to come up against the world; maybe I wasn't supposed to be known to the world; I've learned that's what

[makes my life] difficult. How come I chose [sic] that” (Kil). The reasons behind Kim’s decision to take his life were never made clear. However, his last words reveal some of the dark truths behind K-pop’s glittering façade.

The crushing pressures facing idols have to do with the fans’ expectations of them and entertainment industries’ efforts to constantly meet these expectations. With this level of agency enacted by the fans, they have become entitled to be up-to-date about their favourite idols’ personal lives. Typical examples demonstrating this are instances where a popular idol is spotted out with a person of the opposite sex. News outlets are then quick to publish about a possible “dating scandal.” This is met with outrage from fans who expect public statements to be released by the idol’s entertainment agency which, in turn, almost always obliges with a public denial. K-fans are very meticulous and will look into the most trivial “evidence” they can find to “out” a potential idol couple.

One recent example of such scandal is that involving world famous pop idol Seok-Jin, member of one of the most popular boy groups in the world BTS (Bangtan Boys), and Solbin from the girl group LABOUM. Back in August of 2018, the pair made headlines after netizens had allegedly fished out new evidence to support the rumors surrounding the blooming romance between the two idols. On August 30, after the filming of M Countdown, a popular music show where idols and groups perform on stage to promote their newly released songs, Solbin was seen “disrespecting” Jin by acting very casually towards him given his social role as her *sunbae*, or senior—that is, by speaking to him informally. This led netizens to think the two may be more than mere acquaintances or colleagues. Later, as is customary, backstage photos of idols were released on social media, with all members of different groups posing for group

photos to be shared to the public (Kay). Photos of the two groups, BTS and Laboum showed the two members in question displaying hand gestures different from the rest of the fellow members in their respective groups with both Jin and Solbin displaying the victory sign made with the thumb and index finger as opposed to the peace signs displayed by the rest of the members. This did not go unnoticed by fans who rushed into speculations about the two members dating. Speculation was followed by backlash as fans communicated their dismay. Upon seeing the photos, one netizen who found the photos suspicious commented, “They didn’t do the regular ‘victory’ sign...the two must have coordinated it in the hallway.” Another shared, “These might come across as ‘nothing’ had Solbin not used informal language with Jin, 5 years her senior...” “Please don’t make it obvious,” another fan wrote (as quoted by Kay). A few days later, the pair’s respective entertainment agencies released public statements denying the rumors.

Examples such as these reflect the exploitation by fans of the idols who more often than not find themselves being undermined, attacked or harmed in the public eye for breaking social decorum, consciously or otherwise. On one hand, what this reveals about the fandom is the duality within which their attitudes function, exemplified by a contradiction between star exploitation and fan reception and support for the idols. On the other hand, what it reveals about the idol is that they are a public and democratic field embroiled in an active configuration of industry/fan policing, nation/fan support, and scandal. The K-Pop idol as Byronic celebrity then emerges out of an increasing public interest in their artistic persona that becomes tied to their person, encouraging further interest in their private life. For Byron, during the nineteenth century, this interest meant that after his death, cultural practices such as citation, appropriation and re-appropriation redeployed his work and embedded elements of his writing outside

literary contexts. For the K-Pop idol, it means that their manufactured persona would be appropriated and reinterpreted in a literary context through reading and writing fanfiction.

Another situation exemplifying the obsessive/possessive attitudes of fans towards male idols in particular is popular young actor Park Seo Joon. He recently spoke up about dating rumors surrounding him and fellow actress Park Min Young in light of the ending of the drama *What's Wrong with Secretary Kim* starring both actors. On July 31, Park Seo Joon sat for an interview at a cafe in Gangnam during which he answered a few questions regarding his relationship with co-star Park Min Young. Addressing the dating rumors, Park Seo Joon said:

"I couldn't help but read everything since it's about me." He then explained, "They were saying we have many same [clothing] items and traveled together. I wondered if I have to reveal my departure dates for proof. But in a way, I didn't think that was necessary since I haven't done anything wrong. As for the 'couple items', people who like clothes and are interested in fashion would know that the items were a trend during the time. I have them in several colors, but if you say I'm dating her just by the one that happens to overlap then I must be dating Justin Bieber too (laughs). I have nothing to say if you're going to forcefully fit things like that. Some say I was obvious but I'm not sure what was obvious."

Here I would like to extend the example of the "apology letter" as a genre born out of historical and cultural and ideological factors that characterize South Korean individuals, which also reflects the strict Korean moral code and fandom agency.

Bennett suggests that not only can genres be regarded as literary kinds to be accounted for socio-genetically, but also, more appropriately, regarded as "themselves directly sets of social relations which, in structuring the sphere of reading practices, serve also to condition writing practices." By this Bennett means that genres are organized fields of

sociality that generate the writing practices they require in order to be sustained (105). No matter how straight jacketed the industry may be, K-Pop idols still get involved in situations that provoke the disapproval of the public. More often than not, the only way to gain back the masses' amnesty is through a hand-written apology letter that is often photographed and uploaded on the idols' social media, mostly Instagram accounts (which are monitored by their companies.) The apology letter is a prevalent and commonly used genre in rhetorical correspondence within the K-Pop industry. According to Lisa Villadsen, official apologies provide a standard for a given community in relation to the norms and principles that characterize it. "Unlike the personal apologia," she explains, "where the nature and degree of wrongdoing is typically contested, the official apology in effect acknowledges wrongdoing, and the rhetorical act is meant to demonstrate one's recognition of the error, assumption of responsibility, and moral distancing from the act" (33). An apology letter written by a K-Pop idol usually does all of these things; the idol acknowledges whatever wrongdoing the public deems them to have committed, assumes their error, and promises to be more mindful of their actions and not to disappoint the public in the future.

Additionally, the fact that the apology letter is usually hand written does not go unnoticed, as it is expected in order for the apology to be believed as sincere. The use of the apology letter reflects the common cultural expectation that an apology is in order in a situation like dating scandal, behaving outside accepted social decorum, announcing an unexpected marriage or engagement, and a sincere apology can only be hand written. The use of this genre is directly related to the prevalent notion that the fans are what "make" the idols, and so these idols are eternally indebted to them, meaning they are

expected to keep them happy and constantly gaining and trying to maintain their approval.

There is a real and strong sense of ownership and loyalty on the part of the fans, and this ties the idols to their fans up to alarming degrees at times. K-Pop idols are generally known as very humble and hardworking. They do not take their fame and careers for granted as the industry is very competitive and difficult to maneuver. And finally getting the chance to advance from trainee to idol is an incredible feat. Hence, idols will go to great lengths to appease both their fans and agencies and interact with their fans, not without the insistence of their agencies of course, but they will happily celebrate their birthdays with their fans and even update them daily through posts and videos through Instagram, Twitter and V Live (Korean live video streaming service that allows Korean-based celebrities to broadcast live videos on the internet as well as live chat with fans from around the world). Despite the highly manufactured aspect of the industry, this interaction allows the idols to appear human and approachable to fans who strongly identify with their idols and relate to them on intimate levels. In interviews and public appearances, K-Pop boy groups often say “cute” things like “I’m married to my fans” or “my girlfriend is [fan club name].” While having a loyal fan base in many cases guarantees a successful career for these idols and pleases their agencies, it is still a troubling situation for the idols who are constantly appeasing their fans’ fantasies.

The situation of keeping idols in check also has to do with how the culture emphasizes prohibition and clean living (using honorifics in speech, dressing modestly, special regard for elders, etc.) which warrants the policing and keeping idols’ personal lives from interfering with their public image. The public image of the idol, the celebrity as cultural product, is then standardized and commoditized, to be displayed,

marketed and consumed. This commoditization of the image can be best explained in terms of Karl Marx's notions of "alienated labor" and "externalization." Marx notes that,

The externalization of the worker in his product implies not only that his labour becomes an object, an exterior existence but also that it exists outside him, independent and alien, and becomes a self-sufficient power opposite him, that the life that he has lent to the object affronts him, hostile and alien. (79)

Marx continues to address the state of the laborer becoming a commodity in that "[l]abor does not only produce commodities; it produces itself and the laborer as a commodity" (78). As such, the celebrity emerges as a cultural commodity, a democratic social form, a spectacle for scandal and a "forum of public opinion," as Tuite puts it (*Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* xix). The K-Pop idol, then, is appropriated, interpreted and reinterpreted both on the cultural and the textual level, through imaginative narratives read and circulated among fans in different parts of the world.

Part of the anxiety around policing male idols' masculinities is connected to the fandom's expectations from the industry, especially in relation to the idols' personal lives and sexualities. The K-Pop industry is built on the element of spectacle for fans, and fan practices stress their tendency towards scandal as they replicate the moralism that we see in the public apology letter for example. Yet, the fans, and the industry, strive on scandal, which continuously serves to further the policing of the idols' lives, including their masculinity. These complex desires and anxieties are manifested in a number of tendencies in fanfiction plots and themes. I discuss these in my third chapter.

E. Queering K-Pop Acts: Fit for Fanfiction

The K-Pop industry realizes the power of gender and sexuality and utilizes them, by the policing of performativity in particular ways, in order to create and maintain a certain high, and frankly unparalleled, level of engineered appeal, culminating in fascinating patterns of reception and consumption that only serve to strengthen the industry (and the nation) economically and geopolitically. No body of work has addressed the politics and extensive industrial dynamics behind this hybridity or recognized this hybrid masculinity as a policed one. What I aim to do by problematizing this masculinity is show how its reception and perception by fans are reflected in the themes taken up and explored in the fanfics, showing the duality between perpetuating further policing and temporary depolicing enacted by fans to enjoy their idols be played out in unrealizable plots.

I problematize this hybrid masculinity by looking into the underlying efforts behind its culmination and addressing the paradoxes that allow certain levels of transgressing gender policing of gender performativity in the South Korean music industry against generally conservative social attitudes which in themselves allow this aforementioned hybridity, while simultaneously upholding norms and carefully keeping the idols in check. The concept of gender performativity that Judith Butler presents in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” sees masculinity as culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized bodily performances such as dressing, speaking, and acting. Similarly, the hybrid masculinity of Korean male idols is constructed through the repeated bodily performances that reinforce this type of masculinity.

