

**The Appreciation of Storybending**  
An Exploration of Reviewing Practices in Online *Avatar*  
Fan Fiction

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Arts and Culture Studies: Children's Literature  
School of Humanities  
Tilburg University

*Rincke de Bont*  
ANR: 284541

*Supervisors*  
Dr. S.J. Lehtonen  
Prof. Dr. W.L.H. van Lierop  
Drs. A.W.M. Duijx

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A little over four years ago I started my life as a University student. After completing my bachelor's degree in Cultural Sciences, I decided to stay in Tilburg to pursue a master's degree in Children's Literature. Unsure if I had made the right choice, I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed the following year. Through the master's program I rediscovered my love for children's literature and developed my skills and abilities. After several courses, a short internship, a mountain of papers and many extracurricular activities, it was time to finish up my master's thesis. After nine months of hard work I am very happy to deliver this thesis, which I hope you will read with the same amount of enjoyment with which I wrote it.

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the appreciation of fan fiction expressed by reviewers. Reviewing is a central element in online fan fiction, where written fan fiction stories receive thousands of comments from readers. Fan fiction studies have emerged the last decade, focusing on literacy and language learning or identity and gender, but not so much on reviewing practices, especially not in combination with argumentation in fan fiction reviews, which is the focus of this study. This study analyses the use of arguments in fan fiction reviews and how the overall patterning and structure of these reviews tie in with this use of arguments. Key theoretical issues in this study are a conceptualization of fan communities, fan fiction and fan activity, different approaches to and definitions of quality and the appreciation of arts and literature, and reviewing practices in the literary world and the world of online fan fiction.

The model for analysis consists of elements for close reading and a reading of the reviews in general. This model is applied to 100 reviews for two fan fiction stories, *Stormbenders* (2008) and *His Majesty Prefers Blue* (2010), written about the animated television series *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. The model is based on theories on systematical close reading where every sentence is analyzed for the use of an argument. These arguments are categorized within seven categories, including various subdivisions. The reviews in general are also categorized as belonging to a certain type, according to whether a reviewer is merely praising, kindly constructing, specifically correcting or simply gossiping.

The analysis shows that the reviews tended to be long and in-depth, but were mostly overly praising and positive and/or either very specific and constructive. It turned out, however, that the four review types designed to categorize the reviews were difficult to apply at times. Analysis of the use of arguments showed that fans mostly appreciated the story in relation to the original narrative, praising the portrayal of characters and settings, and appreciated the story as an autonomous phenomenon, praising the use of language and structure.

Other findings were that each review was unique in its recognition and appreciation of textual features in the fan fiction stories. Each review had a different composition when it came to the amount of and content of arguments or additional comments. Common readers have successfully become mediators of their own in the discourse of fan fiction, deciding how they appreciate it and what they appreciate about it, discarding the role of a professional mediator. In return, fan fiction authors have to walk the line between originality and faithfulness to receive this much wanted appreciation.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Imagine reading a book that upon finishing has such an impact on you that you keep thinking about it. It has impressed you so much, you *have* to share your love for it. When there is no one around in your personal surroundings to respond to your feelings, you can turn to the online realm. The internet connects people all around the world, bringing together those with very obscure hobbies or interests. It is online where people can, often anonymously, group together and talk about cultural artefacts. For the more devoted ‘fanatic’ it does not stop after talking. With your freshly read book, you can surf websites that are dedicated to specific aspects of fan culture. Some focus on discussion, speculation or other practices such as drawing art or writing stories. A collective of fans is often referred to as ‘fandom’. Fandom members also often use this term to refer to their own collective. Interaction and participation are important keywords, as fans rely on each other for feedback and contributions. When you want to contribute to the fan discussions about your favorite book, you can write your own story based on that book, for example. You eagerly anticipate the reactions of your readers, while they construct their opinions. Brownen Thomas defines these stories, known as ‘fan fiction’ (or abbreviated as *fanfic*), as ‘stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a “canon” of works’, adding that ‘these fan-created narratives often take the pre-existing storyworld in a new, sometimes bizarre direction’ (2011:1).

In this digital age, readers have also become, in a way, authors themselves, by practicing their influences on others and the canon through fan works and activities (Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011:84). Fans can achieve a lot by working together, as they form online communities to come together and discuss their favorite artefacts of popular culture. Before the age of the internet, fans have grouped together in the form of fan clubs as well, gathering ‘offline’ for discussion as early as the 1960s or even the 1930s, when the pulp magazines, or *fanzines* are taken into account (Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011:85; Thomas, 2006:226). Although the platform has changed and fans are now able to connect all over the world, the core motive remained. They are indeed still ‘communities’ as the dictionaries define it: as a group of people that have a particular characteristic in common.<sup>1</sup> They can support each other in very unique ways. Sometimes it is only on the level of (for example) episode-discussion of their favorite television show and at other times it is helping each other write stories, draw art or even build websites. The most concrete evidence of this communal aspect lies in the writing of fan fiction. Not only do fans review the stories of others, there are also Beta-readers – often more experienced fans – that proofread the stories of certain fan fiction authors. This has become an environment of its own, where fans interact together in constructing fan fiction texts. Therefore, it is important to outline the factors that play a part in the fan fiction community. Fan fiction can have a significant effect on the canon it is written about. For example, the creators of the popular television show

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<sup>1</sup>I use the word ‘community’ as defined by the Oxford Dictionary:  
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/community?q=community>.

*Supernatural* (2005) have made fans' meta-commentary part of the show itself (Coker, 2012:94). This means that fans' suggestions are sometimes taken into consideration by the original authors. This shows that fans are now playing an active part; they produce their own goods, instead of only consuming that of others. Since they produce, they contribute to the online communities, and sometimes those contributions will reach the authors of the original narrative.

The dynamics of fan communities and fan fiction inspire many researchers to examine this subject. Historically, fan fiction as we know it today is almost as old as the internet. Before the internet, writing stories based on one or more source texts already existed. As said above, fan fiction can be traced back to science fiction fan magazines in the 1930s. Brownen Thomas supports this notion, including links to the oral and mythic traditions where folklore gets a similar treatment through re-interpretation (2011:1). Researchers have mostly picked up on fan fiction through media and cultural studies, with anthropological and psychoanalytical studies on the side to focus on the behavior and motivations of fans (Thomas, 2011:2). Thomas goes on to describe three waves of scholarship towards the fan fiction practice. The first wave assumes a position influenced by Marxism, considering the fan as the powerless and the corporations that own the rights as the mighty (2011:3). Henry Jenkins (1992) adds to this discussion by subverting the situation and praising fans for their collective power to undermine the corporatization: their participatory culture offers a new model of cultural production. One major flaw of this research wave is that the fan community is looked down upon as a homogenous group, rather than a group of numerous and varied positions and voices. The second wave is mainly preoccupied with responding to the development of new media forms that lead to new possibilities and interactions in fan activity. The third wave is similar to the second wave, in that it is also researching the role and motives of fans, exploring the contributions of fans to contemporary culture. The difference with the second approach is that this wave concentrates on fandom engagement and fan activities as an aspect of everyday life (Thomas, 2011:4). Of course, these studies focus on fan communities in general. In fan fiction studies I have observed two different tendencies these studies lean towards. The first tendency entails studies about literacy and language learning, focusing on either second language or first language learners (e.g. Black, 2008; Leppänen, 2009; Stasi, 2006). The second tendency in fan fiction studies focuses on identity and gender studies, regarding fan fiction as a tool for fans to construct their own identity and self through fan fiction (e.g. Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2006; Leppänen, 2007). Language learning and identity of course go hand in hand: many researches, such as Leppänen, study both topics. Fan fiction studies have also looked into other themes and topics, tying into the communal aspects of fan fiction amongst others. In this research I explore the motives of fans behind their reviewing practices, something that has not been researched that much before.

Among people whom are not too familiar with fan fiction, the notion exists that these fan created texts almost only entail badly written romance stories about male characters, or about a character and a fictionalized version of the author. This is certainly not the case. On the contrary, a website

like FanFiction.Net (FFN) showcases a large quantity of fan fiction types, including those romantic stories among many others. Subgenres are well-known within fan fiction, varying from recognized genres such as *romance* or *adventure* to very fan fiction specific genres like *hurt/comfort* – where an injured character is comforted by another – or *deathfic* – where a major character dies (Busse & Hellekson, 2006:10, 11). Fans gather to discuss, but also help each other with their fan activities. These communities can be found on websites like FFN or blog sites like LiveJournal.com.

Another prejudice against fan fiction has to do with the authors of published narratives themselves. Author of the successful book series behind the widely popular television series *Game of Thrones*, George R.R. Martin, has discussed fan fiction on several occasions,<sup>2</sup> arguing why he is against it. In his opinion, (fan) authors should not use the story worlds of other authors. He regards this as an easy way out of not conjuring one's own original story and characters. Other authors have spoken out against fan fiction as well on legal grounds. Using their characters and plot is part of copyright infringement, as authors like Anne Rice (*Interview with a Vampire*) and Orson Scott Card (*Ender's Game*) have discussed this matter.<sup>34</sup> The latter author even threatens to sue, in the need of protecting his copyright. Considering this, Card is still flattered that fans adore his work so much that it leads to writing fan fiction. Rice on the other hand, does not allow it at all in protection of her characters and copyright. Despite this, it seems that fans do not mind what an author thinks. As long as they state they do not own any rights to the franchise and do not financially prosper from their writings, it is acceptable in their eyes to keep writing fan fiction. It seems that fans' disagreement on the content of fan fiction is large, but common ground is found on the activity of writing in itself. They feel entitled and allowed to write because they are not seeking to make profit of their fan writings. Fans are able to stand strong: backing their (personal) opinions as well as each other. Support is a significant part of any fan community; including fan fiction communities. This support can take form in reviews that fans leave for their peers. Fan fictions are periodically updated pieces that are incomplete for a long time, thus reviewers do have some input in the stories. When fans comment on other fans' story, at times the fan author uses these comments from their peers to improve his or her own work.

Fans have a lot to say about other fans' stories, because most of the time they feel as much entitled to the canon which the story is based on as any other fan. On the other hand, however, there is a hierarchy present amongst fans. Mostly fans point out what kind of fans they are themselves, in terms of being 'new' or being an 'expert'. In doing so, they position themselves in the fan spectrum. Francesca Coppa (2006:232) provides a helpful overview in her essay, 'Writing Bodies in Space', where she creates 'the Geek Hierarchy'. This table provides a number of pathways that show how fans position themselves as 'less geeky than...' other kinds of fans.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.georgerrmartin.com/for-fans/faq/>, retr. 20 Mar. 2014.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.annerice.com/ReaderInteraction-MessagesToFans.html>, retr. 20 Mar. 2014.

<sup>4</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,2081784,00.html>, retr. 20 Mar. 2014.

For example: science fiction television fans consider themselves less geeky than ‘trekkies’, which are fans devoted to the television series *Star Trek*. This can also be said for fan fiction authors. Authors of ‘regular’ fan fiction consider themselves less geeky than authors of erotic fan fiction, whom in their turn consider themselves less geeky than erotic fan fiction writers who insert themselves into the story, and so on. This hierarchy consists of unspoken rules, where sometimes the use of jargon is necessary for fans to identify their own degree of ‘geek’. In other words, members of online fan communities use an array of words to prove their status in the online community. It seems that, although online fan communities create the opportunity for a person to leave the ascribed identity roles in real life behind, they ascribe themselves to new ones in the online discourse (Black, 2008:100). A fan’s position in the hierarchy becomes clear through their different outings via their online presence. User profiles come in handy to display one’s online activity. How older the profile or username, how longer the fan has been active, underlining their dedication and knowledge. References to pop culture are also a popular method to show familiarity. Another way to express familiarity is through reviews. The vast majority of fan fiction texts receive feedback, which exists for the greater part out of comments on the written text, whether appreciating or depreciating. FFN users are able to leave a written review at the end of every chapter on a completed fan fiction text, as well as an uncompleted one. This allows the fan fiction author to take the comments into consideration and actively include feedback into their fan fiction. The review system of FanFiction.Net also enables unregistered readers to leave their thoughts, comments and reviews. A fan carefully constructs a review for a story they have read. These constructions of reviews and all their different types of variations ties into this research. Different aspects come to light, not only with respect to the tone of the review, but also with respect to the attitude of the reader towards the author.

This interaction between fans and how they look at each other’s fan fiction, asks for a closer look. Fan fiction is a (sometimes) completely different discourse from published, ‘original’ literature. Literary fiction is published as a finished product, available as such to the reader. Fan fiction is released episodically as a work in progress. Another factor is that it is published online, with the possibility for readers to immediately comment on the work. For literary fiction this is also the case, but because a novel is published in its completed form it is not possible for authors to process the criticism into their work. Another difference between fan fiction and published fiction focuses on quality. In the mainstream world, the notion exists that fan fiction is not worthy of being called ‘literature’, for it is badly written. An example that defies this thought is Mafalda Stasi’s 2006 study on fan fiction as literature, which shows that fan fiction authors are able to use the same strategies as novelists with textual and literary tools, to mold a literary text in a different form. I can argue that fan fiction has a different dynamic than published literature; the interaction between author and reader is significantly larger. Not all fan fiction is bad, and fans seem to know this. They are able to write thought-out stories as well as reviews. This unique interaction calls for a different approach. Fan fiction is a different discourse than published



fiction. Therefore, the expectation is that the appreciation and value of fan fiction texts adapts to this discourse.

What kind of (literary) quality do fans see in fan fiction? How do they define, perceive and judge quality? This will be the central focus of this MA thesis. Reviews are the object of this research. The things readers value or, on the other hand, hate about fan fiction and the arguments they use for their judgment will be closely examined. These topics have led to this specific research question:

- What elements of fan fiction do fans value as good writing or storytelling and what kind of critical arguments do fans use to support their opinions?

This research question can be split up into two sub questions:

- What elements of fan fiction do fans value as good writing or storytelling?
- What kind of critical arguments do fans use to support their opinions?

For this research I will analyze fan fiction reviews on structure, verdicts on value, arguments and other contents. By analyzing these reviews I hope to find out what it is that fans appreciate about fan fiction and what they consider to be its unique characteristics. There are things that fans will appreciate that are specific for the fan fiction genre, like characterization, but also things that are common between fan fiction and published fiction, such as certain literary strategies.

Of course, a fan fiction author can also ‘review’ their beloved canon through their own fan fiction writing. In these *fanfics*, certain elements of the canon are changed. It is possible that these changes are made because the fan author does not appreciate what happens in the canon, therefore changing things to their liking. This aspect of fan fiction will not be part of my own research, as I will focus on the reviewers and their reviewing practices. The same goes for the subject of Beta-readers. Beta-readers are readers that proof read stories for fan fiction authors. This aspect will be shortly discussed in the theoretical framework, as it is an important part of the fan fiction discourse and should therefore be explained.

I have specified a data set to narrow down the data collection. I will focus on the television series *Avatar: the Last Airbender* and the reviews of the most popular fan fiction stories on FanFiction.Net. More information on the series will be included in the theoretical framework, and I will elaborate on why I choose this specific canon in the chapter of methodology.

This research will first deal with a number of theoretical problems in the next chapter: I will define some important concepts and give definitions for certain subjects. Topics like reviews and quality in general need theoretical exploring and defining before I can use them in my own research. After this chapter I will design my own research model. This model will help analyze fan fiction reviews in a structural manner. I will categorize the reviews in general, on the basis of the tone of the review and structural patterns. Another part of the model is for close-reading of the reviews, analyzing specific arguments that are made about the text, but also ‘leftovers’: factors that do not contribute to a value or verdict, but address different aspects. For example, a greeting or closing directed to the author or random comments that have nothing to do with the fan fiction text. I will apply this model to my data set of collected reviews.

## Chapter 2. Theorizing fan fiction and the appreciation of the arts

In the introduction I have focused on outlining the different key issues and the perspectives of the various participants in the world of fan communities and fan fiction. It has become apparent that readers have taken on a new, active, role. Presently, fans rejoice through online communities, creating their *fannish* goods. Not all authors respond positively to these developments, clinging to their copyrights and original content. However, many fans are not bothered with this and continue producing. One of these products is fan fiction, a phenomenon that has a rich history. The specific rules that come with fandom have been transformed and adapted to fan fiction and at the same time fan fiction has developed its own set of rules and guidelines as well. In this chapter I will take a closer look into these issues, by defining and explaining the ecosystem of fandom and fan fiction. The last paragraph of this chapter shows an example of fan activity and activism for *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, the canon of choice for the data collection. Being the focus of this thesis, reviewing practices in particular will be examined in detail, not only closing in on reviews on fan fiction, but also on reviews in general and literary standards as well as the differences between literary reviews and fan fiction reviews. However, before I look into the reviewing practices, the aspect of quality will also be addressed by discussing the literary definitions for quality and aesthetic appreciation in literature.

### 2.1. Fandom: the definitions

This section will focus on explaining certain terms and concepts in the world of fans in general, as well as outline the current key issues of fan fiction and fandom. As described above, online fan communities abide by their own rules and jargon.<sup>5</sup> In the following, I will explain the terms that will be frequently used throughout this thesis.

The term ‘fandom’, which I have already mentioned several times, consists of two different words: *fan* (fanatic) and the suffix *-dom*, as in ‘kingdom’ or ‘freedom’.<sup>6</sup> This suggests a realm or world where fans can join and revel together in producing and consuming their *fannish* goods, which are based on a specific published cultural product like a book or film. However, while we see this fandom as a collective, it itself is not cohesive (Busse & Hellekson, 2006:6). Every fandom has a different set of rules, is composed out of different kinds of people and so forth. They operate within a climate of their own. A fandom often establishes its personal safe haven in the online environment by constructing a specific website or online forum. For instance, as regards the series *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, the canon explored in this study, there are websites such as AvatarSpirit.Net and Avatar Wiki, where information about the series is presented, as well as trivial facts, articles and material on different media adaptations. Apart from these categories that center on factual information, there are forums for other types of fan engagement

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<sup>5</sup> An extended list of the vocabulary used by fans is added in the form of a dictionary as an appendix (p. 61) to this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Definition retrieved Mar. 26 2014 from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68041?redirectedFrom=fandom#eid>.

as well. On these forums, fans can contribute to the discussion, post fan fiction or ask questions.<sup>7</sup> It is in these environments that fans feel safe to express themselves and feel accepted. The environment develops into the fan community that has been previously mentioned in the introduction. In these communities, jargon and fan-specific terminology develops on a deeper level, customizing itself to the specific fandom. This allows for more experienced fans to become ‘insiders’ as Francesca Coppa has illustrated with her *Geek Hierarchy* (2006:232). Frequently, fandom specific inside jokes or nicknames for characters also develop. This becomes prevalent in reviews as well, when fans review a fan fiction story and refer to their insider knowledge, thus showing their expertise. Of course, types of fans have names as well, for example the *Big Name Fan* (BNF), a fan with a large following, the *newbie*, who is new to the fandom and the *lurker*, someone who only watches fan activities but never participates (Busse & Hellekson, 2006:11). For this research, I am interested in the supporting aspects of the community that, however, also involve critique. Writing reviews is already a form of participation, even though not all reviewers write fan fiction themselves.

The term *fan fiction*, often abbreviated as *fanfic* or sometimes simply *fic*, is explanatory in itself, telling us it centers fiction written by fans. As it has been previously noted, fan fiction is a way for fans to express their (creative) thoughts or practice their writing, while using existing plot lines and characters from other – often well-known – narratives. Fan fiction can be traced back to the 1960s and Anglo-Saxon Star Trek fan communities and Japanese manga fan communities (Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011:85; Hellekson & Busse, 2006). Starting with printed fan magazines and hand-written texts, fan fiction has a long history. The internet has boosted the growth, exposure and (academic) attention towards this phenomenon. Stories written by fans about their favorite artefact in popular culture have been in the running for quite some time. In that sense, fan fiction is nothing ‘new’ (Leppänen, 2009). Still, it has to be noted that the emergence of the internet plays an important part for the breakthrough of fan fiction. As internet developed, fan fiction developed with it. In its offline days, fan fiction was much more like regular published fiction. The stories were written and published as completed products and were not globally available to broad audiences as it is the case today. A story would not have been able to reach a very wide audience; since the internet was nonexistent it would have been difficult to rapidly distribute these stories. Fanzines provided some distribution, but were not as easily accessible as the present-day internet. At present the genre has transformed into a communal activity where texts are fashioned and produced through online collaboration and communication (Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011:85).

There are different ways to be involved in fan communities as well as in fan fiction. Fan fiction is an aspect of fandom, but can be viewed as a practice of its own. Regarding fan fiction, there are all sorts of active readers, all potentially engaging in three kinds of activities: first, reading

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<sup>7</sup> Fandom specific websites for *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, retrieved 26 Mar. 2014 from [www.avatarspirit.net](http://www.avatarspirit.net) and [http://avatar.wikia.com/wiki/Avatar\\_Wiki](http://avatar.wikia.com/wiki/Avatar_Wiki).

the works of other fans, second, giving feedback and discussing these texts, and, third, writing and publishing their own fan fiction texts. There are however, no dependencies between these three activities. A fan can participate in only one or two of these activities but also in all three of them (Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011:88). This can also be said about fan communities in general: online users participate and engage on different levels, suited to their personal needs. Different fandoms have become unique in their own way and often want to distinguish themselves from others, leading to the inception of specific names for themselves and their fandom. There are *Potterheads*, *Trekkies*, and *Twihards* for *Harry Potter*, *Star Trek* and *Twilight* respectively (Wright, 2011). There are exceptions: fans of *Avatar: the Last Airbender* have found it difficult to agree on a specific name. At one point, a well-known fan artist (alias 'Isaia') coined the term *Avatard*, – a combination of the words *Avatar* and *retarded* – inspired by the almost 'insane' way of being devoted to the series. Fans seemed to agree on this name and followed her example. Recently, Isaia has come back on her words, apologizing for using a slur for mental illness to name her beloved fandom (2014). Some fans seem to agree on this, leaving the *Avatar: the Last Airbender* fandom name non-specified, while other fans still call themselves an *Avatard*.<sup>8</sup>

In these fan texts, fans are prone to alter or add to the universe in which the source text takes place. These 'universes' receive names of their own, like the *Potterverse* or *Buffyverse*, regarding the Harry Potter-series and television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In the genre of fantasy or science fiction in particular, fans refer to the rules of the universe to denote the specific set of laws that distinguishes it from our own world. The rules of the fictional universe of a specific source text are referred to as the *canon*. The term canon in fan fiction means something different than in the literary discourse. A literary canon denotes a body of works that has been accepted as most important and influential for a certain time and culture (Brillenburger Wurth & Rigney, 2006:68, 69). In fandom, a canon refers to the source text, the stream of truthful, 'real' information regarding the story, plot lines, and characters as created by the original author. Still, it can be discussed what parts of the published narrative should belong to the 'official' canon. For example, *Avatar: the Last Airbender* originally aired as an animated television series, with 61 episodes spanning over three seasons in total. However, the series has also derived a number of comic books and (graphic) novels. Fans generally regard the television series as the canon, with the spin-off books as an optional inclusion. This means that some fans may only use the television series as their main source for fan fiction, while others may draw on the whole range of the previously listed sources.

