



Antonia Koch

Conference Report

Fanficforum in Conference 2026

ABSTRACT

Fanficforum Frankfurt held its third annual student conference on Jan. 30, 2026 as a digital and in-person event at Goethe University where presenters shared their academic research on fan fiction. Presentation topics included ecocritical readings of Greek mythology fan fiction, productions of gender in figure skating AU fan fiction, the reception of the pulled-to-publish *Harry Potter* fan fiction *Alchemised* on BookTok, the enduring appeal of Jane Austen's works for professional and fan writers alike, and the aesthetics of evil in post-war *Harry Potter* fan fiction.

KEYWORDS

BookTok, ecocriticism, fan fiction, Harry Potter, Jane Austen, sports

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Fanficforum Frankfurt held its third annual student conference on Jan. 30, 2026 as a digital and in-person event at Goethe University where presenters shared their academic research on fan fiction. As part of the Fanficforum Frankfurt—a student working group focused on academic discussions of fan fiction—“Fanficforum in Conference” has been an ongoing project.



This year’s conference started with a keynote on ecocritical readings of and in fan fiction that references Greek mythology. Student papers focused on masculinity and femininity in sports fan fiction, the pulled-to-publish fan fiction *Manacled* (published in 2025 as *Alchemised*), Jane Austen’s lasting impact in popular culture, and how fan fiction can help us to understand the workings of evil in our contemporary world. The conference showed different approaches in academic research on fan fiction and broadened the topic’s relevance in multiple fields of study.

Julia Neugarten: “Climate Alternate Universe: Ecocriticism and Fanfiction about Greek Mythology”

Neugarten shared work from her doctoral research on *Anchoring and Innovating Greek Myth in Online Fanfiction*. Her presentation outlined how subject matters of Greek myth are transformed in contemporary online fan fiction and considered themes of power, emotion, and the ‘more-than-human world.’ More specifically, Neugarten explored how gendered power dynamics are represented in fan fiction, how fan fiction not only represents characters’ emotions but also how stories depict fans’ emotional engagement with myth, and how fan fiction portrays an interplay between humankind and the environment as well as between fictional characters and their story-world. The presentation focused on how fan fiction relates to the present and the past by using an interplay of popular media and Greco-Roman antiquity.

Neugarten’s qualitative and computational analysis of 5,000 fan fictions about ancient Greek myth showed that fan culture has political and therefore ecocritical affordances through numerous alternate interpretations of the same events—analyzing, reimagining, and criticizing concerns within these stories. Story-worlds based on Greek mythology often imagine a world and nature untouched by climate change. Nature is being described as beautiful and unchanged and therefore showing a preference towards world settings not yet influenced by the industrial age.

As an example, Neugarten used a Greek myth fan fiction with a tag explicitly indicating global warming as a topic. In the fan fiction, the Titans decide to end humanity because its destruction of the earth must be stopped; it does not take place in a distant past but is rather contemporary. The text engages with the ethical question of human destruction of the earth: the immortal Titans question humanity's worth, as mortal human beings cannot see past their own timescale. As Gaia's physical form overlaps with the earth itself, the earth becomes humanized by being described with human-like features, thereby evoking empathy for the 'more-than-human world.'

Neugarten concluded that fan fiction frames nature as an active presence. The example used blurs the boundaries between human and more-than-human and encourages affective connections to be made with the earth. Therefore, the story fosters an understanding of geological timescales and encourages thinking through the problem of climate change even if or because, in reality, there is no outside help that can be relied on, no Titans to solve the problem.

Patricia Heise: "Figuring Out Masculinity: The Question of Art vs. Sport and Masculinity vs. Femininity in Figure Skating AUs"

Patricia Heise's presentation analyzed and criticized how the category of gender is perceived and produced within sports and sports fan fiction, with a focus on figure skating in a *Bridgerton* and a *James Bond* figure skating AU fan fiction.

Heise started her presentation by outlining that nothing about sport is ever genderless, it is always focused on categorizing and dividing men from women. Women and men are held to different standards and requirements, with men seen as better than women. Figure skating started out as a male-dominated sport in the 19th century. Once women were allowed to participate in the sport, they initially competed with and against men. After showing more success in the sport than the men did, however, they were made to take part in special women's categories. World War II caused a decline in men's abilities to participate in figure skating and other sports. This caused figure skating to become a more women-centered sport.

Heise focused on how different elements of the sport are depicted in sample fan fictions. She noticed that only the more physical 'masculine' elements like jumps were being described in detail within the fan fictions, technical 'feminine' elements such as spins and step sequences were often not being detailed at all. Elements are gendered to a certain extent but whether they are seen as feminine or masculine depends on the context. When 'feminine' elements are performed by a man in the *Bridgerton* fan fiction, they suddenly turn masculine through the use of aggressive language. The focus then lies less on the elements themselves but rather on the strength with which the men execute them. However, within the *James Bond* fan fiction, the descriptions of spin elements focus rather on elegance than strength. Sexuality seems to change when skating is being described as feminine and masculine. The male skater in the *James Bond* fan fiction is gay and his skating is depicted as more elegant. In the *Bridgerton* fan fiction, the man is heterosexual and described as in control of the elements and masculine. In a depiction of a team of pair skaters, the female skater is portrayed only as an object of heterosexual desire; her skating is never actively described but rather the dress she wears; the action is left to the male skater who is in charge even though they are moving together.

This also relates to the question of figure skating as an art or as a sport. In the *James Bond* fan fiction, it is argued that sports need to be objective and measurable and not based on creativity and aesthetics.