As for the aspect of policed performativity, contemporary research often addresses the particular type of masculinity into which South Korean male idols may fall, often calling their masculinity a hybrid one. Indeed, South Korean male idol masculinity is a hybrid masculinity in the sense that idols often shift in their stage performances and television appearances from aggressive, über-masculine personas into softer, even feminine ones. In *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption*, Sun Jung discusses the masculinity of South Korean male idols, describing this masculinity as a hybrid and versatile one (163). Indeed, this masculinity, portrayed mostly during stage performances, is a hybrid masculinity in the sense that idols shift in the “levels” of masculinity, at times delivering aggressive hyper-masculine performances, displaying soft or cute masculinities while performing the coveted *aegyo* (literally acting cute) for fans, to cross-dressing to perform popular girl group songs. Fan service also includes “skinship,” which is when idols perform an often homoerotic intimacy, almost always involving the idols taking off their shirts, as part of the show. These performances are highly sensationalized, and out of them ships, or male/male pairings (romantic protagonist coupling) are born, which are taken up as main artefacts in the fanfics.

Jung also adds that, in the hybridization of this masculinity, the industry employs *mugukjeok* or “the effort to make South Korean stars Asianized and/or globalized” in order to play down [the idols’] Korean specificity (ibid.). Whereas fan fiction about other forms of entertainment relies on original material such as complete narratives in novels or TV series to create new material, it is this type of masculinity that makes the K-Pop idol a compelling artefact for K-Pop fanfiction. K-Pop fans build on their favourite idol’s characters, or personas, and explore these characters by placing

them in unrealizable plots, as I will explain in the next chapter, that cater to the fantasies of both the writers and the readers.

The dominant of slash fanfics consists in the dual policing and depolicing of K-Pop idols and interpreting their sexualities in ways that appease fan fantasies and by sexualizing their idols while keeping away the idea of them being emotionally or physically intimate with someone of whom they do not know and/or approve. Thus, this genre consists in the contradiction between the fans' anxieties about their idols' romantic life and their desire to imagine their idols in vulnerable and romantic situations. Fans would like to further explore the prospects and go further, something that the industry would not allow. These limitations are imposed on the idol by the entertainment agency as well as the public, and the agency even more so because of the public.

The slash genre within K-Pop fanfiction can be accounted for in terms of some social characteristics distinguishing these dualities within which the readers and writers. The slash trope demonstrates a policing function in line with the industry in that it contains the transgression at the textual level while being granted the space and freedom to explore these transgressions and enjoy them. It finds its support in the policing and depolicing, with the frustration being transcoded as a homoerotic relationship.

To recapitulate, by taking into consideration the historical, cultural, situational and contextual relationships necessary, as discussed above, I apply a rhetorical theory of genre and extend it to the literary genre. Doing so situates fanfiction within the "triangulation of writer-reader-text" and acknowledges the interactive nature of textual meaning as well as the embeddedness of all these elements within history, context and

culture. In the third chapter of this project, I will undertake a literary analysis of a number of “canonical” fanfics and discuss their dominating themes. I will also continue my discussion on (m/m) slashing, or the pairing of two male K-Pop idols to be romantically and sexually involved in fanfiction, followed by a brief discussion in my coda of the growing K-Pop fan culture (literary and nonliterary) that is emerging in different parts of the Middle East, while focusing on the K-Pop community in Lebanon.

CHAPTER IV

VIEWING, WRITING, READING: K-POP FANFICTION AS PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE (SLASH) LITERARY TEXT

It is quite challenging to approach writing about the topic of fanfiction since it has become increasingly widespread. If we are to approach the topic to perform a general study, it would be helpful to stick to general fandoms, the biggest and most widespread, providing examples that are familiar to a large group of people. However, it seems that the most reasonable way to approach a study is to either limit it to a specific genre of fanfiction or a specific fandom, which I will do in my study. I shall focus on the genre of slash, one of the three main genres within the field of fanfiction including gen and het. Gen refers to a general story in which romantic relationships between the characters are not imposed. Het denotes a story which revolves around a heterosexual relationship, which in the case of K-Pop fanfiction may either be a mary-sue, in which the reader inserts herself in the story, or just an AU (alternate universe, which can apply to all K-Pop fanfiction) in which the protagonist/idol is paired with a fictional character or a female idol, the latter being quite rare, whereas slash denotes a homosexual relationship, most often a male/male one. I will focus on the latter as it defines the genre that constitutes the K-Pop fanfiction canon, encompassing the most popular fandom fanfics, and so it is most representative of the works by K-Pop fans of their attitudes, fantasies and anxieties.

In *The Democratic Genre: Fan fiction in a Literary Context*, Sheenagh Pugh introduces fanfiction and provides some basic definitions in addition to more detailed

explanations on fandom and fanfiction, taking five prominent fandoms as examples. The reader may not be familiar with the examples that Pugh uses, but they are very well known within the global fandom community and give great insight into the examination of fanfiction as a form of storytelling. Similarly, to the reader that is mostly familiar with big fandoms as popular topics for fanfiction, the fandoms and topics I will use as subjects of my study will seem like unknowns, but they are quite popular within the K-Pop community of fan readers.

This chapter will deal more closely with the text of fanfiction. My reading of these fanfics will further illustrate the complex factors which shape the stories written by fans about their favorite male idols. The texts I have chosen to analyze are considered to be “classics” in the K-Pop fanfiction realm. I undertake a textual analysis of popular fanfics *Anterograde Tomorrow* and *House of Cards* and identify formal and textual aspects that make up these literary works. I will read these fanfics as literature and identify textual and formal aspects that characterize the genre of literature to which they belong. Before doing so, I will discuss why slash is such a popular genre among fans, and K-Pop fans in particular, and identify the aspects and attitudes that make K-Pop slash fiction resonate with fans, especially female fans. I will also explore how cultural practices and fan attitudes towards their idols manifest through the fanfiction that is written by the fans for the fans, in a community with shared beliefs and attitudes.

A. Fan Consumption and Participatory Culture: Slashing the Idols/Protagonists

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau's stance regarding the alienation of the television viewer in his book is that the viewer has been "dislodged from the product; he plays no role in its apparition. He loses the author's rights and becomes, or so it seems, a pure receiver" (31). However, de Certeau still maintains that there is a possibility that readers of literary works may become writers, even if their writing is limited to "scribbling" or writing within the margins (ibid.). The consumption of K-pop evokes participatory tendencies and encourages active interpretation of the forms of entertainment being consumed, as fans are thinking critically about these forms and transforming them for their purposes.

If this is so then the consumer of K-Pop, I contend, is not a passive receiver as de Certeau would hold. Television text offers much potential for the consumer to poach, blurring in this practice the boundaries between reader and writer, consumer and producer, as fans employ their autonomy, technology, agency, reciprocal responsibility and correspondence with the entertainment agencies to support and help spread the *Hallyu* wave and facilitate the consumption of K-Pop for fans around the world. In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins contends that "the fans' particular viewing stance sparks recognition that the program is open to intervention and active appropriation. [...] [T]he fans' meta-text, whether perpetuated through gossip or embodied within written criticism, already constitutes a form of rewriting" (158). This meta-text constitutes the fans' own speculations, inferences, and, I would add, desires that orient and shape the process of fan reception. As such, in contrast to de Certeau's stance, not only readers of literary works may

become writers, but visual consumers are also capable of cultural and literary production.

Fan writing can be viewed in highly individualized terms if we consider the astonishing vastness of creative and diversified stories and plots, aided by the diminishing barriers of publishing and muddying the boundaries between writer and reader. Jenkins' survey includes some of the dominant approaches that audiences employ when writing about their favourite forms of entertainment, which indicate "the community's characteristic strategies of interpretation, appropriation, and reconstruction" (165). Jenkins illustrates ten ways in which fans rewrite television shows, of which three directly apply to the writing practices performed by fans in writing K-Pop fanfics; recontextualization, emotional intensification, and eroticization. Recontextualization re-imagines the central artefact, the K-Pop idol, in a new context, as a character that is written into alternate histories and futures; emotional intensification explores the character's emotional struggles and brings out their vulnerability, whereas eroticization appeases the fan writers and readers' sexual fantasies by imagining the idol/character pairing in homoerotic and/or homosexual situations. In the case of K-Pop fanfiction, the fans are pulling characters and narrative plots "from the margins" —a phrase used by Jenkins to describe how fans are actively engaging and interpreting the visual content at the textual level. In this active interpretation, they are able to act upon their conceptions about K-Pop acts within their field and focus on, highlight, and/or extend what they deem to be unrepresented, impossible, or even unacceptable.

As such, fans will publish their own narratives that will build upon the assumptions of what Jenkins calls the "meta-text" (assumptions, perceptions,

inferences), responding to the desires of the fan community. Hence, fans engage in the creation and distribution of forms of cultural production that reflect the mutuality of this community. It is up to the fans to be responsive to each other's desires and interests, so they produce their fan texts in dedicative manners accordingly. Within the K-Pop fanfiction community, this mutuality is manifested in the genre of slash where the strategies of recontextualization, emotional intensification, and eroticization are put into use.

Sheenagh Pugh puts it quite simply that “most slash is still written and read by a female audience and whatever other political or literary goals it may have, it is a genre which aims to do something in a way that pleases women” (*Democratic Genre* 110). At this point I owe the reader a belated definition of slash and an overview of its origins. In her book Pugh provides a historical overview of the genre of slash, dating the first “adult” fic back to the writings of fans for their 70s *Star Trek* fanzine, which paved the way for more fandoms, such as *Star Wars*, *The Man from UNCLE*, *Blake 7* (B7) and *Starsky and Hutch*, to follow suit and write adult fanfiction about their universes (90). Pugh explains that “adult” at the time referred to explicit and heterosexual. However, the year 1974 saw a change in this label after the publishing of what has come to be known as “slash” fiction, “A Fragment of Time,” a fanfic by Diane Marchant for the fanzine *Group#3*, in which she discreetly wrote Kirk and Spock as lovers. This made way for the pairing K/S, which meant that the story will feature a same-sex romantic, maybe also sexual, relationship between the two characters, as opposed to the K-U pairing, with the characters Kirk and Uhura, referring to a het or heterosexual fic. The slash pairing later evolved into m/m, meaning the fanfic will feature a male/male, homosexual pairing. As a result, *slash*

became the name of this type of fiction, and *het* or adult referred to heterosexual romantic/sexual fanfiction. Slash later spread to more universes and became much more visible, even though there is still more het than slash.