Fanon, which can be seen as a counterpoint for canon, concerns – among other things – fan theories about narrative gaps in the canon. Also known as *Headcanon* this set of theories is based on the source material and concerns an interpretation of things that are not explicitly made clear in the canon. When it is unclear what happens to a certain character in the canonical narrative,

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<sup>8</sup> Retrieved 27 Mar. 2014 from <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Trivia/AvatarTheLastAirbender>.

for example, fans speculate on what might have happened. The outcome is never stated in the canon, but fans sometimes reach consensus: the events created by the fan community and repeated pervasively throughout different fan texts (Busse & Hellekson, 2006:9) An example of this is the shared belief in the *Harry Potter* fandom is that the Potters and Longbottoms were never shown to be friends, aside from Harry and Neville, but fan fiction often depicts them as ancient allies and Alice as Harry's godmother and close friend of Lily's. This information cannot be found in the books and author J.K. Rowling has never made a statement about this. Nevertheless, fans are prone to fantasize about what might be. These short figments and speculations are often the principle of fan fiction, used as a starting point for many long stories. It is also important to note that the source for this Harry Potter fanon speculation comes from a fan-made wiki website, called TV Tropes. This website covers all kinds of examples of tropes in television and popular culture on a detailed encyclopedic scale. There are guidelines to how the website operates and functions, but fans can add to entries with no references needed because the website is keen on maintaining things informal. Especially this is what makes TV Tropes a credible source for my research as it regards the fans' own, shared understanding of fan culture: everything I need to find on fan culture is present there in a frank and open form. It is an unfiltered, yet insightful, expression of fans themselves.

As regards the textual features of fan fiction, the spectrum is obviously very wide, varying in quality, genre, style and form. Fans are not afraid to use different media, linguistic or symbolic codes that indicate hyperlinked connections. These connections are found in the different fan websites providing information or other fan-produced goods as well as other source material – like websites that teach writing skills – to support a fan in increasing their personal skills. The use of hybrid textual forms tie into the networks of the fan, as they blend different media and textual genres (e.g., *songfics*, *moviefics*, *poetryfics*) resulting in the array of different fan fiction stories and genres (Black, 2008:98-99). Busse & Hellekson (2006:10-12) describe three main genres for the field of fan fiction: *gen*, *het* and *slash*. These three genres denote romantic implications, where *gen* stands for general, implying no romantic relationships between characters. *Het* and *slash* are stories revolving around heterosexual relationships and same-sex relationships respectively. These three main genres stand next to another way of categorizing fan fiction genres, which are the so-called subgenres, of which the names are self-explanatory most of the time. For fans, these subgenres function as tags to distinguish stories, as a tool for fan fiction selection criteria. For instance, there are short fan fiction stories gathered under the *one shot* genre that only consist of one chapter. This is the opposite of general fan fiction, which are periodically updated stories where the writer uploads one – sometimes several – chapters at a time. A *one shot* is a short story that captures a short moment, often entailing only one scene, between a few characters. This is a fan fiction story that is not periodically updated, therefore not allowing readers to help improve the story through reviews. Regardless, fan authors often go back to edit their stories to incorporate reviews, or write several *one shot* stories within the same *fanfic*. Other examples of subgenres are *Mpregs*, stories where male characters become pregnant,

*episode fixes*, where the author rewrites a specific episode of a series or *fluffs*, light stories that seek to make a tender emotional impact rather than advancing a plot (Busse & Hellekson, 2006:11). This is only one example from the long list of subgenres. The consensual creation of these subgenres and all their names is an example of the participatory mindset in fan communities. These subgenres are a way of measuring whether a story is appealing and if it contains a certain quality. This certain quality, however, is a difficult concept to define as it has many definitions and uses in both the literary discourse and the online fan fiction discourse.

## 2.2. Quality

In this section I will move on to the subject of quality. It seems that although fan fiction is mostly known among the general public for its badly written romance stories, it does possess an amount of quality that fans vie for. There is indeed evidence of fan fiction stories that fans appreciate and regard as literary works. For example, the currently most reviewed fan fiction story on FanFiction.Net for the Harry Potter series is titled *Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality*: a fan fiction consisting of 560,000 words and counting, exploring the *Harry Potter* series from a rationalist point of view where Harry approaches magic through scientific matters (Wrong, 2010). The story goes in depth to the point that it can rival J.K. Rowling's work. Within the reviews, the number of which is over 23,000, fans mostly comment on the quality: they value the different approach to Rowling's books and the thoroughness of the story. It should be noted that these comments are subjective and solely reflect the opinion of each reviewer. The specific ways that fans move beyond merely stating their opinions and, instead, engage in detailed and critical argumentation is interesting. To be able to formulate a framework in which (literary) quality can be discussed in a more systematic manner, I want to look into theoretical literature on quality in this section. What are the institutional approaches to literary aesthetics and art? What does literature say about quality? I will discuss three ways to assess quality – textual features, aesthetic features and institutional status – in the following sections.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term quality as 'The standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something'.<sup>9</sup> The first fragment of this definition shows that quality can only be decided by comparing the one to the other. As regards fan fiction, it seems indeed that the quality of fan fiction is measured by the standards of published fiction. By comparing fan fiction to published fiction, it is possible to give an aesthetic judgment about a specific fan fiction story in the context of published literary works. The second fragment of the definition presents quality as 'the degree of excellence of something'. Of course, this degree is also measured by comparing different objects of the same category or genre. In the case of fan fiction, this means that this degree of excellence is also decided by the comparison between fan fiction texts. These two levels of comparison already give us some insights into discussing (literary) quality, but the second level leaves some issues open. When

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<sup>9</sup> Quality, a definition, retrieved 28 Mar. 2014 from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/quality?q=quality>.

quality is decided by comparing fan fiction texts among each other, it still leaves the question about the measurement of quality itself. What criteria form the basis for an aesthetic judgment of fan fiction? In the following, I will discuss the theories by Crowther (2006), Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney (2006), and Olsen (1981) to gain insight in how literature defines and describes the aesthetical judgments of readers.

To start with, one way to ascribe quality is by measurement against other artefacts, as has been noted above. Commonly, texts can be classified under certain genres, but these genres themselves suggest a hierarchy of or ranking in quality in literature: lecture, entertainment, literary fiction, 'real' literature, literary art, art, Literature, great/grand literature and so forth. In *Defining Art, Creating the Canon* Paul Crowther (2006) also discusses the aesthetic concepts of art and value. He comes to the conclusion that there is a future for an aesthetic approach to the definition of art and that art's canonical values can be given justification in philosophical terms, using a normative aesthetic (2006:2). Using a normative aesthetic means that the appreciation of art is related to a norm or a standard of what art should be. Crowther's strategy involves a revival of the mimetic definition of art, with the burden of meaning switched from correspondence to the normative significance of stylistic interpretation. He follows the approach that in order to aesthetically appreciate art one must know that it is an instance of art, subject to certain categories of judgment (2006:4). With normative aesthetics Crowther chooses for a prescriptive approach in which art critics and theorists try to formulate what should please people aesthetically. In his approach, the professional critics decide which artefacts are true 'art' and why they should be appreciated: they make the decisions for others. Linking this to fan fiction, there is the possibility that readers do not view fan fiction as 'art', but merely read and write it with the purpose to play with text and to entertain. Still, fan fiction is appreciated for what it is, and readers have the control to formulate what personally pleases them aesthetically. They can take on the role of art critics themselves. There is no (professional) critic that decides for them.

In the public eye, a mediator takes on this role of art critic and contributes to the placement of texts into the spectrum of the order. The mediator gives aesthetic judgments on texts that are newly published or receive public attention for other reasons. These texts can possess certain qualities but it is always the reader or mediator that decides whether they appreciate the qualities and whether they categorize them as literary. These mediators have a strong influence on the general opinion. They can be individuals such as a talk show host or a well-known critic, but can also be institutions. They are called cultural authorities, such as juries of literary prizes or education authorities (Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney, 2006:67). Thus, literature is not only a collection of texts, but also the product of human rules, conventions and activities: authors, 'normal' or 'common' readers, and mediators all have a say in the distribution, rating and reproduction of texts (Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney, 2006:65). There are also other factors that contribute to the appreciation of literature. Literary features, such as poetics, narrative, depth and enjoyment, are often cited as reasons for appreciating a text. (Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney,



2006:65). Even though it can be said that this ranking goes from ‘bad’ to ‘good’ in terms of literary quality, complexity and depth, not all works have to correspond to that to be appreciated. A book can be a good read to some readers because it is pleasurable. Sometimes it can be the combination of certain features in books that receives literary appreciation. As mentioned before, a literary canon denotes the discourse of greater texts during a certain time and culture. In relation to fan fiction, it can be said that there are variations of literary fan fiction canons – in the sense of ‘classics’ or the ‘best of’ – among readers. These canons are, again, fandom-specific and only relate to stories within the canon of the source material. For example, on forums fans recommend fan fiction stories to each other. Through these practices, there is an emergent – although very shaky – canon of fan fiction stories that are deemed as the best in their genre. Another way to look for the most popular fan fiction stories is to sort them by the amount of reviews and ‘favorites’ that a story has received. When fans add a story as a *favorite*, they select to follow it and they receive digital updates and notifications for the story. Fans also add a story to their list of favorites because they appreciate it and value it. Fans can appreciate the story making use of the different literary criteria applied to published literature as noted above, but also on the basis of features that are typical of fan fiction. Those features will be analyzed in the fan fiction reviews.

Stein Haugom Olsen (1981) writes about literary aesthetics and literary practice. He distinguishes two different types of answers to the question ‘What is Literature?’ with both answers being of an atomistic nature that reference to the singular literary work. The difference between these two types of answers is that one is reductive and the other non-reductive. To characterize this difference he uses the distinction between a textual feature and an aesthetic feature to reductive and non-reductive theories respectively. A textual feature is a feature of style, content, or structure. All texts have these feature. In contrast, an aesthetic feature constitutes a text a literary work of art. A reductive answer to the question ‘What is Literature?’ makes an attempt to determine what textual features are necessary and sufficient for classifying a text as a literary work. A non-reductive answer to the same question denies the reductive answer, but rather answers it through Olsen’s theory of *supervenience*, where an aesthetic feature is identified by a reader, in a literary work, through an aesthetic judgment as what one may call a constellation of smaller signs and patterns (Olsen, 1981:521-523). Olsen argues that the lower-level properties of the text determine its higher level properties. He illustrates this with an example of a Shakespeare sonnet, where the pattern is a textual feature where certain words are placed symmetrically on each side of the centered words *mad* (1981:524). This pattern only becomes an aesthetic feature for the reader who succeeds in assigning the pattern a function in this poem (1981:525). It seems that reductive and non-reductive theory both work in opposite directions. Reductive theory tries to bring a text back to its essential textual features and appreciates these, while non-reductive theory does the opposite in trying to look at the smaller signs and patterns in a text to construct a greater aesthetic feature that serves as an umbrella for the text. However interesting non-reductive theory and aesthetic features, most of the time the

textual features – as recognized by the mediator – define whether a text has a certain quality to it, but it is always up to the reader to decide which features are appreciated (Brillenburger & Rigney, 2006). It has to be noted that according to the theory of *supervenience* an aesthetic feature is formed as a unique constellation of smaller signs and patterns (such as the patterning of a certain word or letter), therefore it will be highly personal to a reader. There can be no general descriptive criteria for aesthetic assessment (Olsen, 1981:525). In my fan fiction research, I will look at both these textual and aesthetic features of texts and if fan fiction reviewers are able to appreciate these as such. It can be assumed that textual features, such as language use in a specific sentence, are easier to recognize, more objective – in comparison to aesthetic features – and therefore easier to be recognized and appreciated by common readers or fan fiction readers. However, some reviews can also describe the recognition of patterns according to aesthetic features as Olsen discusses it, and it will be interesting to take a look at the opinions of fans in their reviewing practices.

These examples of how to approach literary quality are often abstract in their descriptions and explanations, as textual features are generally described as style, content and structure. This is why I also want to examine a more practical approach to quality in the literary discourse. I will do this by looking at the criteria and qualifications for literary prizes. The (John) Newbery Medal is awarded to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.<sup>10</sup> I chose this award as an example, as it is an award that provides a very detailed list on the terms and criteria for winning this prize.<sup>11</sup> A committee holds responsibility over selecting and nominating books. Most interesting are the criteria that are listed. Committee members need to consider the following in identifying ‘distinguished contribution to American literature’ in a book for children: interpretation of the theme of concept; presentation of information including accuracy, clarity and organization; development of a plot; delineation of characters; delineation of a setting and appropriateness of style. The book should have distinguished qualities in all of these elements. The book also needs to be suitable to a child audience and the committee makes its decision primarily on the text itself. Noted at the end is that the award is for literary quality and quality presentation for children and not for didactic content or popularity. It seems that literary awards manage their own set of rules to narrow down the selection of books. Comparing this to Olsen’s theory of *supervenience* (1981), where he describes that any skillful placement of words can become aesthetic, the criteria for the Newbery Medal remain on the surface. Criteria for the Newbery Medal concern mostly that the text follows the guideline of presenting clear information and containing original characters and plotlines that are suitable for children. Literary quality is considered as obvious, and no didactic or popular books are eligible. The criteria resemble the textual features Olsen has described. It can be said that the Newbery Medal

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<sup>10</sup> Book & Media Awards, retrieved 17 Apr. 2014 from <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia>.

<sup>11</sup> Newbery Medal terms and criteria, retrieved 17 Apr. 2014 from <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberyterms/newberyterms>.

does not correspond to the aesthetic features or judgment, but relies on the textual features to appreciate literature.

It can be concluded from this literature that quality, appreciation and aesthetical judgment are subjected to various definitions and interpretations.<sup>12</sup> In this particular context of fan fiction, quality is about an individual reader discovering the various elements of a text and selecting which of these elements they appreciate. Quality in regard to fan fiction is therefore, determined by fans and the textual features that they personally appreciate. It has been established that fan fiction differs greatly from published fiction, so it is expected that readers and reviewers of fan fiction value different textual features from published fiction. Even fans often debate these issues but are able to reach consensus over certain features (e.g. Mary Sue characters are often condemned). These features will be explored in the third chapter. Before I do that, I will look into reviewing practices in the next section to take a closer look at the structure and content of various sorts of reviews.

### **2.3. Reviews and the fan fiction system**

As I have explained in the first chapter, fan fiction reviews have a very dynamic character, as they are interacting with the fan fiction text itself. However, before I focus on fan fiction reviews, I want to look at reviewing practices in general: is there a consensus on reviews and their form? Reviewing practices can take on many forms but there is an essential core to it. A review aims at critically analyzing an object. Those objects can vary greatly: a contemporary example of this is a Dutch website where the contributors review essentially anything.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the main subjects of reviews tend to be literature, film, music and theatre. Presently, reviews can be found online on websites but are also published in newspapers and magazines. Being critical is something that every person is able to do. According to Joke Linders-Nouwens, being critical is an activity that every reader develops, albeit on different levels: from the naïve, unschooled child to the professional literary critic (1978:1).

In the literary world reviews tend to follow the same structure and form. Reviews not only judge literature in terms of its (aesthetic) contents but also provide a summary of the book for an interested reader. Therefore, reviews tend to hint at what the book is about, but never give away too much information to spoil the reading experience. A review serves to educate readers and help them decide whether they should read a particular book or not. On the other hand, a reviewer also tries to describe and justify his opinion. This leads to the use of various arguments to validate why a book is good or bad. These arguments are mostly based on the appreciation or depreciation of certain textual features, but are not limited to those. Krikhaar & Ros (1986) have researched these categories and the ways in which they occur within reviews

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted, however, that the institutional context, especially in literary canons, makes the subjective become more objective when many people – or gatekeepers in institutions – agree on certain criteria.

<sup>13</sup> Recensiekoning, retrieved 17 Apr. 2014 from <http://www.recensiekoning.nl/>.

in children's literature. According to them, various types of arguments are used by reviewers to express their opinion. The model that they have constructed will be used in my analytical model, introduced in chapter 3, which makes it possible to examine whether these types of arguments occur also in fan fiction reviews.

As been discussed above, reviewing practices are realized in various ways in the world of fan fiction. One particular practice of reviewing is the direct review that fan fiction texts receive as 'comments'. FanFiction.Net has an elaborate system that supports all the communal aspects of fandom that have been described before. This way, fans are able to communicate, support, criticize and help each other. Apart from fan fiction stories and their reviews, FanFiction.Net provides communities, forums and Beta-readers for the interested fan. On the main page of the website, fans can choose to search for a Community, a Forum or Betas in certain categories: general, anime, books, cartoons, comics, games, miscellaneous, plays, movies and TV. Clicking on one of those will redirect to the categories containing names of the various canons that are subject to fan activities. For example, when looking at the section for *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, via 'cartoons', there are numerous communities that serve as a collection for various selected fan fiction texts. One of the most popular communities is titled *Save the Fandom: Truly Well-Written Avatar Stories* and has 184 followers. The followers choose to subscribe to this particular community to receive updates and read fan fiction stories that are listed (Daughter, 2010). This community was created by a fan who initiated the collection of fan fiction stories and actively contributes to the addition of new stories. There are several fans as active staff members to help gather stories that are deemed worthy. This community is an example where fans gather to create a canon in the literary sense amongst fan fiction. Forums are very different from the subcategory communities on FanFiction.Net. The forums serve as discussion boards where fans can talk freely about topics related to their fandom. The forums are also a way to explore creative writing: fans can role-play, where they assume the identity of one of the characters and write from there out. They can also contrive new characters, plot-lines or use existing information to create their own stories. The forums are the playground of FanFiction.Net, where there are no strict rules, apart from those that fans set themselves.

FanFiction.Net also provides Betas, an abbreviation for Beta-reader. Fans can search for and approach Beta-readers who help with editing and revising their stories. One of the two stories I selected for my analysis made use of a Beta-reader.<sup>14</sup> Beta-readers are rather similar to real life editors in the publishing industry. Still, the position of a fan fiction Beta-reader varies greatly from the professional copy editor, as Angelina Karpovich argues (2006:176, 177). Beta-readers work on a voluntary basis and are involved on a much more personal level. Karpovich examines the roles of Beta-reading in fan fiction communities by tracing the evolution of the practice in the context of the changes throughout the recent history of fan fiction communities.

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<sup>14</sup> Although I don't incorporate Beta-reading in my analysis, I found it important to include a brief explanation of the concept because Beta-reading plays a fairly large part in the fan fiction reviewing discourse.

Beta-reading is the practice of releasing a story to a selected (and trusted) fellow writer or other member of the fan fiction community before making it available to a general readership. This proofreading was common practice in fan fiction for a while, and can be traced back to the editors of fanzines. Essentially, the Beta-reader gives feedback to an author on grammar, spelling, characterizations, plot, similarities to canon, and language (Karpovich, 2006:178). The word 'Beta' is a product of the current digital age, as it has been derived from software jargon to differentiate between a *beta release* – an incomplete software product with coding errors – and the official *alpha release* – a completed, functioning software product (Karpovich, 2006:172). Usually an author and his or her Beta-reader are familiar with each other, having connected (online) on several occasions before. Nevertheless, FanFiction.Net also gives people the chance to present themselves as Beta-readers, so that they can offer their expertise to (other) fan fiction authors. Often these Beta-readers have strict criteria: they are willing to proofread stories on the condition that the genre, canon and writing style suits their needs and interests but also their own skills and experience.

The fan fiction reviews that are attached to the stories can vary in length, as well as in content. They also differ from reviews on published fiction because the online environment allows for these fan fiction reviews to be much more informal than reviews in the literary world. Fan fiction reviews also tend to leave out any description of plot but provide reactions to the plot at specific points: this is because a fan fiction story is under development before the eyes of the reader, almost never complete, whereas published fiction is delivered as a completed product, so the reviews focus on the story as a whole. Fan fiction reviews follow the plot as it unfolds; often resulting in fans putting forward guesses on what will happen next. Only FanFiction.Net users that have created a profile on the website are allowed to post stories and engage in several of the activities that FanFiction.Net provides, but this is not required for leaving reviews. Thus both registered users as well as 'Guests' are allowed to review fan fiction. This leads to fan fiction stories having significantly more reviews than favorites, that is, the number of times that the story has been added to the list of favorites of a user – the latter is a feature only available to registered users. This arrangement allows for outsiders to review stories as well, resulting in copious amounts of reviews from devoted fans varying to interested readers.