Thus, the question of art versus sport becomes gendered: men's sports are objective while women's sports are subjective. However, figure skating might blur these lines as it can be seen as both an art and a sport rather than sticking to the binary.

Klara Mannwald: "Fanfiction Turned Bestseller? #BookTok Weighs in on *Alchemised*"

Klara Mannwald presented a discourse analysis of the reception of the pulled-to-publish fan fiction *Manacled* by SenLinYu using two TikTok videos. One focus was the question whether buying *Alchemised* supports J.K. Rowling or if the book can be removed from the controversies. *Alchemised* started as the highly popular Dramione fan fiction *Manacled* that drew inspiration from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the original fan fiction, Voldemort won the Second Wizarding War and as a punishment, those who resisted and those who were not of pure blood were either executed or enslaved. Hermione Granger was given to Draco Malfoy and forced to live under his rule and torture. Before *Alchemised* was published, the original text had to be heavily edited and any ties to the *Harry Potter* books had to be removed. Therefore, the setting as well as the names had to be changed and magic was altered into alchemy.

Through discourse analysis, Mannwald explored subject-intersubjective dynamics of expression and how *Alchemised* is perceived on BookTok. The two videos were chosen based on their differing opinions of *Alchemised*. In the first example, the female creator explains that she loved the original fan fiction and is glad that it was published as she can now support the author. In general, the creator voices a positive opinion on the official publishing of fan fiction, she even bought multiple versions of the book while only having read about one fifth of it. She encourages her audience to buy the book to compensate the author for their work. This video has more likes and fewer comments, with the creator only engaging with positive comments. In the second example, the male creator engages negatively with the publishing of *Alchemised* and warns that buying it supports J.K. Rowling, as it would inspire people to read the original *Harry Potter* series. The creator has also not finished reading the book and does not plan to do so as he disagrees with the content. The second video has more comments and less likes, implying stronger discourse on the topic in the comment section.

Mannwald concluded that both videos show different approaches to interacting with their audience and their core messages. Whereas the first only wants to show support for SenLinYu and their original work, the second focuses on the potential support of Rowling, with neither creator actually having read the entire book.

Laura Bisericanu: "Struggles and Nerves, Angst in Jane Austen Fanfiction"

Laura Bisericanu's presentation described how Jane Austen's works have influenced generations of writers and fan fiction authors, analyzing both professional and fan adaptations and their place in popular culture.

Bisericanu explained that Austen fan fiction predates any digital spaces as historical authors were inspired by her works and were thus categorized as 'Austen-like.' Interestingly, these authors were as heavily scrutinized as fan fiction writers still are today. Both professional and fan fiction writers take inspiration from Austen's ability to write irony and her domestic realism, which readers and writers have been heavily influenced by. Another important part of Austen-inspired fiction is the inclusion of a

distant but romantic hero, as well as the yearning felt by and for that very character (e.g., Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*). Fan fiction is being used by fans to keep the angst of Jane Austen's romances alive, as it is a core part of how her works are remembered.

Even 250 years later, her works are still cherished by a fan community that keeps Austen alive and Bisericanu concluded that yearning for Austen's works is still very much alive and will likely remain for a long time.

Laura Nikolich: “Malfoy Manor Madness: What Harry Potter Fanfiction Teaches Us About How Evil Moves in The Age of Epstein and Co”

Laura Nikolich's presentation analyzed post-war *Harry Potter* fan fiction with a focus on the power structures around Voldemort and how they translate into our contemporary Western world.

Nikolich outlined the basic moral framework within the original *Harry Potter* universe. Nikolich then went on to show parallels between Dumbledore, a fictional leader, and Barack Obama, former president of the United States. Both leaders are seen as flawed but never as purely evil the way one would see Voldemort. Nikolich rooted this in a belief in their general moral judgement and empathy.

This belief is tested in two examples of dystopian post-war *Harry Potter* fan fictions: a Pottermort one in which the war ended in an oligarchical system, while in the second, a Drarry fan fiction, it ended in a fascist dictatorship, both ruled by Voldemort. In the second example, the fascist regime restricts privacy in all areas of life and stripped any other institution of their power to protect citizens, half-bloods, and muggles and thus rejects a basic moral framework. Nikolich here drew a comparison to the current Trump administration with Donald Trump attempting to proclaim emergency state acts to further his power and strip other institutions of theirs.

To understand the aesthetics of evil in both fan fictions, Nikolich made use of psychological distinctions between narcissism and psychopathy. Both fan fictions still present Voldemort as human in some way, though in the oligarchical fan fiction, his humanity is cherished while the fascist one uses his humanity as a flaw. Nikolich also pointed out that Voldemort himself is rarely sexualized within fan fiction, even if his followers and servants are depicted as sexual deviants. Thus, one could argue that his evil may have ties to sexual repression, but, more clearly, sexuality is used to control people.

Linking Narcissa Malfoy and Melania Trump, Nikolich then questioned how and why women would want to support and take part in a system that restricts and controls them. She argued that right-wing women are aware of their own status within the system, that they are valued mostly for their sex and potential for reproduction, but try to hold on to the belief that their obedience towards their husbands will grant them security and maybe even success. This is also depicted in the relationship between Harry and Voldemort in one of the fan fictions.

Nikolich concluded that post-war Hogwarts fan fiction can show how easily an already unstable system can derail. Thus, it could help us reflect on our contemporary Western world—without presenting an easy solution: evil can live within the shadows and does not need to be visible to still exist. In the fan fictions, softness can lessen it, but it seems that the only way to overcome it is the willingness for self-sacrifice.