According to Catherine Driscoll in “One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance,” “the early novel and romance fiction are primarily written and consumed by women” (*Fan Fiction and Fan Communities* 81). In “Slash Fiction and Human Mating Psychology,” Catherine Salmon and Don Symons add that “romance novels have been called, with some justification, ‘women’s pornography’” (as qtd. in Driscoll 96). The consumption of these texts applies to fanfiction, and K-Pop fanfiction, as it is also not a secret that most fanfiction writers are women, and almost all slash writers are women. Pugh cites Mark McLelland’s “Why Are Japanese Girls’ Comics Full of Boys Bonking?” in which he denounces the general attitudes of surprise and fascination with women’s interest in male homosexual intimacy. McLelland relates it to the fact that “in Japan, as elsewhere, men are granted greater license to experiment with sexuality than women (as qtd. in *Democratic Genre* 92). So why should men’s interest in lesbianism be taken for granted while the interest of women in male homosexuality elicit so much fascination and interpretation? Some slash works fetishize m/m relationships the same way straight men fetishize lesbians and their sexuality. McLelland makes a very logical point, of course. However, there are many other reasons why women like to read about men “bonking.”

In *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys*, Lucy Neville, investigates what women enjoy about consuming, and sometimes producing, gay male erotic media including slash fiction, she provides many reasons pertaining to why women enjoy, and often prefer, male homosexual erotica. Neville explains, “m/m content is only

consumed because it offers a form of escapism from women's confined roles within heterosexual erotica, presenting women with the sort of equal relationship they could never hope to achieve with a man themselves" (9). Similar reasoning is provided by Anne Jamison in *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*, in which she sees that gender inequality and typical gender roles do not exist in a same-sex relationship. Jamison and Neville make a very strong point concerning the subversion of power dynamics manifested in slash fiction and/or gay porn. At the end of the day, two men will easily be perceived as equals, while a woman, due to conditioned societal attitudes, will often be considered the man's inferior. Thus, women find the idea of a totally equal dynamic both satisfying and fascinating.

"Fanfiction happens," Pugh further explains, "in the gaps between canon –the unexplored or insufficiently explored territory" (*Democratice Genre* 92). In earlier fandoms, there was a lack of development of female characters, as women were underrepresented in most universes both in fanzines and on TV, and the ones that enjoyed more visibility were often underwritten. As a result, male characters were often more relatable and easier to imagine in hypothetical/alternate situations in fanfiction, as their characters and plots were significantly more fleshed out. Pugh adds that since women are not the ones who struggle with intimacy issues, it is more fun to get men to deal with them (*ibid.*). However, the gap lies in the constipated emotions of the leading male figures. The male protagonists struggle with expressing their emotions and often show little to no vulnerability.

In the K-Pop industry, love and romance for idols are unexplored territory, scandalized even. Add to that the policing of national and commercial broadcasting in South Korea, which means that on screen, no matter how intimate idol members may

get in their interactions, be it in interviews or variety shows, this intimacy is brushed off with lighthearted banter. However, more leeway is given during their concerts which are usually not televised. This leeway can manifest in suggestive or explicit male on male erotic behavior as part of fan service, often dubbed as “gay baiting” by skeptics, since it is an active ploy by entertainment companies who acknowledge the fans’ particular enjoyment of such segments. These aspects constitute a determining social ground for the characterization of the idols in the fanfics. Idols still fail to realize their full emotional/erotic potential, so fans will take to fanfiction to write stories of what could have been, allowing more fruition to the homoerotic relationships that seem to connect the idols together. Writers escape from the constraints of national broadcasting and are free to explore the erotic dimensions of these relationships. There is also a shared desire to explore these moments, and fan writers are happy to respond to the desires of their community, to continue these narratives through the creation of their own versions of the characters’ lives.

Hence, slash fanfic is written to fill the gap and moderate the dilemma in which fans want to see their idols romantically and sexually involved but in a policed way, one that only serves their needs and does not unsettle whatever relationship they have with their idols. As such, readers would not only enjoy imagining two of their favourite good-looking idols being intimate, but they are also comforted knowing that they are still available in real life. The lack of female representation persists in this genre, as writers would not want to ruin the fantasy by bringing in a woman into their stories.

Even though it may be regarded as subpar or associated with trashy literature, even pornography, slash fanfiction can contain some of the most heightened writing in fanfic. Pugh contends that the central purpose of slash is to further develop the male

characters that are not very emotionally open and write them as more vulnerable, however explicit the manifestations of this vulnerability may get (ibid. 106). Not all slash fanfics involve eroticism or explicit sex, although most of them do, but there is a level of vulnerability, an opening up to one's feelings and struggling with their emotions that are central to the slash genre. This makes slash fiction more of a hurt/comfort development rather than something exclusively sexual. Pugh adds, "slash was originally also essentially about men and their emotions, though since it was written by women the male characters they wrote inevitably partook of their own character, experiences and wishes" (*Democratic Genre* 97). "If they didn't have issues with vulnerability and emotion it wouldn't be [slash], and neither would it if it involved two male characters for whom falling for each other was no great matter" (98). Hence, the very fact the two male protagonists want to be together but cannot for many reasons; societal pressure, personal issues, or trauma, provides the ultimate slash fantasy full of angst and hurt, but with the endearing moments of comfort and solace that the protagonists find in each other's company.

Although generally writers of fan fiction are women, in the case of K-Pop fanfiction, I observe that a significant portion is made up of international fans, fans who are twice removed from the industry and do not enjoy the privileges of being part of the national fandom who enjoy many perks, like being able to attend fan meetings and fan signing events, where fans can enjoy the luxury of being in proximity with their idols. These fans also have much easier access to official merchandise and other products related to the idols and their fandom. As a result, international fans take to fanfiction to further the consumption of their favourite K-Pop acts and compensate for the missed opportunities.

As such, K-pop slash fanfiction is a genre in which gender, fantasy, and dynamics of power interact and play out at the textual level, through a transcoding of the narrative structure, queering of the artefacts and performing a dual policing and depolicing by recording forbidden sexual encounters between the fans' favourite idol members. This transcoding is done while maintaining that this queering and intimacy remains bound within the realm of fan text. This duality displays the fans' own ways of working within a restrictive system and conservative cultural norms to explore a type of queer intimacy simultaneously free from and bound by conventions. This process of queering and dually (de)policing is evident in the fanfic classics that I discuss in the next section.

B. Textual Analysis: K-Pop Canon

In general, fanfiction readers, and readers of the K-Pop genre regard fanfiction as a legitimate form of literature, so much so that popular fanfics that have been circulating among readers for years are now considered "classics," over the years constituting a canon which every avid K-Pop fanfiction reader must be familiar with. Since readers always talk about what they read, K-Pop sites and online fanfiction platforms abound with fans writing lengthy recommendations of the texts they enjoyed, or joining discussions about general principles of fandom writing, and often asking questions such as 'what do I read?', 'what are the best BTS fanfics?', 'what are the most popular fanfics in K-Pop fandom?' It is through these discussions that fans can create a shared knowledge of the fan texts circulating online.

Such fanfic classics include *Anterogarde Tomorrow* (2012) by Changdictator (most authors publish under usernames), which is also listed as a book on Goodreads, and *House of Cards* by sugamins. These fanfics are found on different fanfiction platforms such as Wattpad.com, AsianFanfics.net, Fanfiction.com and LiveJournal.com, where users circulate these texts (with or without permission of the original authors) to garner more readership.

In the fanfics that I am going to discuss, we will observe how fans appropriate the idol persona and work it into plots that are unrealizable or unacceptable, allowing them to work within a duality of policing and depolicing that appeases their fantasies while upholding cultural norms in the real world.

C. Fandom Classics: *Anterograde Tomorrow* (EXO) and *House of Cards* (BTS)

Anterograde Tomorrow

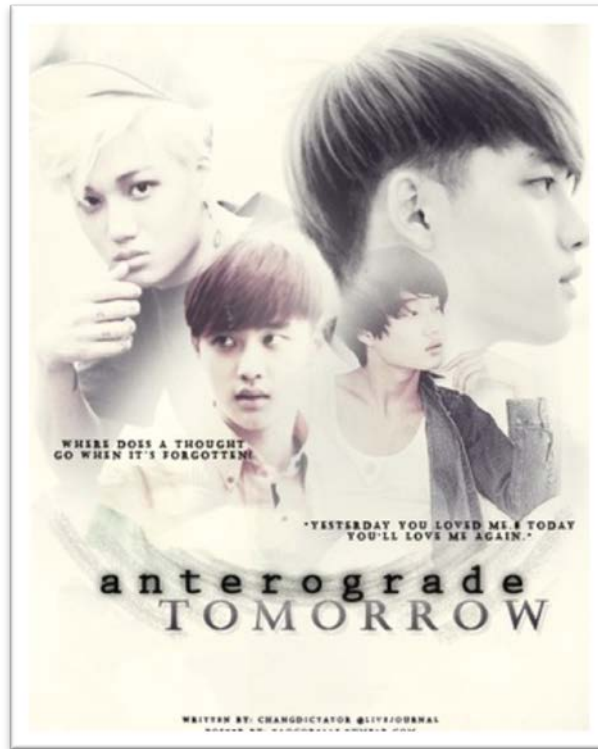


Fig. 1 *Anterograde Tomorrow* book cover on Goodreads

Sunlight drifts into Kyungsoo’s dream, refracts into something cool and salty and maybe involving heels digging into the soft overlap between ocean and beach. He turns and the wet sand transforms into cold linens. (Prologue: Daisies 3)

Anterograde Tomorrow (AT for short) is one of the most popular pieces of K-Pop fanfiction online, and arguably the most popular piece of EXO fanfiction — fanfiction written about members of the boy group EXO. Written by changdictator on popular fanfiction site livejournal.com, the fanfic has garnered an immense readership and popularity and is still being read and circulated among new and old K-Pop and

EXO fans (or EXOL's, the official EXO fandom name) to this day. In 2014, an entry about the fanfic was made on Urban Dictionary, defining it as:

An EXO fanfic with the "Kaisoo" pairing (Kai (Kim Jongin) and Do Kyungsoo) written by changdictator on livejournal. It's arguably the most popular piece of fanfiction in the EXO fandom. *Anterograde Tomorrow* is about a young man with amnesia, Do Kyungsoo, and the writer Kim Jongin (Kai), and how they fell in love. This fic is popular because of its storyline, writing style, and heart-wrenching and tear-inducing scenes. (Urban Dictionary)