In her ethnographical study of fan fiction writers, Rebecca Black (2008) gives insight in different types of fan fiction reviews by discussing four review types that emerged during the coding of structural and thematic patterns in the reviews on stories by a fan fiction author called Nanako. The four types of reviews that Black (2008:107) describes are the *OMG Standard* – where *OMG* is the acronym for the exclamation 'Oh My God!' the *Gentle Critique*, the *Focused Critique* and *Editorialized Gossip*. Each type is different in terms of the length and contents of the review, ranging from very simple supportive messages to specific suggestions for improvement but also including reviews that hardly say anything about the story. I will elaborate on each of these types in the third chapter, where I will use Black's review types to

form a model that can be used to examine my own dataset. An important thing that Black notes is that it is not only the reviewers who are reacting to the story, but that the fan fiction authors and their readers have an interactive dynamic that is visible both in the reviews as well as the story itself. In one of Black's examples, the author Nanako uses an *author's note* at the end or beginning of each chapter to address the readers directly, sometimes by thanking them for reading and reviewing the text, and at other times by wishing them well on a holiday, for instance. Nanako also shapes her online presence by using rhetorical moves to acknowledge certain readers for their support (Black, 2008:104-106). Readers, in their turn, reply to Nanako's notes in their reviews, creating a back-and-forth conversation between the author and her readers. It is important to take these kinds of comments that establish a relationship between the author and the reviewers in account as well when analyzing reviews on their contents, especially when an author encourages readers to leave positive reviews: the personal relation between author and reader can be of great influence on the reviews.

As regards the more specific contents of fan fiction reviews, it is important to look at the appreciation of fan fiction in terms of textual features that are discussed in the reviews. In fan fiction reviews, the textual features that are appreciated can differ greatly from the textual features that are appreciated in regular published fiction. This is mainly because the relation to the source text, the canon, is central to fan fiction, whereas published fiction is usually regarded as an individual work. To draw a general picture of what is considered 'good' writing in fan fiction, I will discuss a few examples of appreciation or depreciation of textual features in fan fiction. First, characterization plays a very important part in fans' judgment of fan fiction stories. To fans it is very important that a fan fiction story makes the characters think and act in the same way they would in the source text. Fans use the terms *OOC* (out of character) and *IC* (in character) in their reviews to point out whether they think the author has portrayed the character in a correct way (Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011:91). Fans are eager to point this out in their reviews. A second major point of criticism by fans is on the creation of new, original characters - or an *OC* for short - that lack in depth and originality. Often, novice fan fiction authors create original characters based on themselves and their own personality; these characters then become the love interest of a character from the source text. These self-inserts are called 'Mary-Sues' by fans, and mocked because of their seemingly perfect behavior and flawless personality (Hellekson & Busse, 2006:11, 47). Apart from these textual aspects that are usually only encountered in fan fiction reviews, fans of fan fiction and fans of published fiction also find common ground on the appreciation of certain textual features, such as good writing, style and themes. This research tries to confirm if these two example are the most important textual features that are noticed by fans, or if there are other textual features – possibly those comparable to published fiction – which fans appreciate or depreciate.

## 2.4. Fan activism in *Avatar*

Before I move on to the third chapter, I will discuss the canon I used for my data collection, the television series *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. This paragraph contains a summary of the series and its development as well as an example of fan activism in its fandom.

*Avatar: the Last Airbender* is an animated television series that originally aired on children's television station Nickelodeon between 2005 and 2008. Sixty-one episodes were aired in total, spanning three seasons. The series creators, Bryan Konietzko and Michael DiMartino, started the development of the series in early 2002. They pitched a series of adventure, action, and magic to Nickelodeon's head of development, Eric Coleman and in February 2004 the official production of the first thirteen episodes of the show began (Konietzko & DiMartino, 2010:12, 30). *Avatar: the Last Airbender* is set in a world inspired by Asian cultures and philosophies, traditional martial arts, yoga, anime and Hong Kong cinema. The story revolves around twelve-year-old Aang who happens to be the Avatar: the reincarnation of an ancient spirit that is meant to serve and protect the planet. The world is divided by people corresponding to the four elements and their homes, the Water Tribe, the Fire Nation, the Earth Kingdom and the Air Nomads. The element of magic takes form in the practice of 'bending' one of the elements. Some people are able to bend, others are not. Only the Avatar can bend all four of these elements. The past 100 years, the Fire Nation is conquering the world and Aang needs to stop its ruler, the Fire Lord. Aang is not alone in his battle, as he is accompanied by his friends Sokka and Katara, a brother and sister from the Water Tribe. With their help, Aang sets on a journey to master all four elements in bending and defeat the Fire Lord. Along the way they travel around the world and meet many people. Another major character in the series, and a fan favorite, is the banished Prince Zuko, son of the Fire Lord. Zuko is on his personal mission to capture Aang and deliver him to his father to retain his honor. He battles with good and evil and towards the end of the series he chooses to side with Aang and his friends. In the end, they succeed and the harmony in the world is restored. Zuko's journey and his decisions, both good and evil, have made him the most complex and realistic character on the show (Konietzko & DiMartino, 2010:24). The series has won several awards, including several Annie Awards as well as an Emmy award and a Humane Society Genesis Award for its depiction of animal cruelty (Konietzko & DiMartino, 2010:118). In 2010, it was announced that there would be a sequel to the series, titled *The Legend of Korra*. This series follows Avatar Korra, the successor of Aang, as she faces political and spiritual unrest in a modernizing world. Currently, the series is still in production.

Although *Avatar: the Last Airbender* aimed at a young audience, airing on a children's television network, the series attracted followers of all ages. As soon as episodes started to air, an online fandom emerged. The teenage and adult fans are the primary contributors in the fandom, having regular access to a computer or similar device, therefore raising the level of the content and discussion to a more mature level. The general fandom for the series consists out of many different people, varying in age and ethnicity, but the online fandom is mostly dominated by

teenagers, adults and up. To illustrate fan activity in the *Avatar: the Last Airbender* fandom I will briefly discuss an example of fan activism following the announcement of a live action adaptation of the series. In 2008, producers of the film adaptation announced their casting decisions, revealing that three white actors were casted as the heroes. Fans became enraged, arguing that the original cartoon was set in an Asian world; therefore all the lead roles should go to Asian (or Asian American) actors (Lopez, 2011:431). Fans came in action with various campaigns. A group of fans founded the website Racebending.com – a play on words with the magic element of ‘bending’ and the adaptation changing the race of characters – and held different campaigns and protests including petitions, letters and real-life protesting (Lopez, 2011:438). In the end, the fans did not get through to the producers of the adaptation, but this form of activism shows that fan engagement and activism can move beyond the world of the text itself, transforming everyday fans to political activists. It shows that fans can move as a group, and often form a tightly knit community that supports and defends the integrity of the source text (Lopez, 2011:432). This article about fan engagement and activism also made the point that in the era of online newswriting, comments can be seen as an important component of online discourse, and can even contribute to the creation of further legitimized conversation (Lopez, 2011:439). This can be applied to fan activism, but to fan fiction reviewing practices as well. It has already been mentioned that there are many differences between fan fiction reviewing practices and literary reviewing practices, but that there are also similarities. The main difference between both reviewing practices is the influence reviewers have on the author. In fan fiction, reviews tend to have more influence on the stories since it is still an incomplete work and authors like to take the comments from fans into consideration. Thus, fan fiction reviews are a part of the writing process.



## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

This chapter will focus on the methodology and the model of analysis which will be developed in order to tackle the research problems and questions. In the introduction I have briefly talked about the questions and problems I intend to answer, but I will elaborate on them below. Subsequently, I will explain my choices for the canon I have selected as the source of my data collection and analysis. Finally, I will introduce the design of my own research model for analysis that combines several methods, models and theory.

### **3.1. Research problems and questions**

In the introduction the following research question has been established:

- What elements of fan fiction do fans value as good writing or storytelling and what kind of critical arguments do fans use to support their opinions?

This research question has been divided into two sub questions:

- What elements of fan fiction do fans value as good writing or storytelling?
- What kind of critical arguments do fans use to support their opinions?

These questions were derived from the general problem that it often is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for why fans appreciate fan fiction. I will to analyze fan fiction reviews in terms of their content, but it would also be possible to interview fan fiction reviewers to find an answer to why they appreciate fan fiction. However, using this method, respondents would be able to manipulate their answers to meet the expectations of the interviewer or to present themselves in a specific light. By analyzing actual reviews that have been posted in reaction to fan fiction stories, I will be able to observe fan activities as they occur online, in an unmonitored form.

### **3.2. Data: choosing a canon**

In search of a canon that I could use as the central object of my research, I narrowed down the potential selection of canons that are present on the online archives of FanFiction.Net. I chose to use FanFiction.Net because it is the most popular website with the largest online collection of fan fiction stories. The website receives a lot of views and therefore also a lot of reviews. The review system FanFiction.Net provides is also very clear and easy in use. To narrow down to a certain canon, I constructed several criteria for this selection. FanFiction.Net provides several categories of corresponding canons: Anime/Manga, Books, Cartoons, Comics, Games, Miscellaneous, Plays/Musicals, Movies and TV. The first step in narrowing down the possible canons was to select the top three canons per category, so that the most popular canons come to light. It was important to select a popular canon, because a large group of followers involves a good amount of fan activity. This results in a thriving fandom, which also means that there is a lot of fan fiction writing going on, evident in a great number of stories that vary in length, genre and style,

as well as receiving a significant number of reviews. I also wanted to focus on a canon that is (originally) directed at a young audience.<sup>15</sup> Another factor that plays a part in my selection is that I wanted a fandom with an activity-peak in the past. The *Avatar* series ended in 2008, meaning that fan activity in the fandom has died down and the dataset is stable and less probable to subject to change. It also needs to be noted that the categories of Anime/Manga and Books are the most popular ones on FanFiction.Net: the canons at the top wield a large number of fan fiction stories. To give an example, the Japanese Manga and Anime -series *Naruto* had garnered more than 354.000 stories in February 2014. When checking these numbers in April 2014, it turned out that they had grown to 359.000.<sup>16</sup> This seems logical because the series is still in production and thus has an active follower base. The narrative of the source text has not been concluded yet, which results in new plotlines and characters being added, which will feed the creativity of fans. However, the most popular canon in the category Books is still the *Harry Potter* series, even though the final book of the series was published several years ago. It remains the most popular canon on FanFiction.Net to date. In February 2014 there were over 674.000 fan fiction stories written of *Harry Potter* and in April 2014 this number had increased to 681.000.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that when a series ends, the fandom can continue.

Despite popularity of the canon being one of my selection criteria, I wanted to steer away from the largest fandoms on FanFiction.Net, *Twilight* and *Harry Potter*, because there has already been done a lot of research on these fandoms and fan fiction based on these canons (see for instance, Willis, 2006; Green & Guinery, 2004; Den Hertog, 2007). I wanted a canon that had been released in a serialized form over the span of several years, because it is in those canons that fans will truly thrive: a canon with an ongoing narrative presents many opportunities for fans to create various drawings and writings. A series that met these requirements was the animated television series *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. This series is the most popular one within the Cartoons category, with over 37.600 fan fiction stories in February 2014. Within this canon itself I also set out to narrow down the vast amount of stories. FanFiction.Net is a helpful tool in itself, because the website provides a search tool that allows for the use of filters including genre, language, status (complete or incomplete), length, characters and sorting by update date, publishing date, reviews, favorites and follows (see figure 1). This tool offers fans the ability to search for stories that fit their needs in an efficient and comfortable way. In addition to these filters, I eliminated the completed stories that were not sequels to other fan fiction stories.

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<sup>15</sup> The topic of this MA thesis corresponds to the subject of the Master's program, which is children's literature. One of the requirements for the MA thesis is that it researches a cultural expression for children.

<sup>16</sup> At another check in September 2014 this number had grown to 367.000.

<sup>17</sup> At another check in September 2014 this number had grown to 693.000.

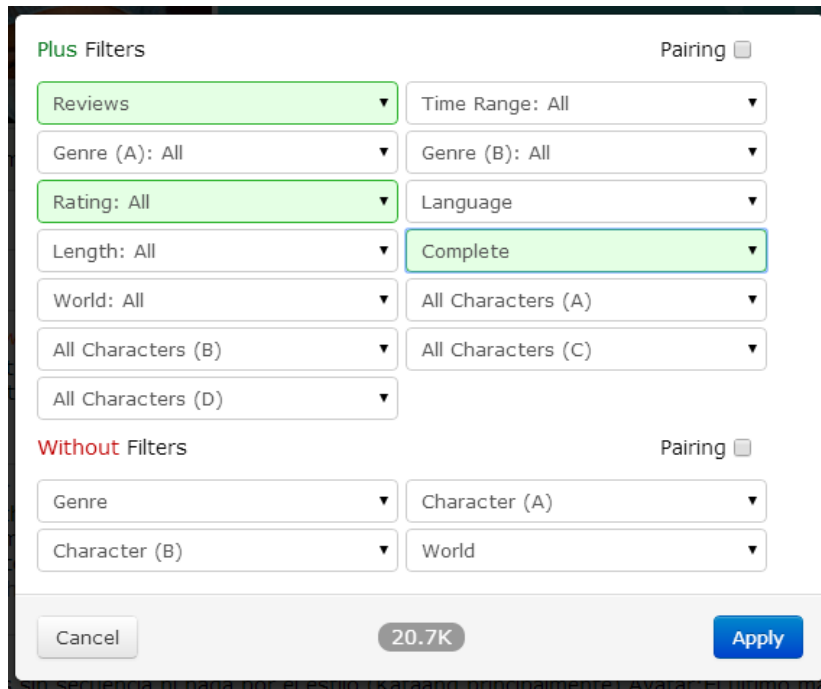




Figure 1.


When these selection criteria were applied to filter the fan fiction for *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, some interesting findings came up that reflected a resolute trend concerning the subjects and genres. There were many similarities in the top stories that came out of the selection. All of the stories were detailed romance and/or adventure stories, revolving around the same two characters from the series (see figure 2).

 [Embers](#) > by [Vathara](#) [reviews](#)  
 Dragon's fire is not so easily extinguished; when Zuko rediscovers a lost firebending technique, shifting flames can shift the world... Follows "Theft Absolute".  
 Rated: T - English - Adventure/Family - Chapters: 91 - Words: 757,722 - Reviews: 7788 - Favs: 3,796 - Follows: 2,758 - Updated: Jan 19 - Published: Sep 24, 2009 - Zuko, Iroh - Complete


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 [Stombenders](#) > by [Fandomme](#) [reviews](#)  
 S3 AU from FBM. Deep in the Fire Nation jungle, the Gaang meets a group of rogue water ninja who send Zuko and Katara on a mission to retrieve Ozai's secret battle plans.  
 Rated: T - English - Adventure/Romance - Chapters: 18 - Words: 171,033 - Reviews: 2747 - Favs: 3,372 - Follows: 921 - Updated: Jul 20, 2008 - Published: Feb 22, 2008 - Katara, Zuko - Complete


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 [His Majesty Prefers Blue](#) > by [ShamelessLiar](#) [reviews](#)  
 A year after the war's end, the gaang returns to the Fire Nation for a week of diplomatic meetings. There, they hear rumors about a vigilante who wears a blue mask and Katara finds herself digging deeper into his identity and motives. Blue/Zutara Lemons  
 Rated: M - English - Adventure/Humor - Chapters: 50 - Words: 212,173 - Reviews: 2398 - Favs: 1,707 - Follows: 821 - Updated: Jan 8, 2012 - Published: Aug 15, 2010 - Katara, Zuko - Complete


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 [The Rise of One](#) > by [Mrs Pettyfer](#) [reviews](#)  
 It began with twelve. Now it's up to one. Sequel to The Black Games.  
 Rated: M - English - Angst/Adventure - Chapters: 27 - Words: 163,216 - Reviews: 2116 - Favs: 942 - Follows: 1,103 - Updated: Dec 20, 2013 - Published: May 2, 2012 - Complete


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 [The Hunter and The Prey](#) > by [RedNovember](#) [reviews](#)  
 [ZK] The Prince of the Fire Nation will do anything to find the legendary Avatar, but what if the bait he captures to lure the Avatar decides to fight back and gains his attention in more ways than one? My take on an overused plotline. [COMPLETED]  
 Rated: T - English - Romance/Drama - Chapters: 24 - Words: 144,835 - Reviews: 1904 - Favs: 975 - Follows: 216 - Updated: Aug 29, 2005 - Published: May 3, 2005 - Complete


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 [Love Thy Enemy](#) > by [RedNovember](#) [reviews](#)  
 [ZK AU] The mighty Fire Empire rules the entire world, after they conquered it a century ago. Now, almost a hundred years later, a tiny tribe of rebels have sent Katara, an undercover assassin, to kill the Fire Emperor Zuko.  
 Rated: T - English - Romance/Adventure - Chapters: 20 - Words: 136,905 - Reviews: 1842 - Favs: 1,670 - Follows: 676 - Updated: Mar 27, 2006 - Published: Jul 18, 2005 - Zuko, Katara - Complete


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 [Til Death Do Us Part](#) > by [Vicki So](#) [reviews](#)  
 The Avatar and company face their greatest challenge: planning and getting through Zuko and Katara's wedding day! Why oh why couldn't they have just eloped? Comedic drabbles and randomness for everyone who hates weddings! COMPLETE!  
 Rated: T - English - Humor/Romance - Chapters: 43 - Words: 51,281 - Reviews: 1721 - Favs: 622 - Follows: 148 - Updated: Oct 8, 2006 - Published: Mar 17, 2006 - Zuko, Katara - Complete

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 [The Black Games](#) > by [Mrs Pettyfer](#) [reviews](#)  
 Once bound by ice, now bound by fire. 12 tributes. 1 winner. Let the games begin. Complete  
 Rated: M - English - Adventure/Romance - Chapters: 37 - Words: 183,863 - Reviews: 1718 - Favs: 1,461 - Follows: 609 - Updated: Apr 19, 2012 - Published: May 26, 2011 - Katara, Zuko - Complete

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 [Sanctuary](#) > by [momothelemur](#) [reviews](#)  
 Two years after the fateful invasion, Katara learns that she must marry the Fire Nation Prince if any sort of peace is to return to the world. She soon learns that living with Zuko isn't easy, particularly with a powerful new threat looming... Zutara  
 Rated: T - English - Drama - Chapters: 32 - Words: 193,534 - Reviews: 1563 - Favs: 687 - Follows: 330 - Updated: Oct 26, 2008 - Published: Dec 14, 2007 - Katara, Zuko - Complete

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 [Rhythm of the Rain](#) > by [DamageCtrl](#) [reviews](#)  
 Rebuilding a nation requires sacrifices. Knowing that the Fire Nation would never accept a Waterbender as it's Lord's wife, Katara removes herself from her fledgling romance with Zuko and encourages him to find greatness with Fire Nation noble Mai. Zutara  
 Rated: T - English - Romance - Chapters: 25 - Words: 251,513 - Reviews: 1409 - Favs: 1,699 - Follows: 253 - Updated: Sep 25, 2006 - Published: Aug 16, 2006 - Katara, Zuko - Complete

Figure 2.

Fan fiction stories for *Avatar: the Last Airbender* are written mostly by women, varying in age: there are young teenagers as well as adult and middle-aged women (Wikström & Olin-Scheller, 2011:87). This can be said of fan fiction in general. Going back to the selected fan fiction stories, it can be said that in the case of the *Avatar* series the most popular stories have exclusively been written by females – at least they often identify as female in online profiles and author notes – and that they are mostly romance and/or adventure stories. In general, adventure is a common genre for this canon's fan fiction stories and can be explained by the fact that the animated series itself is an adventure series. Another notable similarity between the most popular stories was that they are romance stories; nonetheless romance is not one of the main subjects in the original series. This can be explained by the fan activity within the fandom. In every fandom, the occurrence of *shipping* is prevalent. *Shipping* is the action of pairing up two characters from a canon and supporting a romantic relationship between the two. The verb *shipping* derives from the word relationship. In fandoms, fans are prone to argue which characters should truly belong

together, resulting in debates that are better known as “shipping wars”.<sup>18</sup> As the term describes, fans tend to become very vocal and defensive on the matter. For the *Avatar* series, this was as much the same when main characters Aang and Katara were shown to develop feelings for one another. Using a portmanteau of the two names, fans proclaimed to ship ‘Kataang’, while other fans spoke out against it, wishing for Katara to end up with another protagonist: prince Zuko, calling it *Zutara*. In the series they remained friends, therefore fans found other resources to make this romance happen. Through their fan activities they accomplished what never happened in the series: with fan art, fan fiction, blogs and discussion forums, fans argued why they preferred this coupling. The creators of the *Avatar* series picked up on this phenomenon of shipping within the fandom, even dedicating an animated short to it (Konietzko & DiMartino, 2010:180). In the end, Aang and Katara became a romantic couple, heavily disappointing fans that paired Zuko and Katara together. This resulted in many fan fiction authors writing stories that try to correct the error the series had made in their eyes. On FanFiction.Net these romantic stories between Zuko and Katara have become the most popular, since they fulfill the wishes the original series was not able to. During the selection of fan fiction stories that will provide data, I found various sequel stories in the top ten as well: the most reviewed, complete story was actually a sequel. Eliminating these from the list leaves us with the two most reviewed stories that received around 2,000 reviews. These two stories fit all the requests: they were similar in genre and subjects, were completed and spanning over a large number of chapters. As to narrow down the large number of reviews I have selected 100 reviews for my analysis. I have chosen longer reviews to provide more content for analysis. Before this analysis, I will first set out my design for analysis in the next paragraph.

### 3.3. Model for analysis

#### 3.3.1. Useful theories: Black, Krikhaar & Ros

In order to analyze the collected set of fan fiction reviews, it is important to have a suitable and applicable model. In this paragraph I will look at two existing models as input for my own model. I will draw on the model of Krikhaar & Ros (1986) and the work of Black (2008).

In her ethnographic study of fan fiction writers, Black analyses the different types of reader reviews (2008:106). Her conclusion is that the appreciation of fan fiction does not solely hinge on school-based literacy and grammatical conventions, but on other factors as well. She distinguishes four different types of reviews as a result. These reviews each vary complexity, content and criticism (Black, 2008:107). The first type, the *OMG Standard*, is a clear example of the readers’ kind responsiveness to the fan fiction author and focuses on the reader-author relationship. OMG is an acronym for the exclamation “Oh My God!” and consists of enthusiastic statements of appreciation for the story. In terms of the content of these critiques, according to Black, critical arguments are most of the time absent, as they are often short and only consist of

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<sup>18</sup> More information on Shipping Wars can be found on <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ShipToShipCombat>.

praise. The second type of review, the *Gentle Critique* is more structured and provides feedback on different aspects of the author's writing (Black, 2008:108). They are similarly structured and include an introduction or personal greeting (1); a positive comment on some aspect of the text (2); critique (3); a disclaimer or mitigating statement (4); a positive comment or encouragement (5); and a closing (6) (Black, 2008:108, 109). In these types of reviews the reader wants to be critical, but they do not want to hurt or offend the author. The third type is the *Focused Critique*. This type of review has the same structure as the *Gentle Critique* and includes a kind statement as well as specific critique. The difference with the *Gentle Critique* is that readers now specifically point at a flaw in the text and give feedback on how the author can correct it. But again, these constructive comments are shrouded in compliments and encouragements as not to insult the author (Black, 2008:110, 111). The last common review type is *Editorialized Gossip*, where the readers discuss characters and their exploits as if they were independent of the fan fiction author's pen. In the reviews, readers talk about the characters as if they were active, independent participants in the story (Black, 2008:114). It is a sort of "willing suspension of disbelief" where readers do not necessarily mean it as a suggestion for the author. Editorialized gossip also allows readers to discuss characterization and whether they think if a character acted in the right way. Black's types of reviews are very helpful and give good insights on the patterning and structures of fan fiction reviews. Nevertheless, they focus on the communication between reader and author and do not discuss in detail the arguments reviewers use to comment on the quality of the text. Still, the model is applicable when it comes to reviews in general. Therefore, I will present Black's review types as they are and pose some questions on the (expected) use of critical arguments that corresponds with each review type.

Margot Krikhaar and Bea Ros designed a model to analyze the arguments used in reviews for children's literature (1986). Although their model has originally been designed for the analysis of children's literature reviews, it is also applicable to fan fiction reviews as the two discourses overlap. For example, in both instances the reviewers express their opinion of the story, by using similar arguments to substantiate this opinion. Krikhaar and Ros based their model on that of Boonstra (1979) who designed a model for analyzing reviews in adult literature. Krikhaar and Ros describe four different elements out of which a review is constructed. They distinguish a descriptive, informative section (A), metacritical and institutional elements (B), evaluative, argumentative elements (C) and additional remarks (D). These elements make up the general composition of a review (Krikhaar & Ros, 1986:10-12). Krikhaar and Ros distinguish between six groups of arguments. Four of them describe the literary work in relation to elements of the literary communication process. I will present an overview of the different groups and their arguments.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The choice has been made in this model for analysis to copy the use of the Dutch word 'goed', translated as 'good', meaning that a book is appreciated and valued (Krikhaar & Ros, 1986:12-20).

### Group I: the literary work in relation to reality

#### *a. The thematic argument*

A book is good when the contents, theme or an aspect of these is good. It should be noted that the appreciation of the contents is dependable on a certain time or taste.

#### *b. The reflective argument*

A book is good when it reflects the reality outside the book in an accurate manner: literature as a mirror of reality. A book should be realistic and represent the reality in a rightful way.

#### *c. The moral argument*

A book is good when the moral implications (the message) are good. A reviewer agrees with the moral scope that can be construed from the book. This does not mean that the author consciously put certain moral values in his book.

### Group II: the literary work in relation to the author

#### *a. The expressive argument*

A book is good when the personality of the author is expressed. A book will be valued as an expression of the author's personality.

#### *b. The intentional argument*

A book is good when the author realizes his intentions. The assumption is that authors always have certain goal during the writing of the book. In some cases, these intentions can be misread by the reviewer.

### Group III: the literary work as an autonomous whole (as an aesthetic object)

#### *a. The compositional argument*

A book is good if it has a logical or striking structure. A book is valued and judged by its composition. These are elements such as perspective, the use of symbolism, flashbacks, characterization and others. In children's literature the unity between text and image is also of importance.

#### *b. The stylistic argument*

A book is good when the use of language is good. The emphasis is on the aesthetic features of the use of language.

#### *c. The argument in respect to lay-out and illustration*

A book is good when the lay-out and illustrations look good. When the emphasis is on the aesthetic character of the book is appreciated. Otherwise, comments belong to group VI.

#### Group IV: the literary work in relation to the reader

##### *a. The emotional argument*

A book is good (or bad) when it causes a (positive or negative) emotional effect to the reader. Positive are feelings such as “exciting” and “captivating” whereas “shocking” or “depressing” are examples of negative emotions.

##### *b. The identification argument*

A book is good when the reader can identify with the characters and the story. It is appreciated when the text is able to provide this possibility.

##### *c. The adaptation argument*

A book is good when it is adapted to the age and level of the intended readership. These adjustments can occur on different levels, such as the level of use of language, of composition and the level of content. This argument can also be used in a negative way, when the book underestimates the abilities of the reader and becomes too easy.

##### *d. The formation argument*

A book is good when it enriches the reader with knowledge and experience. It is appreciated when a book stimulates reflection or discussion. In the case of children’s literature it is also appreciated when a book serves a practical purpose, such as arts and crafts tips.

##### *e. The paternalism argument*

A book is good when it is free of paternalism. This argument is in contrast with the previous argument: when a book is able to stimulate a reader it is good, but it cannot be too patronizing or forceful.

#### Group V: the literary work in relation to other literary works

##### *a. The argument of originality*

A book is good when it distinguishes itself from other books in its originality.

##### *b. The tradition argument*

A book is good (or bad, depending) when it fits in with a certain tradition, or adds new elements to a tradition.

##### *c. The relativity argument*

This argument compares the book with other books.



## Group VI: the literary work as merchandise

### *a. The argument of layout*

This argument concerns the practical aspects of the layout of a book: jacket, font, paper but also aspects such as misprints and wrong information. It concerns matters that the author or illustrator cannot be held responsible for.

### *b. The argument of price*

According to this argument, a book is good when the pricing is reasonable or fitting for the quality of the book.

When going through all these different arguments, it becomes clear that some of them are definitely not applicable to fan fiction in general. At first glance, the sixth group can be immediately eliminated because these arguments are about (technical) layout and pricing, something that is not applicable to online fan fiction. Fan fiction can be read online for free and all stories are presented in the same format. It depends on readers how they will read it: FanFiction.Net provides options for customization, offering different fonts, sizes, background colors, spacing and alignment of the text. Thus it is clear that these are aspects that are not likely to be discussed in the reviews. If they are, they can be categorized as additional comments. In this line, it is also not likely that the argument in respect to lay-out (aesthetical) and illustration will be used. The expressive argument is a difficult case. Often, fan fiction stories can possess autobiographical elements where the author intertwines personal experiences and/or feelings with the canon to create a story. Sometimes a story is completely autobiographical, sometimes an author draws on personal experiences to only make some improvements. When the autobiographical element is not the case, fan fiction is not about the author, but rather about the relation between the story and the canon. Still, in cases where there are autobiographical elements, readers do not pick up on it, only if the author uses an author's note to make it explicit. Therefore, it might be possible that a reader would use this argument, but it depends on the fan fiction story. In this regard, when looking at the different groups, it seems obvious that the third and fourth groups are the ones that are the most compatible with the nature of fan fiction reviewing practices.

In conclusion, most of the Krikhaar & Ros arguments can be used for analyzing fan fiction reviews, although some of them need to be adjusted and modified. For my own design, I will re-organize the groups and adapt them accordingly to the discourse of fan fiction.

### *3.3.2. Model for analysis*

In this subparagraph I will present my model for analysis and elaborate on the content. As discussed earlier on, the model is divided into two parts: the first part concerns the close analysis of individual reviews – based on Krikhaar & Ros (1986) – and the second part concerns fan fiction reviews in general – Based on Black (2008). I will first present and clarify the close

reading model, followed by the model for reviews in general. From here out, I will start my data analysis.

### Close reading

Every sentence or any specific word in the review will be analyzed by tallying its contents according to the following categories. Based on Krikhaar & Ros, six groups are used to categorize the various arguments. Another factor that has been added, concerns the use of additional comments that are not specifically arguments.

#### 1. The fan fiction text in relation to the canon

##### *a. The argument of characterization*

A *fanfic* is good when the characters are portrayed in the same manner as in the canon: characters think and act as they would have in the original series. They are ‘in character’. This also counts for the correct portrayal of the original series in general.

##### *b. The argument of creativity*

A *fanfic* is good when it presents a story that distinguishes itself from the canon in originality.

#### 2. The fan fiction text in relation to reality

##### *a. The thematic argument*

A *fanfic* is good when the contents, theme or an aspect of these is good. It should be noted that the appreciation of the contents is dependable on a certain time or taste.

##### *b. The reflective argument*

A *fanfic* is good when it reflects the reality outside the story in an accurate manner: fan fiction as a mirror of reality. Fan fiction should be realistic and represent the reality in a rightful way. In the Fantasy genre this mostly refers to metaphors or allegories that point to reality, or realistic characterization, for example.

##### *c. The moral argument*

A *fanfic* is good when the moral implications (the message) are good. A reviewer agrees with the moral scope that can be construed from the fan fiction text. This does not mean that the author consciously put certain moral values in his or her fan fiction.

#### 3. The fan fiction text in relation to the author

##### *a. The expressive argument*

A *fanfic* is good when the personality or personal experiences of the author are expressed. A *fanfic* will be valued as an expression of the author’s personality. In fan fiction readers detect autobiographical elements in the story, which are often based on events in the author’s life. It

should be noted that this can also be used to review a *fanfic* negatively: reviewers can be turned off by this.

*b. The intentional argument*

A *fanfic* is good when the author realizes his or her intentions. The assumption is that authors always have a certain goal during the writing of the story: an author can use an author's note to explicitly state any goals or intentions. In some cases, these intentions can be misread by the reviewer.

4. The fan fiction text as an autonomous whole (as an aesthetic object)

*a. The compositional argument*

A *fanfic* is good if it has a good or striking structure. Fan fiction can be judged by its composition. These are elements such as perspective and the use of symbolism or flashbacks, but mostly characterization and cliffhangers to end chapters.

*b. The stylistic argument*

A *fanfic* is good when the use of language is good. The emphasis is on the aesthetic features of the use of language.

5. The fan fiction text in relation to the reader

*a. The emotional argument*

A *fanfic* is good (or bad) when it causes a (positive or negative) emotional effect on the reader. Positive are feelings such as "exciting" and "captivating" whereas "shocking" or "depressing" are examples of negative emotions.

*b. The identification argument*

A *fanfic* is good when the reader can identify with the characters and the story. It is appreciated when the story provides the possibility for readers to relate themselves to the events, but mostly the characters, that are described. This argument is also used when the story relates to the reviewer as a writer themselves.

*c. The adaptation argument*

A *fanfic* is good when it is adapted to the age and level of the intended readership. These adjustments can occur on different levels, such as the level of use of language, of composition and the level of content. This argument can also be used in a negative way, when the *fanfic* underestimates the abilities of the reader and becomes too easy. In fan fiction readers often appreciate an added level of maturity in characters, for example.

*d. The formation argument*

A *fanfic* is good when it enriches the reader with of knowledge and experience. It is appreciated when fan fiction stimulates reflection or discussion.

*e. The paternalism argument*

A *fanfic* is good when it is free of paternalism. This argument is in contrast with the previous argument: when fan fiction is able to stimulate a reader it is good, but it cannot be too patronizing or forceful.

6. The fan fiction text in relation to other fan fiction texts

*a. The argument of originality*

A *fanfic* is good when it distinguishes itself from other fan fiction stories in its originality.

*b. The tradition argument*

A *fanfic* is good (or bad, depending) when it fits in with a certain tradition, or adds new elements to a tradition. For example, certain popular genres in fan fiction can be given a new spin, or authors write in the tradition of certain *shipping* preferences.

*c. The relativity argument*

This argument compares the *fanfic* with other *fanfics*.

7. Additional comments

*a. Introduction, greeting, opening, closing*

A reviewer uses these types of comments to frame their review to connect to the author.

*b. Casual conversation about characters*

Also known as ‘editorialized gossip’, where readers discuss the characters as if they were active, independent participants in the story. This practice is comparable to viewers discussing characters on a soap opera.

*c. Pop culture references*

The reviewer uses specific pop culture references to show their knowledge and engagement with the fandom and fan culture.

*d. Encouragements*

The reviewer praises and encourages the author, either to keep writing, that they are great writers or other similar compliments.

e. *Other non-related comments (on the reviewers personal life, for example)*

A reviewer leaves a comment that is not related to an argument but has some substance. An example is when a reader mentions that he or she has to get up early next morning and is tired from reading the *fanfic* late into the night.

Most of the arguments distinguished by Krikhaar & Ros have been adopted to this model. Some of them have been modified so they can be applied to the fan fiction discourse. A new category is the first one, with arguments regarding the relation between the fan fiction text and the canon. The sixth category of Krikhaar & Ros, the literary work as merchandise, has been omitted, as it is not relevant to the fan fiction discourse. Another matter is the addition of a seventh category that gathers additional comments: these do not count as arguments. These comments are tallied as well, to categorize comments that fall outside the first six categories. In the end, these comments also help in order to determine the general mood of a review, which is helpful for the second part of the model for analysis. Combining the seven categories enables me to detect a structure among reviews. Do reviews indeed read like a letter, or is there another format present?

*Reviews in general*

For the analysis of reviews in general, I have decided to maintain the four types of reviews Black distinguishes (2008). Her model focuses on how the reviewer communicates their critique to the author. How will the use of critical arguments tie in with these review types? Reading the description, it would be assumable that the *Gentle Critique* and *Focused Critique* are the most substantial reviews in terms of length and arguments. The analysis in the next chapter will show how the use of arguments corresponds to these four review types, and if this assumption is indeed true.

1. The OMG Standard

OMG is an acronym for the exclamation “Oh My God!” that is fairly common in online discourse and fan culture. This type of review consists of enthusiastic statements of appreciation for the *fanfic*. These reviews do not include criticism but instead provide positive feedback.

2. The Gentle Critique

The *Gentle Critique* moves up in complexity, as it is more structured and provides feedback on different aspects of the author’s writing. Similar structures surface from these kind of reviews. They include an introduction or personal greeting (1); a positive comment on some aspect of the text (2); critique (3); a disclaimer or mitigating statement (4); a positive comment or encouragement to continue writing (5); and a closing (6). In these types of reviews the reader wants to be critical, but they do not want to hurt or offend the author, thus wrapping their critiques in compliments and softening statements.

### 3. The Focused Critique

This type of review follows the same structural format and includes a kind statement as well as specific critique. The difference with the *Gentle Critique* is that readers now specifically point at a flaw in the text and give feedback on how the author can correct it. These constructive comments are shrouded in compliments and encouragements as not to insult the author.

### 4. Editorialized Gossip

In this type of review the readers discuss characters and their exploits as if they were independent of the fan fiction author's pen. In the reviews, readers talk about the characters as if they were active, independent participants in the story. It is a sort of "willing suspension of disbelief" where readers do not necessarily mean it as a suggestion for the author.

In categorizing fan fiction reviews I intend to create an insight in the general tendencies of these reviewing practices. After analyzing a certain review in depth, it is possible to describe the overall 'mood' of it. Is it a positive review, or is it negative? Has it been carefully constructed, or does it only exist out of hysterical exclamations? When putting all the reviews in certain groups or categories, it becomes clear what kind of review is the most common. Using Black's system I will try to find the larger tendencies and trends in fan fiction reviews overall.

## Chapter 4. Data analysis

Now that the model for analysis has been completed, it is time to apply it. I will analyze 100 reviews for two fan fiction stories, with 50 reviews for each story. I have selected these reviews, choosing for mostly longer reviews as to gain insight in the use of arguments. On the other hand, I will also view some shorter reviews and other types to show the different types as they have been discussed by Black (2008). There have also been two types of reviews collected: one type is a review that has been left after the story has ended, the other type of review has been left when the story was still in progress. This way I intend to receive a broader understanding of the contents of the reviews.

### 4.1. Two stories, thousands of reviews

In this subparagraph I will briefly discuss the contents and other information about the selected fan fiction stories and their authors. As has been previously discussed, I selected two stories by two different authors after a long progress of filtering.

#### 4.1.1. *Stormbenders*

Between February 22<sup>nd</sup> and July 20<sup>th</sup> in 2008, FanFiction.Net user Fandomme uploaded eighteen chapters of her story *Stormbenders*. The following is the summary that is presented on the website, written by Fandomme herself (Fandomme, 2008):



Figure 3.

*“S3 AU from FBM. Deep in the Fire Nation jungle, the Gaang meets a group of rogue water ninja who send Zuko and Katara on a mission to retrieve Ozai's secret battle plans.”*

This summary makes use of certain jargon. In the first sentence ‘S3 AU from FBM’ means that the story takes place in an alternative universe (AU), taking off from the episode ‘the Firebending Masters’ (FBM), which is the thirteenth episode of the third season (S3). The word ‘Gaang’ is a portmanteau play on words, referring to Aang (the main character) and his band of friends. The story is categorized as adventure/romance and has the characters Katara and Zuko as its central figures. The story is rated ‘T for Teen’, meaning that its contents contain some violence, minor coarse language, and minor suggestive adult themes. This means the story is suitable for teens, 13 years and older.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fiction ratings can be found on <https://www.fictionratings.com/>. This website distinguishing five gradations: from K (suitable for most ages) to MA (suitable for mature adults).

In her user profile, Fandomme does not give any information about herself but instead gives a summary of all the stories she published on the website and also provides links to all the *fanart* readers have made in tribute to her stories. She joined FanFiction.Net September 8<sup>th</sup> 2001. Her last profile update was July 18<sup>th</sup> 2011. She has written eight stories in total for *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. While there is no personal information about her in her profile, she does use author's notes at the beginning and ending of chapters where she comments on her story. These comments are very brief; she mostly thanks her reviewers or clarifies certain story elements. In particular, after *Stormbenders* was completed she used the second half of the epilogue to write an afterword. In this afterword she goes into great detail discussing her goals and intentions for writing this story, also revealing information about herself by mentioning her husband and her own experiences as a fourteen-year-old girl. Her specific age, nationality and other information is unknown.

#### 4.1.2. *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

ShamelessLiar joined FanFiction.Net February 28<sup>th</sup> 2005 and is currently still active on the website. The only information on her profile is a flag that indicates she is from the United States of America. She has written five stories in total, including three for *Avatar: the Last Airbender* and two for its sequel series *The Legend of Korra*. She published the chapters of *His Majesty Prefers Blue* between August 15<sup>th</sup> 2010 and January 8<sup>th</sup> 2012. In the summary of her story she writes:



[His Majesty Prefers Blue](#) > by ShamelessLiar [reviews](#)

A year after the war's end, the gaang returns to the Fire Nation for a week of diplomatic meetings. There, they hear rumors about a vigilante who wears a blue mask and Katara finds herself digging deeper into his identity and motives. Blue/Zutara Lemons

Rated: M - English - Adventure/Humor - Chapters: 50 - Words: 212,173 - Reviews: 2398 - Favs: 1,707 - Follows: 821 - Updated: Jan 8, 2012 - Published: Aug 15, 2010 - Katara, Zuko - Complete

Figure 4.

*“A year after the war’s end, the gaang returns to the Fire Nation for a week of diplomatic meetings. There, they hear rumors about a vigilante who wears a blue mask and Katara finds herself digging deeper into his identity and motives. Blue/Zutara Lemons.”*

The use of ‘gaang’ returns, and the word ‘Lemons’ signifies that the story contains graphic sexual situations, in this case between Katara and Zuko’s alter ego The Blue Spirit. This story is categorized as adventure/humor with Katara and Zuko being the protagonists. This story is rated ‘M for Mature’, meaning that its content is not suitable for children or teens below the age of 16. It is intended for mature teens and older. The story most likely contains suggestive adult themes (but not explicit), references to some violence, and/or coarse language. Detailed descriptions of physical interaction of sexual or violent nature, however, are considered Fiction MA, which is the highest on the scale: fiction for mature adults only. ShamelessLiar is also a frequent user of author’s notes. She uses these mostly to urge her readers to review, stating that she will only



publish a new chapter when she receives a certain amount of reviews. She also thanks her reviewers for their comments, whether they are kind words or criticism.

## **4.2. Data analysis**

This section discusses the analysis of the 100 reviews that have been subjected to the model of analysis. After looking into the reviews via close reading, I was able to categorize the reviews in general. First, I will discuss the use of arguments in the reviews. Second, I will discuss the reviews in general, comparing the results of the two different fan fiction stories, but I will also connect some other findings to the theoretical framework. A more obvious choice would be to discuss the reviews in general first, but in this case this discussion includes the use of arguments as well. Therefore, it is important to discuss the close reading first, in order to clarify and comprehend the use of arguments in the reviews in general.

### *4.2.1. Close reading*

In the previous paragraph, the use of arguments was discussed in the context of the four review types. In this paragraph, I will discuss the use of arguments in general, discussing the overall scores. To gain an understanding of the quantity of arguments used in the reviews, I have highlighted the used arguments according to the six different categories from the model for analysis. I assigned a different color for every category, except for the seventh category of additional comments, which was left blank. This strategy echoes the method used by Lieke van Duin (2009), who went through a similar process to analyze and categorize the use of arguments by critics for children's books in several newspapers. In this paragraph I will show a few examples of the results of this highlighting.<sup>21</sup> Table 2 shows the results of the accumulated arguments in the two stories. After tallying the arguments that were used in all the reviews, I will first discuss the most common arguments, followed by the most used categories. After this, I will discuss the least mentioned arguments, followed by other observations on the use of additional comments and the categories that scored in between. Finally, I will discuss the use of arguments between the reviews for both stories and conclude the close reading.

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<sup>21</sup> The complete list of highlighted reviews has been added as an appendix.