This piece of fanfiction was written in 2012 by changdictator on livejournal.com, cementing her as a household (user)name in the K-Pop fanfiction community worldwide, but the fic was taken down by the author a few years later due to the unauthorized circulation of her work on other sites such as Wattpad. Upon the removal of the fanfic from LiveJournal, fans and readers speculated about the reasons behind her decision to do so. On April 18, 2015, changdictator replied to an anonymous question on askfm.com, an online platform where users can log in and ask questions about any topic anonymously, as to why she decided to take down her work from LiveJournal. Expressing her frustration, she wrote, "One VERY obvious reason is that when i [sic] try to lock or modify my work, i can't lock/modify (by lock she means making the work available only for users who have accounts on LiveJournal) what has been reposted by other people. i can't do what i wish with my own things. And that is extremely inconvenient and frustrating." She continues:

I know this point might be hard to understand if you don't actively produce work for fandom but when I contribute something, I still think of whatever I contributed as my own. no [sic] matter how much it means to fandom it's mine. I'm happy to share it when i WANT to share it. but [sic] now that i do not want to, i'm still FORCED to share it because other people have reposted it. i'm happy my work enhanced your exo experience. i'm flattered that so

many people took the time read it. but just because you spent a few minutes breaking your heart over it doesn't mean it's yours. (askfm.com)

Although the author has removed the fanfic from LiveJournal, it can still be found, much to the author's dismay, circulating fanfiction websites, one of which is Wattpad, registering more than 230 thousand reads, meaning more than 230 thousand fans have read the unauthorized version alone. This goes to show how the author loses control, and authority, over their writings. It can also still be found in the form of a widely circulated PDF file along with a fan made cover and a content page. *Anterograde Tomorrow* is also listed as a book on Goodreads, the largest site for readers and book recommendations in the world, featuring cover art by a dedicated fan. This fanfic has received, and still receives, a lot of praise from readers online. To quote what one user on Goodreads, Christian, had this to say about this classic piece:

Friends, if you must know, the saddest story in the world is not *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Me Before You*, *A Walk to Remember* or any of the most acclaimed tragic novels out there. The saddest story is right here, and it's a *fanfiction*.

Readers of K-Pop fanfiction, especially if they belong to the fandom whose idol is the center of the fanfic, take great pride in each other's work and show a lot of support for members of the fandom who are actively making their idols more known.



Fig. 2 Unofficial cover for *Anterograde Tomorrow* (PDF)

I will be using and referring to the PDF version of the fanfic for citation purposes but will go back to the unauthorized version shared by the user affxtionatexol on Wattpad for the purpose of showing fan interaction and response (through comments) to different parts of the story. The content page of the former version contains the following:

Title: Anterograde Tomorrow

Pairing: Kaisoo

Rating: R

Genre: Romance, Tragedy, slight angst

Length: Three-shot

Summary: Kyungsoo is stuck in the hours while Jongin begs the seconds, because time stops for someone who can't remember and runs from someone who can't miss the last train home.

The above information provides the reader with what to expect from the fanfic. In addition to the title and length (three shots, meaning parts or chapters), it includes the name of the romantic pairing (or ship, short for relationship) around which the story will revolve. Catherine Driscoll explains that online fanfiction archives are usually structured to be searchable according to pairings. Some are even limited to specific pairings (Hellekson and Busse 85). She describes the “most spectacular” generic convention used by readers and writers in organizing and labelling fanfiction, which entails posting fanfics with pairing labels that represent the romantic pair of protagonists in the story (ibid. 85).

In the case of this fanfic, the pairing is labelled “Kaisoo,” which is the combination of the real names of the two members to be romantically involved, Kim Jongin (more famously known as Kai) and Do Kyungsoo (last name comes first in Korean). Hence, the combination of “Kai” and “Soo” from Kyungsoo makes up the pairing “Kaisoo.” It is important to note that ships can be forceful divisions in fandom and fanfic texts, with some ships having more devoted followers compared to others. The “Kaisoo” ship for example is arguably the most popular pairing according to EXO fans, and thanks to *Anterograde Tomorrow*, it was further cemented as a fandom favourite. A simple label search on AO3 will generate more than 45 thousand results for fanfics written about Kai and Do Kyungsoo, more than any pairing combining two other EXO members. To return to the information listed in the content page, *AT* is

rated R (restricted) due to its explicit erotic content and is listed under the subgenres “Romance, Tragedy, and slight angst” since the protagonists are part of a romance, are in a state of suffering, and the story may or may not end with the death of one of the protagonists (*Anterograde Tomorrow 2*).

The story revolves around Kyungsoo (in real life member and main vocal of EXO), a young man who suffers from anterograde amnesia, a type of short-term memory loss affecting his ability to recall the recent past as a result of a traumatic car accident which he survived, but which killed his best friend Baekhyun (member and vocal of EXO). As a result, any event from after the accident cannot register in Kyungsoo’s memory, and he is stuck in a loop, reliving the day before the accident four years ago. Since he cannot keep any new memories, Kyungsoo relies on a scrapbook which he updates on a daily basis with people’s pictures, his interactions with them, including both mundane and significant happenings throughout the day. He wakes up every day to the sight of green sticky notes covering the wall of his bedroom which he also reads to be reminded of the fact that he suffers from “antesomething” (anterograde) amnesia, as well as some of the latest updates posted by him of his visitors (3). In Kyungsoo's scrapbook of faces and dates, there are the pictures and names of people with whom he has interacted and others with whom he is close, including his friends Zitao, Yifan, and Baekhyun, all of whom are members of EXO. The inclusion of members of the idol group other than the protagonist pairing as minor characters is a common practice for K-Pop fanfiction writers. Although these characters are often barely fleshed out or given significant roles, their presence solidifies the fanfic as part of a specific (here EXO) fandom text.

Meanwhile Jongin (in real life member and main dancer of EXO) is a writer who has recently moved in next door, claiming to be an author wanting to write about Kyungsoo's life as an amnesiac for his upcoming book, when he only wants to be able to be close to Kyungsoo. The theme of angst in the story is manifested in Jongin's relentless, albeit frustrated, efforts to make Kyungsoo remember him every day while dealing with a disease that has left him only a few months to live.

The events are narrated in scenes that flow chronologically but shift abruptly to signify the passing of time. The story features a sequence of escalating intimacy despite Jongin having to meet Kyungsoo again for the first time every day, as the memories seem to begin to register at unconscious levels for Kyungsoo. At times, however, Jongin is defensive and distant. He is overcome with the frustration of having to regain Kyungsoo's trust and affection every time they meet, all while battling his own struggles with the fact that he only has a few months to live. Nevertheless, the pair is still able to develop a playful intimacy that escalates into a romance finally consummated with a first kiss in the second shot:

Jongin cups Kyungsoo's jaw and tilts his chin, and their first memory is of one kissing away the disquiet. And strangely, it is one that Kyungsoo cannot bring himself to record [in his scrapbook]. (23)

On Wattpad, there is the option for readers and users to comment on every section, or short passage, of a fanfic text, allowing them to interact with the texts and their authors and give direct feedback. A look at the variation in the number of comments next to every section of this fanfic helps provide a look at where and when most of the interaction by readers is registered. The quoted section above registers more than 80 comments, a significant increase in comparison to previous sections in the shot which

register an average of 50 comments or no comments at all. For this section, fans rejoice at the development of a love story between Kyungsoo and Jongin, expressing both their excitement and approval of how the plot is advancing. This increase in activity shows how much fans anticipate and enjoy instances of homoerotic interaction and homosocial behaviour in general. Another increase in comments can be observed on the following section, registering 150 comments:

“Listen,” Jongin says, “this is me, in love with you,” and he brings their hands over Kyungsoo's chest, and Kyungsoo is suddenly aware of how hard his own heart is pounding out of his chest and the sudden heat in his cheeks, “and this, it sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it?” (31)

Although we notice reader interaction and response on sections where the two are engaging in explicitly erotic behaviour, much higher interaction can be observed for sections in which the genre of angst is more played out, as displayed in the above excerpts. Since the readers take for granted that this is a slash fic with an m/m pairing, the explicit homoeroticism is not anticipated as much as the display of high levels of emotional vulnerability between the protagonists. In the following excerpt, we notice a significant spike in the interaction as it registers more than 350 comments. In the same shot, Kyungsoo realizes, after calling Baekhyun's mother to check up on him, that he is the survivor of the car crash that killed his best friend. He slips into a state of tormenting guilt until he breaks down before Jongin. To quote Kyungsoo:

[She] said to never call her again and then she apologized. To me. [sic] Because she couldn't even blame me for calling her to remind her that Byun Baekhyun's dead. That he was killed in the same accident. That I was the one who survived instead of him. (21)

The story comes to a close when Jongin is finally admitted to the hospital having become too ill. The next day, Kyungsoo is reminded by the notes on his scrapbook and some additional notes on his wall (including a note he had written on his hand to wish Jongin a happy birthday) that he must visit Jongin, a stranger, but somehow it makes sense. Their final interaction sees Kyungsoo hesitantly say “Happy birthday to us,” to a dying Jongin (50). A few days later, Kyungsoo is paid a visit from Jongin’s editor, Oh Sehun (in real life rapper in EXO), who introduces himself and hands him a notebook. Kyungsoo takes the notebook and flips to the last page to read the famous and oft quoted, “My name is Jongin. I’m the writer who lives next door. See you tomorrow, hyung. Don’t forget!” –the opening sentence of the book that Jongin managed to write after all. The word *hyung* is a Korean honorific (here Romanized) and literally means “big brother.” It is used by a male to address an older male friend or sibling. Furthermore, at some point in the fanfic, Kyungsoo admonishes Jongin for speaking to him informally (i.e. dropping honorifics). The usage of such a term shows how fanfic writers display their knowledge of Korean culture and mannerisms when writing about their idols.

Before moving to a reading of another K-Pop classic, a few notes on characterization. Although authors create characters with distinct traits, giving them different histories and writing different futures every time, elements of the idol persona often make their way into the fan text. For example, Jongin, although an achieved writer, expresses to Kyungsoo that his passion lies in dancing, a nod to the reality of the idol inspiring the character, as Kim Jongin (Kai) is the main dancer in EXO. Similarly, Kyungsoo, main vocal of EXO, sings at a local bar as a pastime. Fans like to keep in mind that it is their favourite pop stars their stories are centered around.

Finally, although fans relish moments of intimacy in fanfiction and enjoy viewing homosocial and homoerotic behaviour amongst their favourite idol members in general, it is important to remember that they will explicitly reject any performativity that exceeds the limits of text and/or fan service. This means that fans, especially Korean fans, will not allow or accept if any of the idols was indeed homosexual, or even in a relationship, as that threatens the idol's availability on one hand, and on the other, (for homosexuality) it contradicts nationally and socially accepted norms regarding gender. As such, fans engage in multiple levels of policing, de-policing, then policing again when they uphold cultural norms and replicate what the industry requires of idols (police), free/queer idol relationships in fanfiction (de-police) and still reject homosexuality in real life (police). This policing/de-policing duality is also at work in the second K-Pop fanfic classic, *House of Cards*.

House of Cards

Whereas *Anterograde Tomorrow* constitutes a classic for the EXO fandom, *House of Cards* is another iconic piece of fan text which is written featuring the members of the very popular K-Pop boy group BTS (Bangtan Boys). It is considered a classic according to the BTS fandom and K-Pop fan community alike, receiving much praise on K-Pop fanfiction online forums to this day. Written by prolific BTS fanfic writer sugamins in 2015 on ArchiveOfOurOwn.com (AO3), *House of Cards (HOC)* is named after BTS's 2015 album track "House of Cards" and comprises 25 chapters. The chapters were posted periodically spanning a period from 2015 until mid-2016. Posting in serial form is a common practice for fanfiction writers in general, as it builds anticipation for readers and allows them the satisfaction of frequently looking

forward to new content. It also means that writers can get reader feedback as they go along, satisfying their own need for positive feedback that will also aid their writing.

The AO3 *House of Cards* content page shows a list of the chapter titles along with the date they were each posted (27/11/2015 - 22/5/2016), and unlike *AT*, the full *HOC* text can still be found on the original website with the option allowing users to download the fanfic as a PDF file. However, this work has been “orphaned” by the author a few months after it was completed in 2016, leaving readers with unanswered questions as to why she decided to do so. To orphan a fan work is an option offered by the ArchiveOfOurOwn website for writers who want to permanently dissociate their names or pseudonyms from a published work for whichever reason. According to the AO3 FAQ Archive:

Orphaning is an alternative to deleting a work that you no longer want to be associated with. It permanently detaches the work from your account and re-attaches it to the specially created orphan_account. [...] [T]his is permanent and irreversible; you are giving up control over the work, including the ability to edit or delete it. Orphaning is a way to remove your connection to your works without taking them away from fandom altogether. Works orphaned in this way will be maintained by the Archive to be enjoyed by future fans. [...] This function means that users can continue to share their contributions to fandom while having their privacy respected. (AO3)

As a result, this work is searchable on AO3 under “sugamins_orphanaccount” and can no longer be found on the author’s original page. The author is then dissociated from the work, but the fanfic will still be associated with its author’s name (it remains searchable), so as to maintain their authorship over the work. This dissociative act by a number of authors, however, reflects their helplessness in the face of the continually increasing consumption of the fan text by the fans. It also reflects the fans’ strong desire to keep circulating it in order to garner a bigger readership, invite more fans into

the fandom, and support their favourite acts. I will also be using the PDF version of this fanfic for citation. Before I proceed, here it is important to highlight the author's dissociation from their work, as we observe with multiple fanfic authors, for it recalls Barthes' radical model of reading. Barthes' announcement that "[t]he birth of the reader must come at the cost of the death of the author" seems to manifest in the writers' decision to disappear from the reading and rereading experience (*Image Music Text* 148). The writer exercises a death by choice, leaving the reader to do what they will with the text.

House of Cards (HOC) is one of the lengthiest pieces changdictator has written, as its combined chapters exceed 800 pages. It is also the most read one among her works with more than 760 thousand hits (or reads), excluding those through unauthorized circulations on AO3 and other sites. The main page of this fanfic displays the title of the work along with the pairings around which the fic is centered. The main pairing of the story is Vkook (V aka Kim Taehyung and Jeon Jungkook), but the Jikook pairing (Park Jimin and Jeon Jungkook) is also important throughout. It is rated "explicit" and categorized under m/m (male/male), as it abounds in graphic scenes involving the protagonists. The author has also added the following tags: AU (alternate universe), gang violence, drugs and drug use, explicit sexual content, blood and gore, homophobic language, Dom/Sub (dominant/submissive), among a few other variations of the tags to further categorize the work and facilitate search and warn her readers about the content.

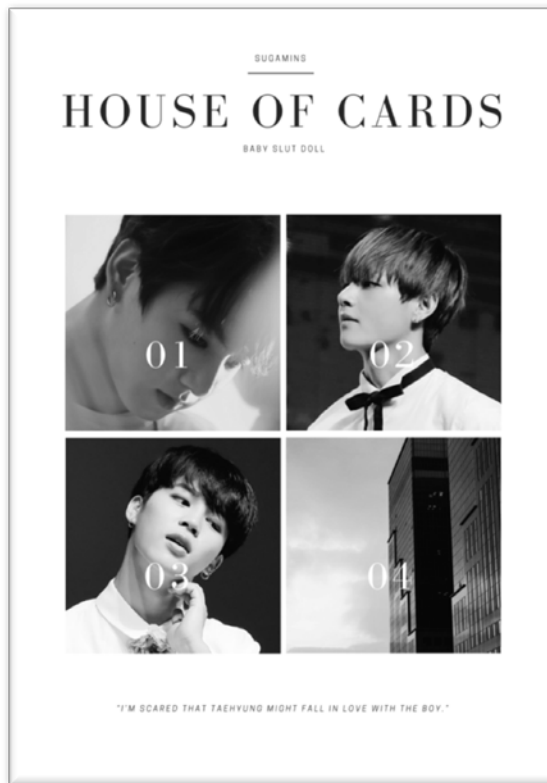


Fig. 3 Fan made cover by user kpop-activist on *HOC* Tumblr page

This fanfic is admired for its complex plot and characterization, as the author writes elaborate back stories for her characters, elucidating the circumstances that have led them into their roles and into the different outcomes throughout the plot. Although there is no entry for this fanfic on Urban Dictionary, an impressively well-made *House of Cards* movie trailer can be found on Youtube, posted by [Sapphiamur](#) in 2017, which has amassed more than 800 thousand views so far. Sapphiamur was able to compile elements from BTS's promotional videos, music videos, as well as a few scenes from a number of Korean action movies to create a four-minute blockbuster-like movie trailer. A previous, less elaborate (two and a half minute) but equally impressive trailer was posted by another user, [pommeideas](#), a year earlier (2016) and has garnered more than 275 thousand views.

As I mentioned, the author tackles some very heavy themes like violence, drug abuse, human trafficking, among others, which solicits warning to the readers not only by the author but also by fans and previous readers despite the desire to further circulate the fanfic. A fan under the username aunnie-ssi posted on a Tumblr page dedicated to the fanfic, “So for those of you who read BTS Fanfiction [must] meet the following requirements; are not opposed to graphic depictions of m/m (Jungkook, Taehyung & Jimin), do not get queasy when reading about violence, blood/gore or committing murder, enjoy the ‘mafia AU.’” This fan’s post reflects the fandom’s consideration for the readers’ “emotional itinerary,” as Natalia Samutina calls it in “Emotional Landscapes of Reading: Fan Fiction in the Context of Contemporary Reading Practices,” through a system of headings, tags, warnings, and disclaimers that inform readers of what to expect (or not) concerning story endings, pairings, violent or explicit content, and the like. There is a shared respect and importance placed on this system of warnings, and readers have great appreciation for it (262). *In Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, Cornel Sandvoss, in “The Death of the Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture,” contends that fan text strives for familiarity and the fulfilment of expectations (30). The fans’ engagement with the text presupposes familiarity, and in it expectations are rigid. This system of warnings and tags, then, facilitates the consumption process by the fans. This process is ameliorated as online platforms are growing to become more and more accommodating to the fans’ needs and making the reading and sharing practices easier.

A simplified premise of the rather complex plot provides that the main character Kim Taehyung (in real life member and vocal in BTS) is an officer who is chosen for a very dangerous mission to go undercover as a new recruit for Haedogje

Pa, a powerful mob empire in Seoul, South Korea. Jeon Jungkook (also member and vocal in BTS), “The Boy” as called by the police, is the heir to Haedogje Pa and has been training to take over after his father. After receiving special training for two months with the department, Taehyung is sent to infiltrate the mob with the help of another undercover agent on the mission. Taehyung not only succeeds in becoming part of the mob but also catches the eye of Jungkook and soon becomes partners with him. Jungkook faces many challenges after meeting Taehyung and partnering up with him, at the end of which however he is led to take over Haedogje Pa. Important characters include Kim Namjoon (in real life rapper and leader of BTS), head of Taehyung’s police department and the person who convinces Taehyung to take on the mission to go undercover. There is also Min Yoongi (member and rapper in BTS), a drug dealer who personally provides for Jungkook but sparks a friendship with Park Jimin (vocal and dancer of BTS), Jungkook’s acolyte and sexual partner. The story is narrated from the authoritative third person narrative, with each chapter shifting its focus from one character to another.

One of the most important events complicating the story is Taehyung’s developing feelings for “The Boy,” which starts to interfere with his mission. In Chapter 9, “Little Games,” Namjoon voices his concerns about Taehyung possibly compromising the mission as the chapter closes with the famous line “I’m scared that Taehyung might fall in love with ‘The Boy’” (232). Soon enough, however, Taehyung has to make the right decision and take down Jungkook and his empire. And one of the biggest mysteries in the story is whether Taehyung betrays Jungkook in the end or it is the forceful interference of his team to end the mission. It is initially difficult to tell if Taehyung would indeed betray his new-found love, but it is later revealed that he

finally does and succeeds in turning “The Boy” in, with the help of Jimin. Due to the complications in the mission, and Jungkook’s contacts pulling many strings, Jungkook only gets five years in prison. In the final chapter, “Monster,” Taehyung pays him a visit as part of the ongoing case. By the end of their meeting, Jungkook, who shows no redeeming qualities except for his genuine feelings for Taehyung, confesses: “I love you” (827). The story ends on a sombre note, separating the unlikely couple, but acknowledging the virtue of their romance. Similar to Wattpad, ArchiveOfOurOwn provides readers and users with the option of interacting with the fan texts by leaving comments at the end of each chapter and giving Kudos, the AO3 equivalent for likes. This chapter garnered the most Kudos (more than 6700) and featured the most comments (more than 800) as it sees “The Boy” finally open up to his closed feelings and show vulnerability in professing his love for Taehyung. Readers also post comments about their cathartic crying by the end of the story, expressing their deep praise for the work and recommending fanfic readers from the BTS fandom and outside it to read and enjoy it.