	<i>Stormbenders</i>	<i>His Majesty Prefers Blue</i>	Total
1. fan fiction → canon	63	50	113
a. characterization	39	43	82
b. creativity	24	7	31
2. fan fiction → reality	33	27	60
a. thematic	14	15	29
b. reflective	18	9	27
c. moral	2	3	5
3. fan fiction → author	17	15	32
a. expressive/autobiographical	0	0	0
b. intentional	17	15	32
4. fan fiction → autonomous	58	51	109
a. compositional	35	30	65
b. stylistic	23	21	44
5. fan fiction → reader	48	25	73
a. emotional	29	22	51
b. identification	11	2	13
c. adaptation	2	1	3
d. formation	4	0	4
e. paternalism	1	0	1
6. fan fiction → other fan fiction	25	17	42
a. originality	6	1	7
b. tradition	9	9	18
c. relativity	10	7	17
7. additional comments	97	71	168
a. introductions	26	18	44
b. gossip	20	12	32
c. pop culture	11	4	15
d. encouragement	22	18	40
e. other non-related	18	19	37

*Table 2.*

Table 2 shows the most common arguments were the argument of characterization (82 mentions), the compositional argument (65 mentions) and the emotional argument (51 mentions). More than half of the reviews mentioned how ‘in-character’ or ‘out-of-character’ the characters were, or if the opposite were the case. Two examples:

*“That's exactly who Katara is. Strong-willed, independent, and ridiculously thick-headed. Although I felt she lacks a little more turbulence, she is far from being OOC, and that's all that matters.”* – hihazuki (18), reviewing *Stormbenders*<sup>22</sup>

*“I can hear the dialogue spoken by the characters from the shows...like seriously most of the time I'm like 'geezus this is EXACTLY what sokka would say genius writer you are amazing ' etc etc.”* – Aeasel (66), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

The compositional argument was used 65 times in more than half of the reviews, showing that they valued the story as an autonomous whole as well. Reviewers commented mostly on the use of cliffhangers as well as the structure of the story in general. Often these comments were combined with the stylistic argument, complimenting the author on their writing abilities in the field of language use. A few examples:

*“I've enjoyed all your plot twists completely (especially the bit about Iroh's most excellent idea - genius!)”* – SaucePear (80), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

*“ [...] the pace was good, the growth of relationships was just wonderful. Your description is beautiful also. Your plot is very original and interesting. I absolutely love how Zuko and Katara gradually grew closer.”* – Lady Charity (41), reviewing *Stormbenders*

*“While the dialogue maintains its usual flow and wit, there are times where it dips into the same cliché, lovey-dovey one-liners that drove me away from Maiko. I also felt Ursa's appearance at the end, while handled well, felt out of place. It's such a significant event, but its placement in the story is a bit flow-breaking.”* – Blue Eyes Shining Dragon (46), reviewing *Stormbenders*

The emotional argument was used 51 times in 34 reviews. Readers felt connected to the story on a very personal, emotional level. Often the emotional effect on the readers was one with physical consequences. Reviewers revealed the story made them cry, laugh out loud or shake with anger. Reviewers also related to the story as writers themselves, often disclosing that the story inspired them to continue writing or that their own thoughts were put into words by the author.

*“I was ensnared by their feelings and predicaments, waiting with bated breath to see what would happen next. My enjoyment goes beyond words.”* – CynthiaER (1), reviewing *Stormbenders*

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<sup>22</sup> The number after the name of the reviewer corresponds to the number (between 1 and 100) of the full review in the appendix, in case one desires to read the full review.

*“Honestly, the entire thing was quite inspiring to me. I'd love to be able to write like this someday. It's a goal of mine. And, through your writing, it made me hopeful that I too could write a masterpiece like this someday.”* – snowygrin (13), reviewing *Stormbenders*

In numbers, three categories distanced themselves from the other categories, receiving far more mentions than the others. The category ‘the fan fiction in relation to the canon’ scored 113 mentions, the category ‘the fan fiction as an autonomous whole’ scored 109 mentions and the category ‘additional comments’ scored 168 mentions. The first two categories resonate with the two most used arguments, the argument of characterization and the compositional argument.

Some arguments were rarely used or never mentioned. The expressive or autobiographical argument was never used, which is surprising: a lot of fan fiction authors draw on their personal experiences and make this known in their author’s notes. However, in these two selected fan fiction stories this is not the case. In both stories, the authors never refer to real life experiences and the readers also do not suspect these elements in their reviews. On the other hand, readers do connect the fan fiction story to the author, as the intentional argument was used 31 times by reviewers, both stories receiving half of those mentions. In these cases, readers think that they know the author’s intentions or goals, and comment on how they agree or disagree with these. Other arguments that are rarely used are the adaptation argument (3 mentions), the formation argument (4 mentions), the paternalism argument (1 mention) and the moral argument (5 mentions). The formation argument is used on a rare occasion when a reviewer compliments the author for exploring oriental cultures and add depth to the original series because it enriches the readers. The paternalism argument and the moral argument are used to comment on the mature content in the story. In particular for *His Majesty Prefers Blue*, where there is mature content, such as intercourse between two characters as well as darker themes such as rape and genital mutilation.

*“I think you did the attempted rape justice to be honest. It wasn't romancetized or sexualized. It had the needed frustrations. And honestly I'm tired of all the rape/bdsm fanfictions that make it 'okay'.”* – awakendreams (59), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

*“However, when you include dark themes, there is some debate on how much should be depicted realistically and what should be twisted around to suit a fictional tale and it's purpose.”* – Belabor (55), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

The opposite happens in *Stormbenders*, where the characters do not engage in sexual intercourse. Some reviewers appreciate this, commenting that the characters are acting their age. Others feel that the characters are too innocent for their own age. Depending on the reviewer’s view, it can be seen as too patronizing, forceful or inappropriate when the characters act more mature than

they are. Below, an example of a moral argument and a paternalism argument about Katara and her (lack of) innocence.

*“Really, I was honestly surprised at how people asked about sex. Katara is still very young, and they were expecting her to have intercourse with Zuko already? No. Absolutely not. And I totally second the part where you say “she doesn’t want to.” – hihazuki (18), reviewing Stormbenders*

*“I’m not sure Katara would be \*quite\* that dense about prostitution...yes, she did grow up in a tiny village where it probably didn’t even exist, but she’s also spent more than half a year traveling in highly populated communities, and she does know where babies come from, having delivered several animals and a human at least once. [...]But she’s a bright kid and mature for her age; if you stretch out the innocence thing much more it will feel forced.” – Rashaka (34), reviewing Stormbenders*

Another important observation is that in most reviews the use of arguments is spare in comparison to the use of additional comments. Often, reviewers use lengthy introductions, use references to pop culture and praise or encourage the author. Other additional comments fall under the subcategory of other non-related comments. In these other non-related comments, reviewers explain how they came upon the specific fan fiction, how much time they spent on reading it and how they came into the fandom. The use of additional comments adds a personal flavor to the review. There was a great range in the ratio between arguments and additional comments, varying from reviews that made use of only arguments, to lengthy reviews that were decorated with gossip and encouragements. There are no specific numbers to this because almost every review was proportioned differently. More than three quarters of the reviewers, however, made use of more than three different arguments to support their judgment, and almost every single review contained additional comments.

Interestingly, reviewers were also prone to relate the fan fiction story to other fan fiction they had read. Although this was not most commonly mentioned, they were present among 30 reviews: the fan fiction text was related to other fan fiction 42 times in total. Five times, reviewers ensured the author this was the best *Zutara* story they had read. In four reviews for *His Majesty Prefers Blue* the readers mentioned Fandomme or her story *Stormbenders*, recommending author ShamelessLiar to read it. This happens similarly in published fiction, where critics are also inclined to compare literature to other literature as a way of deciding whether a book has certain qualities to it.

*“It’s one of my favorite Zutara fics for sure.” – rsrdiall (56), reviewing His Majesty Prefers Blue*

*“I’ve been under the impression that Fandomme’s Stormbenders was unbeatable, but this, too, is stellar writing.”* – chazsvp2 (70), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

*“I recommend you read Fandomme’s Avatar fanfiction for good, strong drama pieces if you haven’t already.”* – Guest (88), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

Between the reviews for the two stories, there are similar patterns in the number of arguments. In arguments, both stories received a comparable number of mentions, meaning that the numbers were very close by for the times a certain argument was used. For example, the thematic argument was used 14 times for *Stormbenders* and 15 times for *His Majesty Prefers Blue*. One of the differences was that readers of *His Majesty Prefers Blue* used the moral argument more (3 mentions versus 2 mentions), because of the heavy subjects in the story. This fan fiction was also more valued for its characterization (43 mentions versus 39 mentions). *Stormbenders* was more valued for its creativity (24 mentions versus 7 mentions), composition (35 mentions versus 30 mentions) and received more emotional (29 mentions versus 22 mentions) and stylistic arguments (23 mentions versus 21 mentions). Still, these differences in numbers were rather small.

In conclusion, it can be said that fans value fan fiction stories mostly because of the author’s ability to portray characters faithfully to the canon and creating a story that is creative and able to distinguish itself from the canon while still capturing its spirit. However, arguments that valued the story as an autonomous whole were also frequently used (109 mentions in total), meaning that fan fiction itself is also appreciated as a stand-alone story, appreciating the individual value of a story as well.

#### 4.2.2. Reviews in general

The 100 reviews were categorized according to Black’s model (2008). The results are shown in this table below:

Type review	<i>Stormbenders</i>	<i>His Majesty Prefers Blue</i>	Total amount
OMG Standard	20	19	39
Gentle Critique	8	12	20
Focused Critique	18	15	33
Editorialized Gossip	4	4	8
Total amount	50	50	100

Table 1.

As previously mentioned, there were little differences between the two fan fiction stories regarding the distribution of arguments and the different categories. The same can be said about the reviews in general: between *Stormbenders* and *His Majesty Prefers Blue* there was a similar

distribution between the four review types. Nevertheless, between these four categories, there were differences. Out of the 100 reviews, 39 reviews could be classified as an *OMG Standard* and 33 as a *Focused Critique*. That leaves with 20 *Gentle Critiques* and 8 reviews classified as *Editorialized Gossip*.

The *OMG Standard* was almost evenly present among the reviews of both stories. *Stormbenders* received 20 reviews of this type, while *His Majesty Prefers Blue* received 19. Common among the total of 39 reviews was the use of the emotional argument and the argument of characterization. In *Stormbenders* 13 out of 20 *OMG Standards* made use of emotional arguments, while in *His Majesty Prefers Blue* only 3 out of 19 *OMG Standards* used emotional arguments. Every review only contained one or two uses of this argument. The same goes for the argument of characterization, where 10 out of the 20 *OMG Standards* for *Stormbenders* used this argument but it was only used in 6 out of 19 reviews for *His Majesty Prefers Blue*. The *OMG Standards* also contained reflective (11 out of 39 reviews), compositional or stylistic (20 out of 39 reviews) arguments. Altogether, 10 out of the 20 *OMG Standards* for *Stormbenders* were five to ten (or more) sentences longer than the average of three or four sentences. For *His Majesty Prefers Blue* only 2 out of 19 reviews were longer than this average. 11 *OMG Standards* for *Stormbenders* contained three or more different arguments that explained why the reader found the story so great. For *His Majesty Prefers Blue* this number is only 4. The remaining *OMG Standards* were either very short reviews of only one to four sentences. In total, it can be said that among the *OMG Standard* category, reviews varied greatly in content and length. Some of these reviews were very short and contained only positive exclamations, others were longer and contained more arguments and opinions. The use of arguments also differed among these longer reviews. As previously mentioned, most of them used the emotional argument or the argument of characterization. The combinations however, were different: some reviews combined these two arguments, while another combined the argument of characterization with a reflective and stylistic argument. I will give two examples of *OMG Standards*. The first is one of the short reviews with little content, the second is a longer one using various arguments.

*“Wow, i love this story! Is it done? Because sometimes I can't tell...like right now. Gosh, it's so good! And made me paranoid about my parents or little brother reading some of it from over my shoulder. XD*

*Anyway, if this isn't done then BY GOD finish it PLEASE!” – The Lady Demon (84), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue**

This review by The Lady Demon is very short and does not give any arguments, but consists of statements of praise and additional comments that refer to the reader's personal life.

*“You are, without a doubt, my favorite Zutarian author and I hope you continue writing fanfics for this pairing. All of your fanfics are very well written.*

*I'm not sure I reviewed for this story yet, which is quite sad, since this is a brilliant Zutarian fanfic; one of the best I've read so far. The plot is very original and doesn't follow the many cliched Zutarian fanfics. Zuko and Katara's relationship is developed very well and just like I would like it to be, with them slowly starting to trust each other and forming a bond. The characters are very realistic and are in character. I feel as if I'm watching an Avatar episode (and I'm very picky with the characterization in fanfics).*

*This chapter, in particular, was nicely written. I was about as confused as Katara was during the fight, but then realized I was a bonehead after Zuko mentioned that it was probably all part of the plan. The Zutarian moments were amazing. I don't even know where to begin with those, since all of them were fantastic and it would probably make this review waay too long, but they were very well written.*

*Can't wait to see what happens next! Once again, fantastic job. Keep up the good work!*

*-pogo- – pobox2468 (47), reviewing *Stormbenders**

This second review is relatively long and detailed, and has similar structures as the *Gentle Critique*. However, the reviewer is only positive and praising and does not critique any aspect of the story. In the first paragraph, the reviewer implicitly relates the author to other fan fiction: praising their work and comparing it to other fan fiction. In the second paragraph there is another comparison to other fan fiction stories, followed by the argument of creativity and the compositional argument. The reflective argument and argument of characterization are used in the following sentence, when the reader complements the author of portraying the characters realistically but also staying consistent to the canon. The third paragraph uses an emotional argument where the reviewer explains feelings of confusion. After this, the paragraph ends with a thematic arguments, where the reader appreciates all the romantic moments in the story. The review ends with statements of encouragement and a closing.

Interestingly enough, the *OMG Standard* and *Gentle Critique* did not differ much from each other. Both were sometimes lengthy, positive and encouraging and at other times short and to the point. A possible explanation for this is that a lot of lengthy reviews showed in depth analysis of the story, used various arguments but were never critiquing. Therefore, these reviews were categorized as *OMG Standards* and not as *Gentle Critiques*. When reviewers did critique the story, they were very specific in their suggestions. This resulted in most reviews qualifying as either an *OMG Standard* or a *Focused Critique*.



Therefore, the *Gentle Critique* emerged far less from the data than the *OMG Standard* and the *Focused Critique*. Twenty reviews in total, with eight *Gentle Critiques* for *Stormbenders* and twelve for *His Majesty Prefers Blue*. These reviews differed in length, but were never as short as one sentence. These reviews were very positive and encouraging towards the author, containing mostly positive statements and arguments to validate why they appreciated the story. What distinguishes the *Gentle Critique* from the *Omg Standard* is that the first consists of some form of constructive criticism, giving notes to the author on aspects of the story they did not like and needed improvement. The use of arguments is similar to that in the *Omg Standard*. Eleven out of the twenty reviews made use of one or two emotional arguments and nine out of the twenty reviews made use of one to three arguments of characterization. Compared to the *Gentle Critique* those numbers are fairly the same. Also often used were compositional arguments, reflective arguments and thematic arguments. Arguments on the story as an autonomous whole were used in seven out of eight reviews for *Stormbenders* and in eight out of twelve reviews for *His Majesty Prefers Blue*, where reviewers would comment on compositional or stylistic aspects of the story. This is an example of a *Gentle Critique*:

*“This fan fiction is the absolute BEST. It was amazingly written with style and wit that I have not even seen in real books. I am so happy that I was referred to this fanfiction by my friend. This has pretty much made my life so much better. When I finished Avatar: The Last Airbender way back when, I can honestly say I hated the ending. I was grateful that it ended happily and the world was saved, but Aang and Katara were together. That, for me, was unforgivable. ZUTARA FOREVER! I thank this author so much for providing a perfect sample of my inner feelings in such an artistic way. I would have wished for slightly more development... and maybe Katara eventually not wanting to get divorced? However, this IS the BEST fanfiction ever. Please Read. No one will ever regret reading this. EVER.”* – An (11), reviewing *Stormbenders*

The reviewers starts out with a stylistic and emotional argument and the argument of relativity, relating the fan fiction to other fan fiction and even published books. After listing aspects of the story they appreciated – while using a compositional argument – the reviewer has some comments but is not very specific and is not able to list any solutions for their critique. After stating what they found wrong with the story, the reviewer quickly retaliates and assures the author of her qualities.

The *Focused Critique* was present in similar numbers as the *OMG Standard*. In total 33 reviews were categorized as a *Focused Critique*, with 18 of this type for *Stormbenders* and 15 for *His Majesty Prefers Blue*. In the use of arguments, the *Focused Critiques* used various arguments in different constructions. Mostly used was the argument of characterization, appearing in 26 of the 33 reviews. The use of other arguments was similarly to the *OMG Standard* and *Gentle Critique*. Different arguments were used in different combinations. What distinguishes the *Focused*

*Critique* is that in this type of review, reviewers point out an aspect of the story they would like to see differently. This can vary from the correction of language to suggestions for different plot points. Another form of the *Focused Critique* emphasizes a specific part of the story and comments on why this detail is appreciated. In some reviews the reader had more than one focused critical comments. In the reviews of both stories, the arguments that were used most, were the stylistic argument (5 in *His Majesty Prefers Blue*, 4 in *Stormbenders*), the argument of characterization (5 in *His Majesty Prefers Blue*, 10 in *Stormbenders*) and the compositional argument (in both stories 4 mentions). *His Majesty Prefers Blue* also received critical points with use of the thematic argument (2 mentions) and the intentional argument (1 mention). *Stormbenders*, however, also received *Focused Critiques* using the thematic argument (1 mention), the intentional argument (2 mentions), the reflective argument (3 mentions), the identification argument (1 mention) and the argument of paternalism (1 mention). It seems that the most constructive criticism revolves around the use of language and characterization. An example of these, respectively:

*“Um, please do me a favor and change Kaia to Kya (Katara's mother) and Kana to Kanna (Gran Gran) Thank YOU!” – River WolfGirl (68), reviewing His Majesty Prefers Blue*

*“I would like to add one more point. Aang clearly loved Katara, and when a person is in love they do crazy things. I find it lackluster that Aang somehow came to terms that Katara and Zuko were married and that was it. No fighting. No Avatar State. No hard choices. He just kind of smiled and got over it. The only suggestion I would make to this story is to have a scene where Aang comes to terms with their union. Whether or not they're his teachers and he should be happy for him, he is also a person - the Avatar, no less - and would create a fuss over losing his love, would he not?” – Aquarinyoshi (10), reviewing Stormbenders*

In both of these cases, the reviewers point out what they think is wrong and give the author suggestions on how to improve these parts of the fan fiction story.

Reviewers tended to gossip on numerous occasions, but only rarely a review existed solely out of gossip, resulting in only eight reviews classifying as *Editorialized Gossip*, four of these review types for the two stories each. This gossip, among other additional comments, added to the length of many reviews, which lead to a lot of reviews reading as a stream of consciousness. Some reviews displayed poor use of grammar or spelling and consisted of run-on sentences, the reviewers probably being inexperienced or reacting spontaneously. Not many readers proofread or edit their own reviews, but immediately expressed their feelings that came to mind as soon as they finished a story or a chapter. A lot of reviews existed almost completely out of additional comments, which can be related to the research of Krikhaar & Ros. As mentioned before, they

concluded that parts of reviews consist out of the retelling of the book, giving a descriptive summary to inform the reader (1986:10). This retelling is similar to the additional comments in fan fiction. Part of this is the summarization or recitation of what has been read, but fans use this retelling to highlight what they appreciated about the story. When the review is merely retelling events and speculating on what will happen in the next chapter, it classifies as an *Editorialized Gossip*.

There seems to be little patterning amongst the reviews in terms of certain arguments being used in groups or arguments that have a relation to each other. When characterization is mentioned, it is sometimes followed by an emotional argument, but this is not always. Sometimes a reviewer discusses the fan fiction story by ‘bullet points’, each bullet being a different argument. There are also reviewers that do not mind going back and forth between different arguments or using multiple arguments in one sentence. Connecting this to Olsen’s theory of *supervenience* (1981), it seems that every review is indeed a unique constellation, formed by the appreciation of certain textual features as recognized by the reader. It is clear that most reviews fit the descriptions of the reductive theory, where the text is reduced to its essential textual features. Most of the time, reviewers tend to appreciate textual features instead of aesthetic features. Meaning, the readers give judgment on specific textual features. The appreciation of aesthetic features is a result of the accumulation of appreciated smaller patterns and signs, and some reviewers go as far to construct a larger aesthetic feature from the textual features in the fan fiction stories, but not from the smaller signs and patterns such as (the meaningful placement of) words or letters. Reviewers are able to notice textual features, and construct a greater aesthetic feature that serves as an umbrella for the text. It is often the overall judgment with which readers open or close their review. Some examples of this judgment:

*“All-in-all, I think you composed a wonderful tale rich with adventure, comedy, and romance. You’ve taken a series that has touched many and inspired more with your creativity and skill.”* – Aquarinyoshi (10), reviewing *Stormbenders*.

*“What started out as a really good lemony zutara fic turned out to contain a surprise twist, and an insightful look into the relations between the nations.”* – ColdRelief (73), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*.

*“I honestly think this is the best Zutara fic I have ever read. I love the balance of drama, suspense, and humor.”* – Nymphadora (60), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*.

These type of comments are the result of well thought-out reviews that clarify the arguments that are used. However, these reflections do not look at the smaller patterns and signs as in Olsen’s examples. Whereas Olsen describes an appreciation that evolves from the recognition of a detail in the form of symmetrical placing of words, the reviews for *Stormbenders* and *His Majesty*

*Prefers Blue* do not look at these smaller signs or patterns such as specific words (1981:524). Still, reviewers are able to select features from the story to construct their overall judgment. This happens mostly in the *Focused Critique* where the reviewer singles out a certain feature – such as theme or structure – and comments on it, while later connecting the detail with other opinions to form the constellation Olsen speaks of, as seen in the examples above. At other times, reviewers only recognize certain textual features but do not connect them: the pattern only becomes an aesthetic feature for the reader who succeeds in assigning the pattern a function in the story (Olsen, 1981:525). In other words, they can point out the stars, but are unable to form the constellation.

It was also difficult to categorize some reviews. Theoretically, they belonged to a certain category, but read very different. An example is a negative review that happened to be the only downright negative and hurtful review out of the 100.