After the completion of her work, Sugamins adds a page for Notes after the final chapter with the following statement:

Thank you all so much for not only reading, but subscribing, giving Kudos and commenting throughout the entire duration of the story. It's been a long and arduous process for both me as a writer and you all. I'm so thankful for you all for making this my most viewed story on AO3 and for supporting me throughout even when I cause you all heartache and pain. (830-831)

Not much information can be usually found on the writers of these fanfics, but we know two things about sugamins. First, that she is British, since she writes a note in Chapter 3, “Think of It Like an Army,” in which she justifies the use of the term

“leftenant” instead of “lieutenant” “because I’m British haha” (45). Second, we know that her real name is Maria Anne, since she signs her final statement in Notes with Maria Ann x. As for changdictator, I noticed that fans and readers refer to her in the feminine, so we can assume it is established as common knowledge that she is female. She also mentioned on one of her online profiles that she is from Liverpool, entailing that she is British.

To recapitulate, in these two fanfics, homoerotic intimacy is central, with the narrative of romance among the protagonists in a pairing ultimately culminating in homosexual fulfilment. The centrality of this homoerotic intimacy is in keeping with the fans desire for the idol to be finally portrayed as a romantic/sexual artefact, but only in a manner that is policed, i.e. the male idol is romantically and/or erotically involved with another male idol only in fan texts and not in reality. This impossible or unattainable homosexual characterization and pairing appeases the fans’ heteronormative/possessive attitudes about their idols being homosexual or ever being in a relationship in real life.

Furthermore, the authors in these fanfics wrote scenes that made use of the flexibility and hybridity portrayed in the masculinity of the idols and built upon them to create histories for the characters. Many fanfics follow this same logic. Authors draw upon their meta-textual knowledge and understanding of the idols and the personas they project, especially in moments of emotional intensity and/or homoerotic behavior portrayed in music videos or on stage and variety shows, which often include intimacy between members or at least offer suggestive interpretations. According to Samutina, “Fan fiction literature is, in many ways, a world-building, an expanding of

an assortment of images, characters, and their multiple interconnections” (“Emotional Landscapes” 258). Hence, what fans are doing is reclaim such performative experiences from the margins of policed media and offer their readers the kinds of characters and outcomes that are impossible to be realized or imagined otherwise. They build on these aspects to decide their fanfic pairings as well as the storyline that connects the two characters in the pairings.

The authors take elements from the real characters which are aspects the fans generally know about them, like their interests or roles and even some of their real character traits, some of which seamlessly make it into the characters’ back stories, allowing further identification with the protagonists. This appropriation of elements is aided by the voyeuristic perks provided by the K-Pop industry in catering to the fans’ wishes and virtually letting them inside the idols’ lives. In terms of themes and characterization, these perks provide fiction writers with plenty to take from and write about, making it possible for them to extend the idol persona and explore it in exciting plots.

As for thematic elements, although there is an explicit focus on sex in these fanfics, great importance is placed on the angst and the portrayal of the obstacles facing the love between the protagonists. And the narrative suspense relies on the theme of discovering love in a hopeless place or in a hopeless situation. Ultimately, the virtue of love will be acknowledged even though the relationship is cut short due to an illness, betrayal or death.

Other popular K-Pop fanfics include *Colors* (2015) by Nerdyjimin, another BTS fanfic and a favourite among multiple fandoms. This fanfic, however, can no

longer be found on Wattpad, where it was posted initially, as it was removed by the author. Another EXO classic is *Forty-Eight Hours* (2012) by Xīnxīnxīxī, which is translated from Mandarin to English by Lukais (more than one English translation exists but this one is the most widely read). It is worth mentioning that *Anterograde Tomorrow* can be found in Russian and Spanish. The BTS and EXO fandom, as all K-Pop and fanfic fandom in general, cross national boundaries, as most writers are fans from different countries, who are either native speakers of English or speak it as a second language.

I would also like to mention a more traditional example of K-Pop fan text, the K-Pop novels of Jennie Bennett, which can also be referred to as profic, since they are professionally written for profit. Bennett writes novelized K-Pop fanfiction in which she creates stories revolving around K-Pop idols, their fans, and the potential love stories between them. Another difference between the fanfics that I discuss and Bennett's works is that the latter may function at a higher formal level, as they are written by a professional and have gone through a process of editing. Bennett also takes on a more censored PG 13 approach with her stories for storyline and characterization. In her works like *Snowflake Kisses* (2016) and *Silver Screen Dreams* (2017), Bennett writes mary-sues, which feature male idols, by some twist of fate, meeting and falling in love with their fans. All her stories, including *Kidnapped Idol* (2017), *Undercover Fan* (2017) and *Fangirl Problems* (2018) uphold heteronormativity in that they each feature a love story between a male idol and a female fan exclusively. In addition, it is important to note, however, that Bennett does not include the real names of idol groups and members, opting instead to create fictional ones. Featuring heterosexual romance and using fictional names for the K-Pop

idol characters are both reasons why her novels have not been able to become part of the K-Pop canon. The reasons behind Bennett's decision to use fictional names instead of real ones to refer to idols are unclear. However, one reason may be possible legal issues. Another may be to avoid any backlash from K-Pop fans who might disagree to her use and portrayal of famous idols whose fan bases may be skeptical about a professional author imposing on a tradition of fanfic writing by "real" fans.

In conclusion, K-Pop slash fanfiction reflects both the audience's love for and fascination with the male idol persona and the fans' frustration over the impossibility of being intimate with these idols. This anxiety and frustration are partly the result of marketing ploys by the K-Pop industry to police the idols' lives as well as their performativity and trying to keep them emotionally available to sustain the fans' romantic fantasies. Thus, fan writing, in the words of Jenkins, "brings the duality of that response into sharp focus," not merely reproducing the performative text broadcasted through different media but also rewriting, filling gaps, and dismissing unsatisfactory parts which interfere with the accommodation of their fantasies (*Textual Poachers* 165).

Worth mentioning also is that while for other media fandoms canon is uncontested, and fan writers usually expand the generic material already textually available for them while drawing heavily from the original material, K-Pop fanfiction is not only a new genre-extending outcome, it creates canon of its own, since fans create canon and fandom tradition that are not present at the textual level or drawn out in plots like in the case of novels, TV series or movies. K-Pop fans do not respond to an existing fan canon (or fanon) but create their own. The fan text later becomes

canonical, for which a meta-fan text (fan text in response to fan text) can emerge in the form of sequels or prequels for the fan text itself. It is also important to acknowledge that K-Pop fanfiction writers, like authors of other forms of entertainment, are faced with similar challenges of losing creative or distributive control of their material but can choose to disassociate themselves from their works or completely remove them from online archives, which highlights the transiency of online publishing.

Fan texts are mostly electronic, and access to them has never been easier. Furthermore, removing texts from the web has become just as easy. The easiness of removing texts from the web is predicated on the easiness of producing new ones, which is aided by ever evolving online technologies and platforms that are meant to keep up with the fans' diverse temperaments and ever-changing attitudes regarding the consumption and production of their own and others' work. This has rendered online fan text, as any product, disposable and/or replaceable. This replaceability reflects the attitudes of rapid consumption that shape fan practices that are tied into the capitalist modes of production in the K-Pop industry.

The final chapter will conclude my project by touching upon international, including Arab K-fans, discussing how national and cultural norms shape the practices of the South Korean K-fandom and their engagement with their idols and then discuss how international (Arab and Lebanese) K-fans remix these cultural norms to establish their own relationship to K-Pop idols through fandom practice, including fanfiction reading and writing. K-Pop, like fanfiction, is continuously gaining momentum and attracting scholarly interest. K-Pop fanfiction, however, is yet to receive any such attention. The increasing growth of the *Hallyu* wave and its spread to many parts of the

world, including the Arab region and Lebanon, highlights the relevance of this project to undertake the investigation of growing and emerging fan communities around the world with similar interactive and assimilative attitudes in interpreting, appropriating, and reconstructing forms of entertainment.

CHAPTER V

CODA AND CONCLUSION

HALLYU AND THE K-POP BOOM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND LEBANON

A. Growth of K-Pop in the Middle East

In the third chapter, I set out to elucidate the distinctive ideological assumptions behind the genre of K-Pop slash fanfiction and considered the thematic and textual features that reflect these ideologies and characterize this specific genre. In this brief chapter, I will take up the growing K-Pop fandom in the Middle East region. K-Pop, along with the *Hallyu* wave, has been strongly influencing the Middle East, but scholarly attention has yet to reflect this occurrence. I focus on Lebanon in particular and the important role it plays in the transcultural dissemination of the *Hallyu* wave. It is also important to acknowledge the role of the fans as cultural mediators and how they succeed in localizing a globalized transnational cultural phenomenon.

As discussed in previous chapters, K-Pop was able to achieve great success outside Korea as a result of multiple processes; through providing a form of augmented entertainment (combining catchy music, unique fashion, and incredibly synchronized dance), playing down the Asianness of the idols and blurring their gender performativity, incorporating English into hit songs, and carefully catering to the fans' interests and preferences. All of these elements have helped the industry achieve a multileveled universalizing process.

As I discussed in my second chapter, K-Pop is a genre seeks to please a wide range of fans and accommodate their diverse tastes. It is a well-rounded cultural product based in the aforementioned elements; add to that the convenient access to the idols' lives that is stressed by the industry to increase levels of both fascination and identification. Sociologist John Lie discusses how K-pop and other *Hallyu*-related cultural products work to satisfy global audiences. She explains:

What K-pop did was to fill a niche that was relatively open for clean, well-crafted performers. . . . K-pop exemplifies middle-class, urban, and suburban values that seek to be acceptable at once to college-aspiring youths and their parents: a world that suggests nothing of inner-city poverty and violence, corporal or sexual radicalism, or social deviance and cultural alienation. . . . The often repeated claims about K-pop singers' politeness—their clean-cut features as well as their genteel demeanor—is something of a nearly universal appeal, whether to Muslim Indonesians or Catholic Peruvians. (355)

K-Pop acts have been able to achieve incredible milestones in their reception in different parts of the world. For example, the latest records for most views in 24 hours on YouTube as well as fastest video to garner 10 million views have been held by Korean acts such as Blackpink and BTS. K-Pop artists took four out of the five top spots on Billboard's "World Albums" Chart back in 2017, and more and more releases have been able to top music charts in recent years. Popular group BTS has been the most successful in breaking into the US mainstream market and has been named in 2018 as one of next generation leaders Time Magazine whose cover BTS was one of the very selected few to make. During one of BTS's comebacks on August 9, Merriam-Webster official twitter account defined "epiphany" as their word of the day. This is due to the spike in the research for the term as a result of the release of the group's comeback trailer titled "Epiphany." The word became a worldwide trend on twitter which prompted Merriam-Webster to comment on how BTS spike vocabulary search

with every comeback or album release, tweeting “Pretty much every time they release a new song, we see a lot of people searching and studying the words” (yckim124, Allkpop). This goes to show the increasing popularity and spread of K-Pop in different parts of the world.

Although K-Pop, or Korean pop culture and music, connotes cultural specificity and distantness, cultural proximity is made possible through a plethora of media platforms that enable individuals to access any form of entertainment using the internet. The Middle East was initially exposed to the *Hallyu* wave through K-dramas which were broadcasted on channels like MBC and Dubai TV. In one of the few scholarly articles on the phenomenon of *Hallyu* reception in the Middle East, “The Korean Wave in the Middle East: Past and Present,” Mohamed Elaskary contends that “K-drama found its way into the Arab world in the 2000s with the popularity of social media outlets that helped boost *Hallyu* not only in the Arab world but all over the world” (8). Elaskary argues that “cultural factors play an important role in the success of *Hallyu* in the Arab world. Among these factors are the social habits and customs that Arabs share with Koreans, such as family bonds, love stories that are not explicit, friendship, altruism, etc.” (ibid. 7). Compared to Western pop music which is rife with nudity and obscene lyrics, K-pop finds a perfect fit in mainstream Arab societies (although K-Pop is not without obscenity and nudity, but “clean” K-Pop is generally the mainstream). Hence, most viewers would not see the genre as too alien or offensive, but possibly more in keeping with notions of sexuality and sociality in their own culture.

In recent years, the Middle East has grown to be a hub for K-Pop fandom communities and activities. Local K-fandoms from different countries in the Arab

region such as the UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon have been creating online communities to share fandom experiences and engaging in activities on the ground where they plan “K-Pop meetings” and parties that allow them to enjoy their shared interests. Additionally, due to the increasing popularity of K-Pop among Arab fans, several K-Pop acts and events have recently been hosted in the Arab region. One of the first major K-Pop performances in the UAE came in 2011 when pop idol Seo In Young and girl group Nine Muses performed as part of the 2011 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix celebrations (Why Do People in the UAE Love K-Pop so Much? Lau). Five years later, in 2016, Abu Dhabi was one of the localities hosting K-CON, an annual convention organised by CJ E&M—one of Seoul's leading content and media companies—where multiple K-Pop artists and groups come to perform and engage with fans through “fan meetings” and fan signing sessions. The first batch of K-CON concert tickets was reportedly sold out in record time since its announcement and the event received immense public response on social media with the circulation of the trending Hashtag #kcon2016abudhabi (“A Wholesome K-Pop Experience,” Chowdhury). Lee Sang-Gil, Chief Strategy Officer at CJ E&M commented on the phenomenon that is overcoming the cultural gap between South Korea and the Arab world, saying, “We feel that K-Pop and Korean culture is getting more recognition in the region” (ibid.).

More recently, in April of last year, a number of popular K-Pop idols and groups from the famous entertainment company SM (one of the most powerful entertainment companies in South Korea) performed in Dubai as part of their SMTOWN 2018 world tour. This event was followed by the invitation of K-Pop boy group sensation EXO to Dubai mid-January to watch The Dubai Fountain play their smash hit Korean song *Power*. The Hashtag #WelcomeToDubaiEXO was soon trending

on Twitter, and hundreds of excited young fans were present to witness the momentous event, screaming at full force at the sight of the idols (“Why the Middle East Loves K-Pop,” Khouri).

Interest in K-Pop has been steadily growing in the Middle East, especially the UAE, where fandom practice has been institutionalized in different ways, allowing for the emergence of an organizational frameworks that enable community members to keep connect with one another, organize events, and recruit new members and fans. One example on this institutionalization is Korean-focused clubs in universities in the UAE. These clubs are an example of the youth’s fascination with Korean culture and their dedication to gather and enjoy South Korean dramas, music, traditional food, fashion as well as language. This increasing interest has also led to the development of Korean language classes, as in the case Zayed University where the King Sejong Institute opened in 2010 with the support of the South Korean government (“The Rise of South Korea’s Soft Power in the Middle East,” Saberi).

Through fannish activities, K-Pop becomes localized, and the consumption of K-Pop becomes a cultural experience that influences the fans’ daily lives and the development of their identities. This influence is exemplified in the fans’ special interest in Korean the culture of Korea, as many start to learn the language, dress according to latest Korean fashion and enjoy different aspects of Korean culture.

B. K-Pop Fandom in Lebanon

Unlike the UAE where K-Pop is increasingly becoming more and more mainstream, Lebanon still constitutes a very small portion of the K-Pop fandom, as it

constitutes an even more niche market for the *Hallyu* wave and K-Pop consumption, given its much smaller population. This niche presence is also due to the fact that K-pop content is almost completely unavailable offline, and there are no local shops for fans to buy K-pop commodities (fans encourage each other to stream K-Pop music and organize group album orders from international websites). And no K-pop band has performed in Lebanon yet. Nonetheless, K-Pop fans in Lebanon have been active as a budding K-Pop community and proactive in their support for their favourite idols.

K-Pop fans in Lebanon have been organizing small gatherings and meeting up to discuss their music and gush about their favourite idols since 2012. In an article by Victoria Yan titled “Riding the Korean wave: K-Pop’s Growing Beirut Fan Base Feels the Flow” Yan writes about the rising K-Pop fandom in Lebanon while attending one of the K-Pop meetings that are usually held twice or thrice a year in a hotel or other venue by a group of K-Pop fans whose increasing number outgrew the tiny spaces offered by the local cafes.

Rida Farhat, one of the fans interviewed by Yan, is a veteran Lebanese K-Pop fan and one of the founders of the Korean Cultural Club at the American University of Beirut and one of the organisers of the tri/bi-annual K-Pop meeting. Rida explains how the local fandom was first assembled through a small Whatsapp group that included friends and acquaintances with a shared interest in Korean music, drama and pop culture. Later the members started meeting up and having get-togethers at Dunkin’ Donuts in Hamra. They were continuously increasing in number until one day they were kicked out in 2015 (ibid.). “Yeah, we definitely were too big of a group, like 20 people,” Rida explained laughing. “We were too noisy, and the space was tight so they told us to leave. This is how we ended up at this [Golden Tulip] hotel” (ibid.). Later these small

get-togethers turned into big gatherings hosted at the Golden Tulip Serenada Hotel in Hamra with more than 50 participants whose ages range between 15 and 30. Similarly, the Whatsapp group was overflowing with fans, which led to the creation of a Facebook group under the name “Lebanese K-Poppers” that currently hosts hundreds of fans, most of whom are Lebanese. Out of the Facebook group members only a small proportion usually attends the meeting due to logistic purposes, but many are active as they regularly post videos and memes of their favourite idols to keep each other updated and discuss the latest gossip in K-Pop.

According to Yan, Lebanese K-poppers are completely self-run and “have no affiliation with any Korean cultural associations nor do they receive regular funding from any institution” (ibid.). The K-pop fandom and culture outside South Korea and its neighboring Asian countries is overwhelmingly fan driven. In Lebanon, unlike the Arabic pop music industry that is driven by local and international industrial and social agents, K-Pop music is forwarded solely through fandom networking and participatory effort. K-Pop communities have often been referred to as organized forces in their efforts to support their favourite K-Pop acts and further the genre’s, and culture’s, dissemination.

In this part of the world, the spread of K-pop is thus more spontaneous. This is because consumption and dissemination are based on the will of the consumers and their ability to access cultural content through social media. Real time interactivity is facilitated, and the K-Pop experience gets remediated, through multiple online K-Pop platforms. Websites such as AllKpop, Soompi and Koreaboo (also existing as pages on Facebook and Twitter) provide around-the-clock English language news, gossip and updates about K-Pop and the South Korean celebrity and culture scene for the

international K-Pop fan base. Anghami has also been catering for the K-Pop fan base by featuring a diverse playlist of K-Pop songs. One of the breakthroughs for K-Pop fans in Lebanon is getting a local radio station to play a song by famous K-Pop boy group BTS, on Radio One Lebanon.

K-pop fans in Lebanon, as well as around the world, form local (and international) communities that serve as a way to get to know other fans and make friends. One does not usually find this type of community growth among fans of mainstream American, or even Arabic, pop music. These meet ups unite K-Pop fans from all over Lebanon who come together to gossip about their favourite artists, show the extent of their K-Pop knowledge by playing trivia games, and perform covers of K-Pop song choreographies that feature innovative and unconventional dance moves. “Tired of American mainstream pop,” Yan explains, “a niche group of Lebanon’s youth has chosen to jump on the “K-pop” wave - a subculture with a global fandom.” This type of engagement is also absent in the Arab music scene. These fans are unlikely to become this attached to an Arab or Lebanese pop artist let alone consider writing fanfiction about them as this dynamic does not exist in the Arab music industry. The Arab music industry is much less immersive, which ties into the dynamic of prohibition and desire that does not exist between fans and Arab singers. The Arabic music industry is also nothing like the K-Pop industry as far as idol production is concerned.