*“Stupid virgin bitch doesnt know shit about life. Your story sucks balls and anyone who likes it is just cause theyre immature like you. Wtf, you took Avatar and made it something fucking crazy, that means somethings wrong wit u.”* – Guest (69), reviewing *His Majesty Prefers Blue*

It is difficult to place this critique in any category, but the reviewer is not raving about the story and neither focusing on a certain element that needs improvement. Therefore, it can be classified best as a *Gentle Critique*, despite the lack of encouragements. It has to be noted that these kinds of critiques, often called *flames*, are constructed by so called anti-fans or non-fans. This term, suggested by Jonathan Gray, explains the anti-fan and non-fan as viewers of pop culture with limited knowledge of the object they are critiquing. Still, even the anti-fan and non-fan care to a degree to make their opinions heard and have them acknowledged (Gray, 2003:65). Anti-fans actively participate in making their opinion known via *hatesites*, for example. Non-fans have some knowledge of a certain pop culture artefact, but are neutral in their appreciation of it. Both types of fans never viewed the artefact completely, and base their opinion on the fragments they have been exposed to (Gray, 2003:70, 71). It can be safe to assume that this particular reviewer is indeed fan of the *Avatar* franchise, but he or she has probably not read the complete fan fiction story. It is important to note that he or she has not completely read the fan fiction story, but rather failed to complete it because of a lack of interest. Although these types of reviews are uncommon, it seems that a new category for these reviews should be created and added. The genre of *flames*, hateful comments aimed to insult the author, can be used to construct this new category.

As this example illustrates, categorizing the reviews to four types proved to be very difficult. First, even though the reviews fit in a certain group, there were a lot of differences between the reviews in those groups. Some *OMG Standards* were very short and held little arguments, while

others were very lengthy and in-depth. Some *Focused Critiques* corrected the author on spelling or grammar mistakes, while others correct the author on characterization. The close reading proved that in the area of substantial arguments there were very diverse argumentations. These distinctions are not clear in Black's model.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion and further discussion

In this chapter, the results of the analysis in chapter 4 will be summarized and interpreted in terms of the theoretical concepts that have been introduced in chapter 2, and the research question will be answered. In the discussion paragraph I will, among other things, discuss Black's model for categorizing review types.

### 5.1. Answering the research question

This paragraph will answer the research question of this thesis, which is as followed:

- What elements of fan fiction do fans value as good writing or storytelling and what kind of critical arguments do fans use to support their opinions?

This research question has been divided into two sub questions:

- What elements of fan fiction do fans value as good writing or storytelling?
- What kind of critical arguments do fans use to support their opinions?

To start, I want to answer the first sub question and look at the elements of fan fiction that fans value as good writing or storytelling. Looking at the results of the analysis, there are two different elements of fan fiction that fans value. These elements can be described as perspectives readers use to judge the stories they read. These two perspectives refer to different parts of the definition of the word quality as described by the Oxford English Dictionary.<sup>23</sup> The first perspective relates to the definition of quality as 'the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind', which is the first half of the Oxford definition. When this definition is translated to the discourse of fan fiction, this means that fan fiction is measured against the canon it originated from. It is important to readers that fan fiction lives up to the source: they value a story that properly captures the spirit and characterizations of the canon. In the reviews fan fiction is also compared to fan fiction and sometimes even published fiction. Fans prefer to relate their fan fiction to the source. The second perspective relates to the second half of the definition, which defines quality as 'the degree of excellence of something'. The analysis shows that fans judge the quality of a fan fiction story by comparing it to other fan fiction stories. However, it also became clear that readers value the fan fiction stories they read as 'the degree of excellence of something' in another sense: valuing fan fiction as an autonomous whole, meaning the intrinsic qualities of the texts were appreciated by the reviewers.

To illustrate and further explain the answer to the first sub question, the second sub question must be answered. This second question has to do with the use of critical arguments. The results

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<sup>23</sup> Quality, a definition, retrieved 28 Mar. 2014 from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/quality?q=quality>.

show that there is a variety of arguments that fans use, but that some arguments are more common than others. The preferred categories of arguments were the categories that related the fan fiction story to the canon and arguments that viewed the fan fiction story as an autonomous whole. Fans valued stories that stayed true to the source, the portrayal of characters and the settings. The most important was the characterization, as readers appreciated the ability of the author to make characters think and act the same way as in the canon. This corresponds to the first part of the definition of quality again, where the standard of something is measured against other things of a similar kind. In this case this means the quality of fan fiction is measured against the canon. The second most used category contained arguments used to assess the fan fiction as an autonomous whole. Fans appreciated the use of language and the structure of the story. This corresponds to the second definition of quality, where the quality is defined as the degree of excellence of something. In this case, it is the degree of excellence of fan fiction as an independent work of fiction. In their reviews, readers recognized features in the story, as Brillenburg Wurth & Rigney distinguish them, such as poetics, narrative, depth and enjoyment (2006:65). It seems that fan fiction walks a thin line regarding its pursuit of appreciation: according to the reviewers, fan fiction needs to be true and faithful to the source, but also has to possess its own qualities and originalities.

The research question has been answered, but there are other findings related to the question that should be mentioned. The second sub question asks what kind of critical arguments are used by fans to support their opinions. The overall review includes these critical arguments and corresponds to the theory of *supervenience* coined by Olsen (1981), which has been discussed in chapter 2. Readers are able to recognize textual features and show appreciation for these in their reviews. The accumulation of these features construct a constellation, which results in an aesthetic feature that can be appreciated. With that said, every constellation is unique and different. Every review voices a different opinion and a different take on the reviewed fan fiction story. Corresponding to this, reviewers use different arguments in different capacities to describe their appreciation of the fan fiction stories.

The first sub question asks what elements of fan fiction fans value as good writing or storytelling. An important role in making this decision, regarding what stories should be valued, is the 'mediator', a concept from chapter 2. The mediator, or 'cultural authority' (Brillenburg Wurth and Rigney, 2006:67), gives judgments on texts that are newly published or in the public eye for other reasons. The mediator strongly controls the general opinion, but in the case of fan fiction these mediators are rarely present. In fan fiction the common reader has become an important mediator himself. The option to write reviews creates the power for fans to voice their own opinion, instead of listening to a mediator. Of course, in fan communities there are different mediators such as the Big Name Fan or message boards that list favorite stories. Still, fans depend on their own judgment or the judgment of fellow 'common readers'. It also does not take down the difference between published literature and fan fiction. In fan fiction the story is

accompanied by the reviews, which are only a click away for other readers to explore the opinions of others. In published literature review and publication are not so ‘physically’ close together.

## 5.2. Discussion and conclusion

In this paragraph I will discuss several issues and critical points. First, I will reflect on the methods I applied in this thesis. After this, I will discuss on how to improve the model for analysis.

In this study, I was able to base the analysis on several theories that funded my argumentation in analyzing the fan fiction reviews. The model I constructed with Krikhaar & Ros and Black provided a foundation that legitimized decisions I made in categorizing arguments in reviews. However, some of these decisions are still dependent on interpretation. Another researcher using the same model might appoint arguments in reviews to different categories. It is also important to note that the use of different fan fiction stories in different canons could provide a different outcome, if the analysis was based on the same model for analysis. This research made use of long and popular fan fiction stories and mostly long and in-depth reviews, a choice of selection I made to narrow down the data. I also could have walked another path and could have chosen a different canon or story. Still, I chose to review popular stories and their longer reviews as to obtain more data (more arguments in numbers) for the sake of this research and its outcomes. In the future, it is possible to look at other types of fan fiction stories and apply the model for analysis on those to see if the outcomes are different or similar.

I would also like to discuss the two theories used to construct the model for analysis on how they worked in this research and how they could be improved. The model of Krikhaar & Ros (1986) still proved to be very helpful and insightful, even though it had to be adapted to the discourse of fan fiction. The results of the analysis show that the adaptations were successful: it was possible to categorize every argument made in the reviews. Even though some categories turned out to be (almost) non-existent in the reviews – for example the expressive argument or the formation argument – it is in my opinion not necessary to erase these from the model for now. This is because of the possibility that these arguments could be present in other reviews for other types of fan fiction. Applying their model to more fan fiction reviews could yield some interesting results.

As for the model of Black, there are some critical remarks about its effectiveness. As has been discussed in chapter 4, categorizing the reviews to four types proved to be very difficult. The reviews within one category were very different from one another. For example, some *OMG Standards* were very lengthy and in-depth, while others were short and to the point. On the matter of content, review types were also very different: the close reading revealed that in the area of substantial arguments there were very diverse argumentations. Some *Focused Critiques*



pointed out errors in language and grammar, while others commented on how the characterization was wrong. These distinctions are not clear in Black's model. Black's model covers the contents in a very global way, but it would be helpful if there were differentiations between the categories. For example, to make a subdivision for the *OMG Standard* where there is a distinction between longer, in-depth and shorter, superficial *OMG Standards*. Black's model also makes it difficult to see the various degrees of complexity in reviews. According to Black there is a hierarchy between the *OMG Standard*, the *Gentle Critique* and the *Focused Critique*, in contents as well as in structure, the *OMG Standard* being the less complex type and the *Focused Critique* the most complex type. However, this is not always the case, as there are for example some *Gentle Critiques* that are longer and use more arguments and therefore surpass a *Focused Critique* that only highlights a specific error. Black's model needs to be reexamined to make it more suitable for studying fan fiction reviews on its content and argumentation. For example, the negative review that was discussed in chapter 4 was very difficult to ascribe to any of the categories. This calls for the addition of a fifth group that categorizes reviews that fit none of the previous four. In conclusion, there are two suggestions on how to change Black's model accordingly. The first suggestion is that Black's model could be changed to include a fifth category (called *flames*, for example) and that it should make more subdivisions between the four categories. The second suggestion is to reorganize Black's model in total, tailoring it to the analysis of the use of arguments in reviews of fan fiction.

This thesis has shown that fan fiction is appreciated as a coin with two sides. The first side shows that readers enjoy fan fiction as an enrichment and expansion of an artefact they know and love. The other side shows that fan fiction as a literary genre is taken seriously by its writers and readers. Reviews play an active part in this appreciation, as they influence the authors greatly. Participation, communities and exchange are keywords in this field that make it so successful. I will end with a quote from fan fiction author Fandomme herself, which shows how much the interaction between author and reader is appreciated.

*“First, I would like to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for making this story such a special experience. To those of you who have encouraged me from the beginning, way back at A Girl's Drink (like Misora), I want to thank you. For those of you who have read Ozai's Vengeance, who read and believed and stuck with me, I want to thank you. For those of you who have drawn art, promoted the story, talked about it, and sent me private messages and emails and told your friends, I want to thank you. You are the reason for the success of this story. It has been an amazing journey of self-discovery for me. And it would not have happened without your encouragement.”* – Fandomme, in her afterword for *Stormbenders*

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# Appendix 1

## Fan Fiction and Fan Culture Dictionary

Based on:

Fanwoordenboek. (Den Hertog, 2007:137-144).

Avatar Dictionary. 11 August, 2014

<http://www.bluespiritgal-fanfiction.com/avatardictionary.htm>

A Fanspeak Dictionary. 11 August, 2014

<http://expressions.populli.net/dictionary.html>

Fanfiction Terms. 11 August, 2014

<http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/docs/terms.html>

### A.

**AANG** – The AVATAR. Main protagonist of the series, a twelve year old AIRBENDER that sets out to save the world in war.

**A/N / AN / AUTHOR NOTES** – Explanatory note from the author about a fan work.

**ANGST** – A *fanfic* containing raw emotions, anxiety, fear and worry.

**ACTIFAN** – An Active Fan, a fan who participates in fan culture.

**ADMIN / ADMINISTRATOR** – The administrator maintains and runs a website and/or message boards.

**ADULT / ADULTFIC** – A story with themes for older readers. May be inappropriate for children.

**AGE STATEMENT** – The reader/viewer has to state that they are of age to view a fan work.

**AIRBENDING / AIRBENDER** – The act of manipulating the element of air. AANG is an AIRBENDER.

**AIR NOMADS** – One of the four nations within the AVATAR world. Known as the most spiritual of the four.

**ALT / ALTERNATIVE** – an alternative story; different from the norm. Often takes place in different settings.

**ALTERNATIVE HISTORY** – A *fanfic* changes the original history of the canon.

**ALTERNATIVE TIMELINE** – A *fanfic* breaks off from the original timeline at a certain point.

**AU / ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE** – A *fanfic* changes the original settings. Either a story takes place in a different universe or certain events from the canon are changed (e.g. a character does not die).

**ALTFIC** – A *fanfic* that differs from the norm.

**ANIME** – Term used to refer to Japanese animation. Anime has a fandom of its own. Fanart is often drawn in this style.

**ANTISHIPPERS** – Fans who are opposed to a certain relationship.

**ARCHIVE** – (1) An internet storage site for *fanfics*. (2) The act of archiving a story.

**ARROW TATTOOS** – Cultural tradition of the AIR NOMADS which symbolizes an individual to be a master AIRBENDER.

**ATLA / A:TLA** – Acronym for the name of the series: AVATAR : THE LAST AIRBENDER.

**AUTHOR FIC** – a *fanfic* based on the author's life.

**AVATAR** – (1) The spirit of the world reincarnated into human form and master of all four BENDING elements. Is the bridge between the real world and SPIRIT WORLD. (2) Name of the television series.

**THE AVATAR CYCLE** – The AVATAR repetitive cycle of reincarnations. The AVATAR is reborn into one of the four nations in the pattern of water, earth, fire and air.

**AZULA** – Princess of the FIRE NATION. Sister of ZUKO and daughter of FIRELORD OZAI. Sets out in the story to defeat the AVATAR in aid of her father.

## **B.**

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**BEARDMUTTERINGS** – Form of poetics. The act of pronouncing words as if they were one continuous word (e.g. 'Itotallysquealed').

**BENDING** – The ability to BEND one of the four elements, water, earth, fire or air. It exists through a spiritual connection and is not genetic. Some people are born NON-BENDERS.

**BETA / BETAREADER** – A second reader for fan fiction. This reader serves as an editor and corrects the story or provides feedback.

**BETA VERSION** – A first or rough draft of a story.

**BLOG / WEBLOG** – An online journal where a person records their personal dealings. Can also be used in the fan community.

**BNF / BIG NAME FAN** – A fan that has achieved status in the fan community. He or she is popular and well-known amongst other fans. See WKF.

**BOF / BEST OF FANDOM** – (1) an annually issued (digital) magazine that highlights the best fandom activity of the past year. (2) A title given to a person or moment in fan culture.

### **C.**

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**CANON** – The original works or narrative that inspire fans.

**CHALLENGE FIC** – A *fanfic* written for a challenge. This challenge sets out a certain plotline or idea for a story. Sometimes used in competition.

**CHARA / CHARACTER** – a person represented in fan fiction. Often these are the characters from the source or newly created characters.

**CHARACTER CODES** – Letters in the **HEADER** that indicate which characters are in the *fanfic*, e.g. Z/K for Zuko and Katara.

**CHARACTER DEATH** – Indicator warning readers that a main character will die in a certain *fanfic*.

**CLICHÉ** – Refers to overused plot points in fan fiction.

**CLUBZINE** – A magazine spread among a fanclub.

**COLLABORATION** – A story produced by several authors joining together.

**CON / CONVENTION** – Gatherings for fans. Conventions often host different panels and activities for fans.

**CONDOM** – Term for fan that regularly visit conventions.

**COPYRIGHT** – The exclusive rights that belong to a certain author. Fans disclaim copyright to protect their fan work.

**COSPLAY** – The act of dressing up as a character. This is often done for **CONVENTIONS**.

**CRACKFIC** – Fan fiction that defies the source in a manner that is very unlikely or unrealistic. Often contains an unlikely (romantic) pairing.

**CROSS OVER** – A *fanfic* that involves characters and or location from more than one fandom.

### **D.**

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**DARK** – A *fanfic* that portrays negative emotions. The story is sad or depressing and contain heavy themes.



**DEATHFIC** – A *fanfic* which centers on the death of a (main) character.

**DISCLAIMER** – A note from the author stating that he or she draws from someone else's original work and does not own it him- or herself.

**DNP / DO NOT PRINT** – A request by the author for readers to not print their work. Used to prevent multiplication and/or distribution.

**DNQ / DO NOT QUOTE** – A request by the author for readers to not quote their work. Used to prevent multiplication and/or distribution.

**DRABBLE** – A *fanfic* that is self-contained and is often no longer than 100 words.

**DRAFT** – A first, unrevised, version of a *fanfic*.

## **E.**

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**EARTHBENDING / EARTHBENDER** – The ability to manipulate the element of earth into sand and various forms of rock for offense and defense purposes. TOPH is an EARTHBENDER.

**EARTH KINGDOM** – The largest and most diverse kingdom of the four AVATAR nations. Most of the EARTH KINGDOM has been occupied by the FIRE NATION.

**EDITOR** – A person that revises a work before it is published. See BETA READER.

**EGOBOO / EGOBOOST** – A positive exclamation from a fan reinsures positive feelings for an author.

**EPIC** – A long drawn out *fanfic*.

**E-ZINE** – An online version of a FANZINE.

## **F.**

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**FAKEFAN** – Someone who is not an actual fan, but tries to belong with other fans.

**FAN** – Short for 'fanatic'. Someone who is focused on a certain pop culture object and admires it.

**FANART** – Art drawn by fans, depicting characters or settings from canon.

**FANACTIVITY** – The activities fans participate in, e.g. writing, drawing or discussing.

**FANCOMMUNITY** – The collective name for a group of fans that feel connected.

**FANDOM** – The collective name for a group of fans admiring a certain (pop culture) object, e.g. a book series or a television series.

**FANFICTION / FANFIC / FIC** – Fiction written by a fan based on the CANON.

**FANFEUD** – An argument or fight between different groups of fans.

**FANFICER / FICER** – The writer of FAN FICTION.

**FANNE / FEMFAN / FEMMEFAN** – Female writers of FAN FICTION.

**FANON** – (1) A story, pairing, or situation that does not follow the canon. (2) Things that are not strictly canon, but are widely accepted by most fans to be true.

**FANWORK** – The product of (some) fan activity. FANART, FAN FICTION are examples.

**FANWRITING** – Writing by fans. Is not FAN FICTION per say.

**FANZINE** – Magazines for and by fans on a certain subject.

**FAQ / FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS** – Answers to frequently asked questions regarding certain topics and rules. Mostly used on forums and message boards.

**FB / FEEDBACK** – (1) the reaction of a BETA READER on a *fanfic*. (2) The reaction of readers on a *fanfic*.

**FEMMESLASH / FEMSLASH** – Fan fiction that focuses on a female/female romantic or sexual pairing. See also SLASH.

**FIREBENDING / FIREBENDER** – The ability to manipulate the element of fire from thought and projecting the fire as a weapon. AZULA, ZUKO, OZAI and IROH are FIREBENDERS.

**FIRE LORD OZAI** – Main villain of the series, father of AZULA and ZUKO and brother to IROH. Is continuing his grandfather's quest to conquer the world.

**FIRE NATION** – One of the four AVATAR nations. Small in size but on a campaign towards world domination. Ruled by the FIRE LORD.

**FIRST DRAFT** – A first version of a fan work. Is often unrevised.

**FLAME** – A hurtful comment, containing profanity, often directed at the author of a *fanfic*.

**FLAME WAR** – A fight between certain groups of fans. Other than a FANFEUD the purpose of a flame war is to insult and upset.

**FLUFF** – A light *fanfic* that is light, humorous and happy. It will not stretch the reader.

**FURRY FANDOM** – Fandom with an animal impact. Popular animals are foxes

and lions. Fans dress up as ‘furries’ or apply it to characters in fan fiction.

## **G.**

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**GAANG** – A nickname fans have given AANG and his group of friends.

**GAMERS** – (1) people that play video games. (2) Fans of video games.

**GARY STU** – Male version of a MARY SUE.

**GENERAL / GEN** – A *fanfic* with a general theme, other than ANGST or ROMANCE. Often contains no shipping and follows the canon closely.

**GENRE** – Term to define the type of fan fiction.

## **H.**

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**HEADER INFO** – Information at the top of a *fanfic* that informs the reader about the story, author or gives a summary. The headers used by FanFiction.Net show the title, the author, a summary, the rating, language, genre, chapter count, word count, review count, favorite count, follows count, last updated date, publish date, status and ID number.

**HET / HETEROSEXUAL** – A *fanfic* depicting a romantic or sexual pairing between characters of the opposite sex.

**HOAX** – A joke, trick or deception, meant to deceive or confuse people. See TROLLING.

**HURT/COMFORT** – A *fanfic* in which a character is put through a traumatizing experience in order to be comforted by another character.

## **I.**

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**IC / IN CHARACTER** – In fan fiction, the CHARACTERS behave in a fashion that agrees with CANON behavior.

**INTERACTIVE STORY** – (1) A *fanfic* in which the characters make contact with the readers. (2) A *fanfic* in which the author requests help or contribution from the readers.

**IROH** – Uncle of ZUKO and AZULA, brother of OZAI. Is a retired general that travels with his nephew ZUKO and helps him in his quest to find the AVATAR.

## **J.**

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## **K.**

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**KATAANG** – SHIPPING name for KATARA and AANG.

**KATARA** – Sister of SOKKA, is from the WATER TRIBE and a WATERBENDER. Helps AANG in his quest to save the world and is his love interest.

**KINK** – A *fanfic* written about a certain (sexual fetish).

**KLEENEX WARNING** – A warning from the author that the story is sad.

## **L.**

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**LEMON** – A *fanfic* containing graphic sexual situations. A LEMON might be a full length story that contains merely scenes of graphic sexual intercourse.

**LOVE/HATE** – A FAN FICTION theme where the CHARACTERS start out hating each other and end up loving each other.

**LURKER** – The opposite of an ACTIFAN. A person that is part of an online (discussion) group but does not participate. He or she only observers.

## **M.**

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**MAILING LIST** – A list containing names of people that communicate via e-mail.

**MARTY STU** – Male version of MARY SUE. See GARY STU.

**MARY SUE** – An original female character that is seen as perfect and has a tendency to be great at everything. Generally not considered a good CHARACTER and is also often a fictionalized version of the author. See SELF-INSERT.

**MOD / MODERATOR** – The ADMINISTRATOR of a website, chat- or message board.

**M/M** – Fan fiction that focuses on a male/male romantic or sexual pairing. See also SLASH

## **N.**

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**NEOFAN** – (1) A new and unexperienced FAN. (2) A FAN from a new generation.

**NETIQUETTE** – The code of conduct or acceptable online behavior.

**NETZINE** – A FANZINE that is only present online.

**NEWBIE / NOOB** – Any fan that is new to a fandom.

**NON-BENDING / NON-BENDER** – The ability of not being able to BEND an element. In all nations but the AIR NOMADS some people are not able to BEND.

## **O.**

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**OC / ORIGINAL CHARACTER** – Any CHARACTER that is not in the source and is created by the *fanfic* author.

**OFC / ORIGINAL FEMALE CHARACTER** – An original female

**CHARACTER** that is not in the source and is created by the *fanfic* author. See **MARY SUE**.

**OMC / ORIGINAL MALE CHARACTER** – An original male **CHARACTER** that is not in the source and is created by the *fanfic* author. See **GARY STU**.

**ONESHOT** – A *fanfic* focusing on a brief moment in time, is often no longer than one chapter.

**OOO / OUT OF CHARACTER** – A **CHARACTER** is not behaving as they would in the **CANON**.

**OT / OFF TOPIC** – When a fan, reader or author mentions anything that does not relate to the main topic (of conversation).

**OTP / ONE TRUE PARING** – A reader can **SHIP** multiple parings, but prefers one over the rest.

## **P.**

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**PAIRING** – A combination between two **CHARACTERS**, often with a romantic inclination.

**PARODY** – Genre in **FAN FICTION** where the author parodies the **CANON**.

**PLOT BUNNY** – An idea for a plot as affectionately referred to by authors.

**POSTING** – The act of putting materials online, such as **FAN ART** or **FAN FICTION**.

**POV / POINT OF VIEW** – In a *fanfic* the perspective from a certain **CHARACTER** is used to show events.

**PREQUEL** – (1) A *fanfic* that takes place prior to the **CANON**. (2) A *fanfic* that takes place prior to another *fanfic*.

**PRO / PROFESSIONAL** – Someone who is in reality an author or illustrator, whether they make fan work or original work.

**PWP / PLOT, WHAT PLOT? / PORN WITHOUT PLOT** – A *fanfic* with little plot, often focusing on **ADULT** topics. The author pokes fun of themselves when they use the term **PWP**.

## **Q.**

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## **R.**

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**R/R / READ / REVIEW** – An invite from the author to encourage readers to review their stories.

**RL / REAL LIFE** – **RL** is used to refer to real life and real life events.

**RATING** – A way to tell the reader what reading level a *fanfic* contains.

FanFiction.Net uses the ratings K, K+, T, M and MA.

**REVIEW** – Opinion of a *fanfic* left by the reader.

**ROUND ROBIN** – Authors take turns writing a *fanfic*, each adding one chapter.

**RPG / ROLE PLAYING GAME** – A game that involves people pretending to be their favorite character. Often happens on message boards or in REAL LIFE. See also COSPLAY.

## S.

**SCI FI / SCIENCE FICTION** – A GENRE containing themes with unrealistic or otherworldly settings.

**SEQUEL** – (1) A *fanfic* that takes place after the events in the CANON. (2) A *fanfic* that takes place after the events in a previous *fanfic*.

**SELF-INSERT** – When an author puts a fictionalized version of themselves in a *fanfic*. Is often not appreciated by readers. See also MARY SUE.

**SHIP** – Derived from ‘relationship’. The paring of two CHARACTERS in a *fanfic*.

**SHIPPER** – A reader who supports a particular relationship PAIRING.

**SHIPPERFIC** – A *fanfic* that pairs certain characters together.

**SHIPPING WAR** – A feud between groups of fans about which romantic PAIRING is the best.

**SILLYFIC** – A light piece of FAN FICTION which is meant to amuse. Unlike FLUFF, this GENRE breaks CANON rules and can get OOC. However, this is intentional and done for laughs.

**SLASH** – A *fanfic* involving a theme concerning same sex CHARACTERS. See also M/M or FEMSLASH.

**SPIRIT WORLD** – Alternative for a hereafter, beyond or afterlife in the AVATAR world. Is inhabited by spirits and other creatures. The AVATAR is the bridge between this world and the real world.

**SPOILER / SPOILER WARNING** – Information from the CANON which may not be known to a reader. Authors put up a warning if this may be the case.

**SOKKA** – Brother of KATARA, is from the WATER TRIBE. Travels with his sister and AANG. Is a NON-BENDER. Is often used for comic relief, but is also inventive and intelligent.

**SONGFIC** – A *fanfic* based around or inspired by the lyrics of a song.

**SUMMARY** – A short summary of a *fanfic*.

**T.**

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**TEASER** – A small part of a story, posted to get readers interested in the story in advance. Counts for CANON as well as FAN FICTION.

**TOPH** – A blind EARTHBENDING girl that later in the series joins the GAANG to teach AANG EARTHBENDING. She uses her BENDING ability to ‘see’ through vibrations.

**TREKDOM** – The FANDOM name for Star Trek.

**TREKKERS / TREKKIES** – Name for FANS of Star Trek.

**TROLLING** – The act of deliberately deceiving and pestering others online to get a rise out of them. See HOAX.

**U.**

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**UST / UNRESOLVED SEXUAL TENSION** – This term refers to interactions between CHARACTERS that have sexual undertones. A *fanfic* tends to build up this tension for the reader’s pleasure.

**V.**

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**VIGNETTE** – A very short piece of FAN FICTION which is centered on a CHARACTER’s feelings, emotions, experiences and thoughts.

**VANILLA** – Refers to the GENRE of sexual stories that only contain ordinary male/female content without any variations or other KINKS.

**W.**

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**WATERBENDING / WATERBENDER** – The ability to manipulate the element of water in its various forms as a solid, liquid or vapor.

**WATER TRIBE** – One of the four nations of the AVATAR world, located in the north and south poles.

**WAFF / WARM AND FUZZY FEELINGS** – A *fanfic* that is set out to provoke happy thoughts among its readers.

**WEBLOG** – See BLOG.

**WIP / WORK IN PROGRESS** – A *fanfic* that has not been completed yet.

**WKF / WELL KNOWN FAN** – A fan that has achieved status in the fan community. He or she is popular and well-known amongst other fans. See BNF.

**WOFAN** – Female version of FAN.

## **X. Y. Z.**

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**ZINE** – Short for FANZINE. Magazines written by and for FANS about a certain object. See FANZINE.

**ZUKO** – Son of OZAI, brother of AZULA and nephew of IROH. Sets out initially to

capture AANG and return to the good graces of his father. Later he joins the GAANG to defeat his father.

**ZUTARA** – The SHIPPING name for the romantic pairing supporting ZUKO and KATARA.



## Appendix 2

### Analyzed fan fiction reviews

LEGEND:

1. Fan fiction in relation to canon
2. Fan fiction in relation to reality
3. Fan fiction in relation to author
4. Fan fiction as autonomous whole
5. Fan fiction in relation to reader
6. Fan fiction in relation to other fan fiction
7. Additional comments

### STORMBENDERS REVIEWS

1. CynthiaER chapter 18 . Mar 25

#### OMG STANDARD

Fandomme,

There are no words to express my gratitude. This story is so, incredibly good. I have a great deal of respect for anyone who can capture the spirit of the Avatar characters and you have done just that. I laughed out loud so many times during this story and was so enthralled I couldn't pull myself away even when my eyes were tired of looking at the screen.

You captured the spirit of each beloved character while adding your own flare to expand the Avatar world. Your writing and creativity is expert and I want to thank you so much for bringing this story into the world. Katara and Zuko's relationship feels natural and genuine. I was ensnared by their feelings and predicaments, waiting with bated breath to see what would happen next. My enjoyment goes beyond words. I am adding 'Stormbenders to my collection of favourite stories to be read and enjoyed again.

I sincerely hope that you write more of anything in the future because it would be a shame for your talent to be stifled by the trials of daily life.

A very sincere and enthusiastic thank you from a fellow author who wishes you the very best,  
CynthiaER

2. tina4u chapter 18 . Mar 25

#### OMG STANDARD

I honestly LOVED this story. I had read your previous fic, Ozai's Vengeance, a couple years back after the series ended but I couldn't bring myself to read stormbenders right away. And I'm sad but at the same time VERY HAPPY I didn't. I'm sad because I see that the last time you made a fic was 2008...I'm guessing this means you haven't been on this site since maybe 2009. I REALLY REALLY REALLY want you to know how I feel about this and how

happy this story made me. ATLA consumed me during my awkward middle school years and I looked forward to watching it every week. When it ended I was hopeful that such a series would get a sequel but was sad to find out that they wouldn't be making one. ( I don't count legend of Korra as a sequel. Its more of a companion). Reading this now during my college years just brings me back and reminded me why I loved this series so very much. The characters are rich, especially Zuko, and the plot was amazing. And you did I very good job at manipulating this story so it still has the essence of what Brian and Mike have created, but at the same time shaped it to go beyond that (and have Katara and Zuko together like they should have been). I love the idea of storbending bringing two nations and two different elements together which was the the avatar universe needed. I'm glad we see more of that in Legend of Korra. Another thing I liked was Aangs character. He seemed to have a bigger character development here that he did on the show and it was really nice to see him mature not only physically ( as he did in the show) but also personality wise. Zuko was a bit out of character but I think I only viewed that was because we didn't have enough time with him on the show. I think if we really got to know him, he would be like this. Again this was a WONDERFUL read, I really didnt want to finish it but I had to cuz it was so good! Im so happy we have someone as talented as you in this fandom and this ship. THANK YOU!

3. awkotaco14 chapter 6 . Mar 14

#### **OMG STANDARD**

I really, really love Toph and Zuko's relationship. So much it almost makes me cry. It's 100% family, no awkward "12 year old pining after a 16 year old" scenario or anything like some other stories. She's the little sister he never really had, and he's kinda the older brother/father figure she never really had. IT'S PERFECT. This whole story is just perfect, and I'm only on the 6th chapter geez. You're a wonderful writer!

4. I think ily chapter 11 . Feb 9

#### **OMG STANDARD**

Look... I've been reading fanfics since five years ago. And this is my favorite.

I can't even articulate how well this has been written... I don't know if it's just me or if it's the beauty of your fingers against keyboard but holy hell I think I love you.

It's just... the dialogue is just... just UGH. And it's just that I think you're the most talented writer ever, EVER. And I pride myself in my writing.

Oh and also I don't cry for books. Ever. Ever. (Ok that one time where Fred died, but everyone's a HP fan at heart and we all cried during someone's death in that series.) But this made me cry, properly cry, like the ugly crying? The one where there are fat, blotchy tears and you're making all these horrific sounds? Yeah. That one.

And it's because you've captured everything in a subtle romance that I could ever hope to capture. You... you amazing thing, you.

And it doesn't matter that Zuko didn't end up with Katara in the series because I'll always have fanfics like yours to keep myself going.

So, yeah. Sorry for blabbering so much.

I don't know if you still read these reviews, but I want you to know that you've done magical things for this story.

So yeah... I think ily.

5. [too-much-inspiration](#) chapter 18 . Jan 12

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

I love that this story is so well put together and written. There was a great depth to the story that I greatly enjoyed, and the romance was built up realistically. I find that in a lot of romance stories the characters involved end up being essentially the same two characters regardless of who they started as. Maybe this is because I miss the subtleties but that is usually why I dislike romance stories, but I found you didn't do that here so thank you for not letting the romance devolve in that fashion. I most enjoyed their capture and how they were stringing Ozai and Azula along for the duration for the story. I really would have liked to see them discovered sooner though, especially since we didn't really get to see much of Ozai and Azula's response to the discovery that they had been manipulated so thoroughly by the end. Ozai and Azula seemed to almost flop over at the end at the same way as a lot of RPG final bosses end up doing. There was definitely a few missed opportunities for drama in that battle, although it still was reasonably dramatic with Iroh and Aang being nearly-fatally injured, particularly since some of the other things that could have been done would have been quite cheesy. In any case, thank you for writing and posting this, and thank you to everyone else who contributed to this story as you listed in your afterword.

6. [NoOrdinaryAuthor](#) chapter 18 . Oct 9, 2013

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I can't express my love for this story. I honestly can't. It's like this story rings so true that I'm speechless. And(I really hope you don't take this as 'bragging') but reading this made me think of my own writing, and what I would have done with it, had you not beat me to this. :D

You basically, like, wrote EXACTLY what I had in my head. Seriously. All of this? It's just perfect. It makes so much sense. And after I finished reading your afterword, I was just like, "whoa. slow your vulture-horses down."

What you've written mirrored my thoughts. I love it. I love it so much it pains my little heart.

I love the fact that you also believe that Zuko is the real hero. And it's true! He is the character that evolves the most in, like, the ENTIRE series. He grew and matured and I came to love him more than I thought I could ever love a cartoon character. Aang...meh. I liked him, I suppose(I mean, he IS the main character, it's kind of hard to NOT like him), but he was just so childish. "He is Peter Pan, and the Lion-Turtle's back is his Neverland." Best. Line. Ever. I honestly believe that it could not have been put any better. It's so true. I never liked the fact that he always seemed to give up so easily, but I guess, in the back of my mind, I cut him slack 'cause he's twelve.

That's another thing. Aang is twelve. Twelve is when you start puberty. Fourteen is when you're BARELY old enough to start dating..

ATLA seems like a kiddie TV show on the outside, but once you start paying attention, it's surprisingly in-depth.

That's why I'm so glad you wrote STORMBENDERS , and succeeded, too. It's wonderful, and nothing happened that the original creators wouldn't have done as well, and that makes it even more real.

Okay. Now in regard to your writing style, here are my thoughts:

-I like the simplicity that your writing can take on at times. It's smooth and it flows nicely.

-During the last chapter(17), it was well written, but some parts lacked detail and emotion.

(i.e. Azula and Aang's battle, the bit where Aang almost died)

-I didn't like the fact that you never gave Aang a chance to properly react to the fact that Katara didn't share the same love for him as she did for Zuko. It seemed...odd. He never got the chance to speak up on how he felt, or that he was okay with Zutara. It was just kind of...ignored for the rest of the story.

-Toph is GAY?!

Love you! Hugs and kisses,

NoOrdinaryAuthor

7. TigerStriper chapter 18 . Sep 8, 2013

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I had a lot of opinions about this story. But for the most part I thought it was excellent.

There were a lot of things that I found absolutely absurd and ridiculous, but that was part of

its charm. As for its Zutara element (being the entire story) I was on the cusp of like and

dislike. The thing about Zutara is I don't think that people should try to intertwine it with

the Cannon ATLA. It's more of a shipping that only works if the author deviates from the

original plot to the extent that it would either change the course of events throughout ATLA

or change how the characters felt following the show. Other wise I think the characters end

up to OCC. Your story had a little of both, it had a drastic plot change, but it also added

elements like Katara never seeing Aang romantically, ignoring Zuko's feelings for Mai for the

most part, and Aang just getting over Katara. I'm a bit of a Cannon Nazi in the way that you

don't purposely give and explain a reason for why things don't follow, I don't approve. But I

do agree with you about one thing, Everyone knows ATLA was really about Zuko.

TigerStriper chapter 16 . Sep 8, 2013

So the whole, "White's a morning color" what's with that? is it in the show somewhere or did

you just make it up? What's its significance except for a weird personification of the Fire

Nations twistedness?

TigerStriper chapter 7 . Sep 6, 2013

I liked all the awkwardness. Also you really made me want creme brulee.

TigerStriper chapter 6 . Sep 6, 2013

Um not to be nit picky, but I doubt Toph would be dreaming about an oddly colored

platypus bear. She was born blind (I believe so at least, I can't remember if that was ever

specified) so she doesn't even know what colors are, they're as ungraspable as abstract

nouns. She would perceive dreams the same way she perceives everything else, sightless.

But now that I think about it, she might have been being sarcastic, I couldn't tell, she and

Zuko have both been really OOC in this chapter.

TigerStriper chapter 2 . Sep 5, 2013

Sometimes it really bothers me when I can tell that the author purposely wants me to just

despise a character. But wow I wish these guys would just go away! But then there would

be no story of course. And we can't have that.

TigerStriper chapter 1 . Sep 5, 2013

Hello there, just a warning I have a habit of leaving frequent, non-relevant reviews, so bare with me if they get annoying. Anyways so I've been reluctant to read your story for a really long time, the summary put me off, I assumed it to be another typical, irrational Zutarian fic. But then the author of one of my favorite fics, who is very highly renowned and talented, suggested yours along with a few other favorites so I decided to give it a try. So far it seems pretty good. Strangely my favorite part was when Katara was saying how Aang is too young to shave and it brought up one of my biggest issues with Kataang; they were both too young to be in a life long relationship, if they had both stayed friends for a few years it might have tipped the scales of my shipping preferences, since they are only slightly tilted towards Zutara. With that said there is a very specific way to pull off writing a Zutara without it seeming irrational, OOC, plotless, and conflicting with the prior Canon, but so far this is off to an excellent start. Oh before I forget, the one thing I didn't like was when Sokka hit Katara in the but with the towel, the back, or head, or leg would have been fine but I thought that was a little inappropriate for him to do to his sister, (if it were a girl or a boy who wasn't related I wouldn't mind) all I know is I would be creeped out if my brother did that to me. Ok that's all, sorry for the novella.

8. [BJArthur](#) chapter 8 . Sep 7, 2013

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

"I looked everywhere, and I didn't stop." He paused. "That's how I always find you."

that's a great line. i mean, it's a really, REALLY awesome one. the first time i read this story was a few years ago and i've always remembered that line, even if i couldn't remember it was from this story exactly. now that i've 'found' it agin, i'm fav-ing it so i can always re-read when i want to.

on a separate note, i love how realistic you've made Katara and Zuko - both for who they are and for how old they are. that can be difficult, but the way you've done it rings true and makes the over-all story that much better. and it's pretty darn wonderful to begin with.

thanks for sharing!

- BJ

9. [Aglaranna](#) chapter 5 . Sep 6, 2013

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

You know what I love about this chapter? The fact that you did bring up Aang's inability to enter the Avatar State and the fact that he never told anyone about it. The first time I read this story was when it actually clicked through that he'd never told anyone and how irresponsible that was. Hell, I was never a fan of Aang's relationship with Katara because it all felt like it was based on what he wanted and didn't seem to consider her feelings at all. But, it is a truth that would have damaged his relationship with the rest of the Gaang and one that he should have copped to. It was a disservice to his (mostly non existent) hero arc. I'm glad you did it, even though I know it must have been hard.

10. [Aquarinyoshi](#) chapter 18 . Aug 2, 2013

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I would like to start off by congratulating you on writing such an enjoyable piece. I'm just now getting involved in ATLA fanfiction, and I'm extremely pleased to have begun with a great work such as yours. It is apparent in your writing that from start to finish you grew along with the story, and that is something that, as a fellow writer, I find the most rewarding. Your attention to detail allowed the story to flow seamlessly, and I loved where you filled in holes that the anime left empty. After this story, I definitely view the Fire Nation differently, and it's all because of you.

I always wondered what it would have been like if Katara and Zuko wound up together, and now I realize that it just doesn't sit well with me. That's now saying that I didn't appreciate the spin you took with it in your story! You empower Katara in ways that the anime did not. In this sense, you also give Zuko new found freedom that he otherwise did not receive; however, despite this, I am still a shipper of Katara and Aang.

I would like to add one more point. Aang clearly loved Katara, and when a person is in love they do crazy things. I find it lackluster that Aang somehow came to terms that Katara and Zuko were married and that was it. No fighting. No Avatar State. No hard choices. He just kind of smiled and got over it. The only suggestion I would make to this story is to have a scene where Aang comes to terms with their union. Whether or not they're his teachers and he should be happy for him, he is also a person - the Avatar, no less - and would create a fuss over losing his love, would he not?

All-in-all, I think you composed a wonderful tale rich with adventure, comedy, and romance. You've taken a series that has touched many and inspired more with your creativity and skill. I can see why this story has garnered so many favorites. Keep on writing, Fandomme!

11. [An](#) chapter 18 . Jul 31, 2013

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

This fan fiction is the absolute BEST. It was amazingly written with style and wit that I have not even seen in real books. I am so happy that I was referred to this fanfiction by my friend. This has pretty much made my life so much better. When I finished Avatar: The Last Airbender way back when, I can honestly say I hated the ending. I was grateful that it ended happily and the world was saved, but Aang and Katara were together. That, for me, was unforgivable. ZUTARA FOREVER! I thank this author so much for providing a perfect sample of my inner feelings in such an artistic way. I would have wished for slightly more development... and maybe Katara eventually not wanting to get divorced? However, this IS the BEST fanfiction ever. Please Read. No one will ever regret reading this. EVER.

12. [h0tbread](#) chapter 18 . Jul 22, 2013

### **OMG STANDARD**

Since I'm new to the fandom (about time I watched be of the greatest shows ever) and especially new to Zutara, I had a friend recommend this be my first Zutara read. Boy were they right, you don't disappoint! The entire story was incredibly well written, and only made

my love for the ship grow. Thanks for such a wild ride, I'm glad I finally jumped on board.  
-Aktress

13. [snowygrin](#) chapter 18 . Jul 3, 2013

#### **OMG STANDARD**

Wow. Just wow.

This fanfiction was breathtaking. Really, absolutely brilliant. I have never, ever been that compelled to read a fanfiction so quickly. I loved it. Honestly, the entire thing was quite inspiring to me. I'd love to be able to write like this someday. It's a goal of mine. And, through your writing, it made me hopeful that I too could write a masterpiece like this someday.

You are a master author. Really. You are. I loved this. Wow. Please, just keep writing. You've got a gift.

14. [niky0n](#) chapter 18 . Jun 1, 2013

#### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

I feel depressed somehow after reading this.. :'(

It's over. It's over. If only I could forget everything I have read and start all over again, I would.

I really, really love this story. I haven't read a story like this for a very long time.

The description, the moods, the feelings. You really thought about this story quite well.