“When you get into K-pop, you’re basically immersed into another world,” Rany Jaber, one of the attendees explained to Yan. This immersion ties into the aforementioned concept of augmented entertainment. The K-Pop industry takes all the elements of a successful and appealing music industry and expands and betters them,

augmenting them into a music genre, a phenomenon, which offers fans an experience like no other. Another particularity to the K-Pop phenomenon is the aspect of hybrid masculinity, which did not go unaddressed in Yan's interview. Rany, who identifies as bisexual, adds, "In K-pop, you can be straight and also dance like a girl. Men can be very feminine, men can wear makeup, and it's accepted. Here, [in Lebanon] you're automatically perceived as gay in a derogatory way if you act that way" (as quoted by Yan). Another interviewee also commented on the type of masculinity that surrounds K-Pop noting that "the blurring of gender roles in K-pop allows for further self-expression" (ibid.). This event creates a safe and open environment for all members to enjoy listening and dancing to K-Pop music away from the judgement of those who are unfamiliar with the genre and who may not understand how fans engage in this subculture where traditional standards of masculinity are contested.

Lebanon is home to a population of different religions and sects, as well as distinct social communities who differ in their outlook on gender and sexuality, which may affect the acceptance of different aspects of the phenomenon of K-Pop and its globalized culture. The K-Pop fandom in Lebanon is comprised of individuals from these varying religious and social backgrounds, yet there seems to be a general acceptance of the type of masculinity portrayed in K-Pop, encouraging fans to become more open minded about non-traditional expressions of masculinity and gender in general. This change and adoption of different attitudes denotes the aspect of cultural exchange that is associated with the K-Pop experience. Furthermore, this experience, in the Middle East and Lebanon in particular, seems to navigate through a social alienness and gender queerness that is associated with the fans, as manifested in general attitudes of ridicule and ostracism. An "outsider" quality as well as a queerness seem to work

through the industrial music of K-Pop. This complementarity signifies compelling qualities of the industry and fan practices' statuses as non-normative manifestations of sociality, sexuality and sound by bringing together otherness, queerness and industrial music.

C. On Cultural Exchange

According to Yan, "The scene [of the K-Pop meeting] is as much a cultural exchange as it is a venue of self-expression." The meet ups, in Lebanon and other Arab countries, emphasise and celebrate the cultural aspect of being a devoted K-Pop fan. Hence, fans engage in the buying and selling of handmade Korean objects. Traditional Korean food such as kimchi and kimbap is sometimes prepared at home to be sold or served at the events. Fans of K-Pop and *Hallyu* also tend to gather at centers for Korean culture sponsored by the Korean government and local Korean associations, or at universities. In addition, a geo-political presence in the form of Korean UNIFIL peacekeepers with the United Nations has helped build rapport between Lebanese citizens and Korean culture. UNIFIL groups provide security, medical and cultural services to the people in the South of Lebanon. Locals can engage in a number of activities such as learning the Korean language, taking part in Korean martial arts courses such as taekwondo, and celebrating Korean holidays and cultural events.

What is significant is that the Arab K-fandom seems to be adopting Korean fan practices as well as attitudes that otherwise would not have been able to emerge in the Arab music scene, like the example on gender expression which I gave above. K-Pop provides an immersive cultural experience in which fans become more interested in the

culture of the artefact in which they are obsessed. Many of the fans, both Arab and international, are interested in learning the language or at least a number of phrases spoken frequently by fans and idols. Many even plan to travel to South Korea. If that is not possible, fans turn to online markets where they can purchase not only K-Pop albums and merchandise, but they also buy their favourite foods so they can recreate recipes from Korean cuisine. That as well as Korean products and cosmetics. This passion also extends to their interest in K-Dramas and movies. This is the transportation of cultural and aesthetic tastes mentioned earlier. They even come to appreciate softer, feminized masculinities and androgyny.

These attitudes reflect the “transported” sensibilities in Lebanon and the Middle East, as constructed by the remixing of South Korean cultural norms and modes of fan participation and reception with Arab and Lebanese ideals. Such acts of interpretation reflect how K-Pop fans are not merely passive consumers of a cultural product, but they live out their fandom through organizing and participating in numerous events, with time gaining more power and becoming organized forces.

Finally, it is fitting here to refer to the benefits that *Hallyu* has for Korea in general and the Korean economy in particular. In this respect, many scholars who have written on the *Hallyu* wave have referred to the influence it has had on the export of Korean products overseas. As such, the Korean Wave has undeniably had many positive implications for Korea, such as improving foreign relations, growing tourism industry and an overall enhancement of the Korean image at the international level.

D. Idol as Fictional Character: Authenticity vs. Manufacturing

Attempting to summarise the phenomenon briefly, 24-year-old Imad al-Fil, another veteran of the group, defines K-pop as a “complex bundle of music, choreography, dance, fashion, lifestyles and attitudes” (as quoted by Yan). “The whole world of K-pop is a bit like a reality TV show,” al-Fil explains. He continues:

The ‘idols’ are another genre of human beings. In public they never show their authentic lives, instead, they’re characters of a different story. The whole thing is a bit of a fantasy, which is symbolised through the hairstyles, the outfit changes, and the music videos being very fictional and fantastical.

Similarly, another fan also addressed the apparent lack of authenticity within the highly manufactured industry. Lara Akar says that despite their lack of authenticity, they make their fans happy, which is sufficient for her. “What they give me and what they do to make the fans happy is good enough,” Akar says. She continues, “I don’t have to know who they really are, or what they actually do. What's more important is all the effort they put into playing these personalities in their concerts, and TV shows... all of this effort they put making their fandom happy” (ibid.) Even though fans realize the access to the idols’ private lives provided by the industry allows them to know the real persons behind the idols, there is a general consensus among most that K-Pop idols are indeed fictional beings, engineered to appeal to the various tastes and likes of fans. It seems fitting that many should take to fanfiction to create an extension of these fictional characters. As such, K-Pop fanfiction emerges as a literary genre that stems out of an increasing interest in the figure of the Korean pop star.

A large portion of K-Pop fans in Lebanon are readers of K-Pop fanfiction. Interestingly, despite fans coming from and living in regions varying in their conservativeness, a large portion of fanfiction being read by local fans is slash. In

Writing Genres, Devitt asks a very important question which I will rephrase to fit my discussion: What makes some literary genres, like K-Pop fanfiction, a culturally specific genre, that enables it to be read beyond its particular situations? K-Pop fanfiction seems to transcend its original context, which gets recoded into the Arab or Lebanese context.

I address, then, like Devitt did, the paradox that is formed by the historical situatedness of literature, here K-Pop fanfiction, and its potential universality (181). K-Pop fanfiction transcends this situatedness through the universalization enacted at the level of writing, as a great number of fanfics are written and disseminated in English but goes through processes of translation to reach more readers. Even though I have argued that a literary genre is embedded in rhetorical situation, K-Pop fanfiction can be read beyond their context's or author's space, time, and situation. This is true because behind the literary genre of fanfiction is a pop culture phenomenon based in capitalist and consumerist practises that facilitate globalization and transculturation. This over passing of cultural situatedness and specificity into other regions in the world, like the Middle East and Lebanon, constitutes an additional rhetorical situation for genres associated to K-Pop, literary and non-literary, to emerge and circulate in these regions. These genres include the rhetorical genre of the fan meeting, which starts to become a common practice among Arab and Lebanese fans. Add to that the literary genre of K-Pop fanfiction, which starts to garner readership among Arab and Lebanese fans, as they adopt similar attitudes of fascination, identification, and the queering of the K-Pop idol as the genre's main artefact.

E. Conclusion

There is a small but thriving niche fandom that is following in the footsteps of many other countries in forwarding their love and support for their favorite idols. In their common practices, fans are creating communities that include people from all ages, genders, religions and regions, which are able to create strong communal bonds. These bonds become stronger as these fans find solace in each other's company, being supporters of a culture and a genre that is alien to their communities and societies, which often puts them under constant criticism, skepticism and often, ridicule. Earlier, I had quoted Jenkins in that readers and writers depend upon each other for the perpetuation of the fandom (Jenkins, 163). Jenkins adds that fanzines are not commodities sold to consumers, as they are reflections of the desire to create forms of cultural production. They are produced by the fans for the fans, to forward their love and support but also to extend the togetherness of this support on the part of the fans. The reason I go back to it here is to bring to the fore the communal quality existing in the K-Pop fandom around the world, and more so among fans of the same locality.

What comes out of this support and passion also is a literary genre that is slowly—in the Middle East—gaining more and more momentum as fans are becoming more visible and proactive in their consumption of multiple aspects of their favorite musical acts. It is a fascinating phenomenon to be looking into, and there is still much room to investigate the many different aspects of it as it has yet to be taken up locally from an academic stand point. A thorough investigation of the K-Pop fanfiction reading and writing community in Lebanon is beyond the scope of my project. However, future academic prospects may include looking more closely into how K-Pop fanfiction plays out as English language text in Lebanon, as a text that is shared and enjoyed in

transnational contexts. Fandom in the Middle East, K-Pop and otherwise, has generally been overlooked as a subject for scholarly inquiry. K-Pop in Lebanon enjoys a small market size due to its small population compared to other countries where K-Pop is very popular. However, the Middle East is fast developing into a targeted market for K-Pop practices, and so the region surely deserves future scholarly attention.

In this project, I have set out to describe a genre of writing that is gaining momentum and inviting readers from different parts of the world. First, I aimed to identify an emerging literary genre and raise important questions on (literary) genre theory and rhetorical theories of genre and show, in the case of K-Pop fanfiction in particular, that it can be defined by the interrelations between writers, readers, texts, as well as contexts. Second, I took up a textual analysis of K-Pop fanfiction as a literary text and identified elements that define and distinguish the genre while discussing the strong appeal of slash among women readers.

Third, I hope that the analysis presented in this paper regarding global fan communities in general, and K-pop fan communities in particular, will be a valuable contribution to the available literature on the globalization of popular culture. I also attempted to show how the consumption of popular culture can change the lives of individuals and how these individuals themselves may play a decisive role in connecting globalized culture with local fandom. In Lebanon, the K-Pop fandom still makes up a very small, niche demographic, but including the growing fandom of the Middle East region, the Arab fandom constitutes a forceful presence to be reckoned with.

Because genre plays such a significant role in influencing the way people use language, read, and write and read texts, literary and nonliterary, understanding theories of genre helps contribute new perspectives and approaches to numerous efforts within English studies. It also betters our understanding of how people operate within their cultures and societies. I hope to encourage new considerations about genre and literature when considering new literary modes that emerge out of evolving times and changing needs. I may not be able to supply all answers, but I aspire to provoke new questions about genre theory, media fandom, globalization, particularly in the music industry, and how cultural and social forms can be adapted to fit new localities.

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