Sometimes, I wish I could write as well as you. I also want to write my thoughts and feelings as fluently as you did here in Stormbenders.

I really love the innuendos. The slight hints of Zuko's feelings for Katara, like the "Honey" part. I laughed at that.

This fanfic brought me alot of feels. Laughter. Suspense. Everything. It's so great, I want to mention so many things of how much I love this..

I love how you portrayed the characters. Zuko being funny and serious both at the same time. Remembering that Katara is only fourteen, and constantly reminding the readers that she is.

And what I love most about this, is that you wrote their romance like it was "building up", not something that just appeared out of nowhere. You were unlike other romance writers who kept on writing the female lead gushing over the male lead about his looks, etc. and vice versa, but you wrote it to another level, a sense of realism, if I do say. That in real life, true love is not all about the superficial things, and I really felt it in this fanfic. And also the fact that you didn't write a "you-know-what-I-mean" scene, the sense of realism and the reminder that they are still minors are there, unlike some writers who like to write about these scenes without even thinking about what I had just mentioned.. All in all, I love it. I love it alot. I would read it over and over if I could. I would favorite it, follow, and even bookmark it and place it on my bookmarks bar. That's how much I love this story. And I'm hoping to read more like this. Though, I know you have written this way back, and you might not read this review anymore(considering the amount of reviews in this story), I am still hoping you would continue to write another fanfic about Zutara. You're so amazing, and I consider you one of my idols when it comes to writing from now on. :)

I love it alot. I would read it over and over if I could. I would favorite it, follow, and even bookmark it and place it on my bookmarks bar. That's how much I love this story. And I'm hoping to read more like this. Though, I know you have written this way back, and you might not read this review anymore(considering the amount of reviews in this story), I am still hoping you would continue to write another fanfic about Zutara. You're so amazing, and I consider you one of my idols when it comes to writing from now on. :)

I guess this is it. Hoping to see more from you.

15. FilthyHonest chapter 17 . May 11, 2013

**EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

Finally...A fanfiction which does NOT call the wife of the fire lord "Fire Lady". :D

16. larosa19 chapter 18 . May 9, 2013

**OMG STANDARD**

Very lovely story, it had me laughing and crying to the end. Thanks for writing such a masterpiece.

17. keys to the kingdom chapter 18 . Apr 29, 2013

**GENTLE CRITIQUE**

i found this because one of my favorite authors gave you a shoutout and i had nothing else to read at the moment so i thought i'd give it a try. honestly, i really didn't like the first couple chapters of the story. i almost gave up on it but your story seemed promising so i stuck with it, and i'm so glad that i did. this was amazing. the ideas, the way it was written, it was perfect. i really liked what you did in the last chapter. i really loved this and i'll be sure to check out your other fics :)

18. hihazuki chapter 18 . Mar 24, 2013

**GENTLE CRITIQUE**

Spoken like a true writer. I'm really surprised at how you'd write down the things you did wrong. I didn't notice most of the flaws you admitted until you wrote them down. Katara from the beginning did strike me as a little monotone, her feelings weren't constantly fluctuating, and it's as if she had too much calm and composure all the way to the end. I thought she'd go through more inner battles. I see her emotions flare on occasion though, whenever her and Zuko have their fights. And I love those sequences to death. I love how you stick to the goals you implanted yourself from the beginning and followed it through to the end.

You brought us a more casual, humorous adventure story, with a small touch of romance that isn't too miniscule but logical at the same time. I adore how you don't condescend to the sole goal of winning shipping wars and try to justify the pairing by all means. I love how romance is just the topping to the foundation of Fire Nation culture you laid out and the suspense you presented is the flavor in it. It makes a superb combination.

Really, I was honestly surprised at how people asked about sex. Katara is still very young, and they were expecting her to have intercourse with Zuko already? No. Absolutely not. And I totally second the part where you say "she doesn't want to." That's exactly who Katara is. Strong-willed, independent, and ridiculously thick-headed. Although I felt she lacks a little more turbulence, she is far from being OOC, and that's all that matters.

19. YinYangSisters chapter 18 . Feb 20, 2013

**OMG STANDARD**

Wow. Okay, here comes my rant.

Your story is just incredible; your writing, pacing, the way you kept everyone in character was just...wow. I love it when I read a Zutara fic where I can actually picture the two in my head, because they are written so vividly and realistically.



I've actually spent the entire day reading this whole fic, I just couldn't put it down - I love how you gave Katara some power, since I don't know why, but a lot of authors don't really do that with Z/K stories. I also totally agree with you; Zuko was the real hero of ATLA. He earned our respect, rather expecting us to have it immediately like Aang did, just because he was the Avatar.

I really love your style of writing, too; how clear and precise you are to the point, how you don't waffle on and give me irrelevant information. Oh, and Zuko and Katara's characters were just flawless - with Zuko, you got in just enough gloomy awkwardness, and with Katara, just enough witty bossiness. It was perfect.

I know this story was written years ago, but it makes me so sad to think that that's it...I guess it's inevitable to say that the quality of Z/K fics are declining, but no worries. We still have your stories, and the stories of other actually TALENTED authors out there.

I hope that one day, I can be as good a writer as you - you've inspired me so much, that I'm going to start on the next chapter of my own ongoing Z/K fic, even though I swore I would try and wait a week.

Thank you for this story, I really learnt a lot :) I know it's a long shot to ask, since it's been so long, but please, please keep writing, and don't you ever, ever stop.

- Yin

20. [Olileslie](#) chapter 18 . Feb 11, 2013

### **OMG STANDARD**

Well, the anime club I sponsor for the local library just finished up ATLA, so I was feeling a little nostalgic and decided to look up some good fanfiction. I am astonished I didn't find this fantastic story sooner. I think you did a fantastic job of keeping this within the realm of possible in the ATLA universe. The characters felt like themselves, the technology created by the fire nation with creative and believable, and the resolution and aftermath of Sozin's Comet felt more in line with what the series had started to build towards before veering off the road in an extreme fashion. I have to say that I am pleased to find that there was someone out there besides me who wanted to give Aang a talking to about growing up and embracing his role. It needed to be done to save the world, and maybe that's unfair to ask of a twelve year-old, but circumstances being what they were, I'm amazed that it never came up in canon. Again, I would like to thank you writing an unforgettable tale. You have the gift of storytelling and hope you never stop sharing it :)

21. [greaves](#) chapter 18 . Jan 11, 2013

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

OH. What a fun, fun story. I enjoyed it so much and spent way too much time reading it in a compressed period of time.

Your gratuitous and lovely author's note at the end was very thoughtful. I suppose I never

really thought about Aang's character arc, particularly in relation to Zuko and how wonderful, thank you for making me think about those things.

I loved Katara. I did. And, by god, you treated her with \*respect\* and it was just so refreshing. Some of her lines I was wincing with awkwardness - she can be very blunt - but you give her so much agency. Because even when she was blunt or a bit graceless (I have the \*ahem\* scenes with Zuko in mind in particular) she said what she wanted and what she didn't want and she was clear and powerful, and I was blown away. (Thanks also for giving us a lead male that can be sarcastic and stubborn and so on that isn't also a giant douchenozzle, as seems to be the trend with love interests anymore. Unfortunately.)

You had some really brilliant lines, too. Some of them were the innuendos. I kept going, "Wait..." And there were some charmingly snappy comebacks. And then there was some really poignant stuff that I appreciated. What Zuko said about Hakoda not being able to take back his words to Katara even if he'd never meant them sticks out to me in that regard.

I know you wrote this story years ago, but it would have been impolite for me to not review, especially since I liked it as much as I did.

22. rainsrabble chapter 8 . Nov 26, 2012

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

This is probably my favorite chapter of this fic. The really special thing about sb is the way you write the katara/zuko interaction. She's an innocent young girl and Zuko is trying very very hard to be good even if he is bad at it. I love the way she has no idea that wrapping her wet naked body in his clothes will cause him a fever. Or why he rolls over on his stomach because she's sucking on an ice cycle. Or why he is staring at her while she rubs herself down with her cold cup. Or why he doesn't think being ready to go when she's ready for him will be a problem. Or why he stops breathing when he's got her pressed up against him when she's leaning out the window. Zuko's smile when she tells him she might be catching his fever is probably my favorite part in this whole story. Anyway. I just wanted to let you know how much I love the way you highlight the age difference in this. Zuko is older than her, and she's just coming into her sexuality and I love that she doesn't know it. The dynamic here is perfect and Katara's inner voice is so in character that it makes me smile.

23. zutarakid50 chapter 8 . Jul 28, 2008

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

You just couldn't resist putting in the 'I have a bad feeling about this'line, could you? I hope Katara and Zuko can escape Jun. Longshot and Smellerbee.

By the way; For some reason, I keep re-reading the part when Aang and Zuko say good bye in chapter 6. I guess its the way its written but I really like that part.

24. Ariel4891 chapter 8 . Apr 19, 2008

#### **OMG STANDARD**

AH! Hurry up and update please!

I NEED to know what's gonna happen next!

25. [theblackalchemist](#) chapter 8 . Apr 19, 2008

**OMG STANDARD**

love this update soon.i'll be waiting!

26. [GirlWithTheInkStainedSoul](#) chapter 8 . Apr 18, 2008

**OMG STANDARD**

I just wanted to say that I love you writing. You have succeeded in continuing the story of Avatar while making it your own, and you've done a tremendous job at it! I can't wait to continue reading, and you can definitely expect another review from me. I also wanted to tell you how much I love your Toph and Zuko connection, it was perfect, and both that and this story as a whole is great inspiration for my own, in one of my stories I'm trying to incorporate that Toph and Zuko friendship, and this story in a way told me how to do it. Great job, definitely!

27. [H-thar](#) chapter 8 . Apr 17, 2008

**FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Obviously looking forward to the next update! Based on the turn of events, I'm guessing that Smellerbee was the one following Katara in the first place, and I am wondering how she and Longshot ended up working with Jun. As far as improvements, I was a little baffled as to why no one seems to suspect Katara of being a waterbender (what with the way she looks). Is that because the Oyster District is indiscriminate when it comes to women, and that is one reason it was chosen? Or is it because people see her working in a tea shop (dressed like that) and think she's just a beautiful water tribe slave (and therefore no threat)? Just curious, and not sure if there is room for clarification AFTER the fact or not. Wish I could help!

28. [abstractmind](#) chapter 8 . Apr 17, 2008

**OMG STANDARD**

This story is AMAZING! You are an incredible author. Everyone is totally in character. I love how everybody interacts. And I know I wasn't imagining the innuendo during the stormbending practice...

29. [Silberias](#) chapter 8 . Apr 16, 2008

**FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I am quite addicted to this story-and the other chapters have been spoken for quite well, so I won't dwell on them.

Almost every written work I've ever read has had a weak point, and I hope that this was the weak point for this story. It seems quite contrived compared to the rest of the chapters-it is still well written, exciting in description, plot action, and execution...but I don't feel like it was on par with the other chapters.

I particularly liked the chapter where Aang and Katara had to say goodbye near the bison

stable-it might be one of my favorites once this is completed.

I'm just saying that this chapter didn't sit well with me, it seems far less easy & natural than the others. Never you worry, though, \_ I got high recommendations from people on deviantART to read this, and I won't stop reading it just because of one chapter \_

You are really a talented writer who goes into detail quite well and easily. No matter how hard that flow is to pull off, you make it seem like you just sat down at a keyboard and that this lovely story just flowed out of your fingertips.

I have loved reading this story and I hope that you shall continue producing such grade A work \_

30. [CoffeeGyrl](#) chapter 8 . Apr 15, 2008

#### **EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

i love the note in the pocket with the bad doodle on the back. I adore Zuko's teenage hormones kicking in and even better Katara's are starting to kick in. I like the intimacy of her noticing that Zuko missed a spot shaving.

And the pirates line was off the hook. I adore Jun she's such a bad ass and I can't wait to see what you're planing.

Katara may wind up like Hama having to bloodbend her way out of a holding cell.

31. [1kenshinlover](#) chapter 8 . Apr 15, 2008

#### **OMG STANDARD**

Great chapter. I can't wait until the next update.

32. [Lady Flick](#) chapter 8 . Apr 15, 2008

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

OMG this is freakishly insanely good. My god I just...I'm speechless right now. The interactions between Zuko and Katara are perfection. Though the bit where Katara was asking about prostitution felt on the brink of forced, for the sake of humor. But don't get me wrong, it was adorable. Totally and completely adorable, especially with Zuko all coloring up and trying to explain. XD He's so WIN. The story is progressing nicely, very nicely, and I especially liked the Katara being followed bit, where she pretended to work somewhere else. That was brilliantly done and omg I -loved- that you referenced the Painted Lady episode! :D And Zuko's reaction. Oh, oh and Zuko's protectiveness! That was gold. Pure gold -lovesit- so this story is seriously insanely unbelievably good. It's too bad Smellerbee and Longshot think Katara betrayed them, and think Zuko's still bad C: but I'm glad you brought them back in. And Jun! HOW DOES SHE -KNOW-? how could you just end it right there? Gahh -flails- Anyway, whenever I finish reading one of your chapters, I want to write one of my own, but now I feel like I'm totally ripping it off D: yours is just that awesome. But I won't. Lol, promise XP just keep those updates coming. :D

33. [zstar](#) chapter 8 . Apr 15, 2008

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I was hooked on every single sentence of this chapter.

I love how you characterize Zuko over all, but when he is being a normal, hormonal teenager: ("Yeah." She rocked back from heel to toe. "I didn't thank you before, about the apron.")

Zuko shrugged. "It's fine." He didn't move. She suspected he was annoyed about her taking his things - he kept scowling at her bare legs poking out from under his cloak. Angry color stained his good cheekbone and spread down his neck to his bare shoulders. He swallowed and she saw the tendons working.)

I die a little. It's subtle, yet obvious that Zuko is starting to feel attracted to Katara.

And I like the little appearance of Smellerbee and Longshot. I always wonder what happened to them, where they went and how they dealt with the loss of Jet, and this little entrance was plausible for me.

34. [Rashaka](#) chapter 8 . Apr 15, 2008

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Curse your cliffhangers!

I'm not sure Katara would be \*quite\* that dense about prostitution...yes, she did grow up in a tiny village where it probably didn't even exist, but she's also spent more than half a year traveling in highly populated communities, and she does know where babies come from, having delivered several animals and a human at least once. What you've done so far works because I really think that Katara and Zuko are talking on two completely different planes most of the time; and Katara only seems to half-pay attention to him when he talks. But she's a bright kid and mature for her age; if you stretch out the innocence thing much more it will feel forced. Hasn't yet, like I said, but I thought I'd give you a head's up that it won't last and be believable much past this. All Katara has to do is take one good look at the body language between the men she's serving and their "dates" and she'd figure it out, even if the concept is a new one; I can only assume she hasn't given the issue any actual thought yet.

Actually, the innocence thing works a lot better for me (feels more realistic) when it's between Katara and Zuko, and his "frustrations" combined with her obliviousness. I can easily see how Katara would ignore his awkwardness or create incorrect reasons for it, especially given that because of their history she can't look at Zuko's behavior objectively. Such is not the case for the people around her... Katara has a good eye for recognizing human exploitation (except when it deals with her personally, like Jet) and knowing how to fight that. I can easily see her not just recognizing the Oyster District for what it is, but wanting to "fix" it.

Other stuff:

I love the idea of Smellerbee and Longshot showing up, and Jun's return was dramatic.

Katara's initial refusal of Zuko's money felt very true to character. It just sounded \_right\_.

The little entrapment scene against the counter was pretty sexy.

The robe/bathing/clothes discussion made me smile... \*that\* is when Katara's obliviousness feels the most believable to me. Her thoughts are in one area, and Zuko's thoughts are WAY over there somewhere else, but they maintain a conversation anyway. It's like two people speaking different languages by neither one realizes it because it sounds like their own.

The idea of the necklace as a prize of war is particularly cruel given its significance to Katara personally.

My favorite part:

"How did you know where to find me?"

"That's easy," Zuko said. "I looked everywhere, and I didn't stop." He paused. "That's how I always find you."

You just come up with these great lines for Zuko. Completely fitted to the scene but somehow weighted with much more... almost like the boy is turning into Iroh without even realizing it. :D The old man's manners must rub off on even Zuko after enough time.

35. [RedBrunja](#) chapter 1 . Feb 21, 2008

**OMG STANDARD**

Oh my god.

\*vibrates\*

That was a damn fine start. The bit with Toph - oh god, oh god, my heart was breaking for both of them, because you KNOW Zuko was damn well the only one who wasn't going to see his scar, and the way you know Toph couldn't help but feel rejected...

\*wibbles\*

Also, I cannot express my love for Zuko physically \*kneeling down on his hands and knees\*.  
\*forces self to take deep breaths\*

\*dies inside\*

That is so perfect - I had to read twice to catch that he was consciously claiming Iroh as his father in front of him, and the weight of all that history - the reference to the Agni Ki (I could see little Zuko kneeling down so clearly in my head) and the weight of all the betrayals (i.e. Ba Sing Se) was just... a gut punch.

Good job.

36. [GirlCat817](#) chapter 18 . Jul 20, 2008

### **OMG STANDARD**

what an ending, and explanation. For the record, I wasn't referring to sex when I mentioned grown up acts I was thinking in terms of subverting authority and plotting to overthrow the evil regime, espionage and just overall, fighting in a war when they were still kids, and losing their innocence that way. However, as someone who works with teenagers, this is the type of things they are doing now in varying degrees. I'm sorry it's over but I'm glad, too, that it ended happily if slightly ambiguously. But I'm glad there won't be a sequel because you did end it in a way that a sequel could theoretically ruin this ending. Thanks for the wonderful story.

37. [Schwarzd354](#) chapter 18 . Jul 21, 2008

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

This epilogue was brief, but I kind of expected that. The story didn't need much more to wrap everything up. I think your afterword summed it up the best in that this was about Katara making the decision. I liked how the bulk of it was the letters they sent each other, and the end was Katara choosing to go with Zuko. I also liked the way she said it, in that they would be going on more 'missions'. For me, that time seemed to be when they were happiest, both in this story and in the series.

As for the series itself, I completely agree that Zuko is more of a heroic character than Aang. That's not to say that Aang is a bad character, but when he has an opportunity to grow, he doesn't really take it. One criticism I have of the finale is that the way he just happened to hit his scar on a rock and realign his energy was rather Deus ex Machina. And while spirit bending Ozai was cool, and makes me wonder that if he can take away bending, could he grant it?

I have some friends who watch the series as well, but I can't discuss it with them as my opinion is railroaded and forgotten with some shocking frequency. My friends aren't bad people, they're just loud and don't listen. So it's nice to talk to people who (even if they don't agree) are at least willing to let me have a turn to speak.

Anyways. I've clearly gotten off track, but I'd love to discuss the series in more detail if you like. I might as well get some use out of my English degree. Feel free to IM me if you like, my AIM name is the same as my penname.

Final notes, this story was exceptional. It didn't even occur to me that you were trying to balance out Ozai's Vengeance until you mentioned it, but mission accomplished.

Stormbenders used the same themes that Ozai's Vengeance did but the usage was so smooth that the comparison simply never occurred to me until now. That's all I can think to say for now. Now that you've given Zuko and Katara each three short stories and one long

story, I hope you keep going. Considering your track record so far, I can only imagine what is coming next.

38. [Zadien](#) chapter 18 . Jul 21, 2008

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

Ok, I'm going to admit to being one of those lurkers that all fanfiction authors hate because they read and then review, so as part of my new resolution to review everything I read I'm reviewing this... far, far too late. I'm really sorry because you're an amazing writer and you should be appreciated. It's not like it takes long to review, so onto the actual review, be warned, it's long:

I'm in awe of how you wrote this story -and so fast too!- and you never put people of out character. It was an absolute pleasure to read this and it will be something I will continue coming back to over and over again. (Props to be given for sure because you announced you were going to discuss the finale of the show and because I haven't seen it yet -being in Ireland I have to wait until the DVD box set is released on amazon before I can get it because I refuse to watch the entire 3rd series in Irish, it makes Iroh's singing sound weird and Toph's voice is wrong and Zuko sounds like a whiny crybaby which is an outrage) but it was spoiled already for me because I looked at a fanart for the pic and then read a comment and... yeah that's nothing to do with you. Back to the fic:

Things I loved about the story is that it didn't move too fast and all the characters were developed beautifully but the romance never overwhelmed the plot and vice versa. Zuko... you really write the most amazing Zuko or else you bring out his best characteristics but don't hide his flaws. As for Katara, she wasn't the mom for a change. She's always the mom or a sex object in some fanfiction I've read... I kind of made a point not to read anymore Avatar fanfiction apart from this because this lives up to the series and sometimes surpasses it. I mean I got free Zutara from your fic.

The Storm bending was so unique and clever but seemed as though it should have been a natural occurrence in the show and how you developed the blood bending and how she practiced that, it was nice to read about Katara being strong and not being afraid of anything -again bad fanfiction. Most of all I loved the simple way you described Zuko's and Katara's relationship without shoving a load of smut down our throats; it was nice to see the affection developing slowly but I loved when they fought too because that's a key part of their dynamic. And Zuko's little comments here and there, the hints that he cared about her, it was just really lovely.

So please, write more Avatar stuff if you can and I promise that I'll review it from the very beginning...or at least regularly. Though you certainly don't lack for reviewers, lol, but that's



a tribute to how talented you are. Thank you for sharing this story with us, it really made my week every time a chapter was added.

39. [Phiso](#) chapter 18 . Jul 21, 2008

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I started this story at chapter 4 at 11 in the morning, and even with my hour break, I finished at 8:30 pm. The sun is setting behind me. My mom was wondering why I was so quiet all day. That is how much your story engrossed me. GOOD JOB!

I did like this a lot. I like how the development between Zuko and Katara was handled, and it made the entire thing seem pretty believable. It wasn't something sudden and unrealistically fluffy - it grew, and I liked that.

I loved your references to the Chinese culture (Guang-zhou, for example), along with perhaps a few other Oriental cultures, and how you mingled that into the Fire Nation culture. They really did seem very a Oriental type of people. Your religion aspect was handled marvelously as well, and I did love that one blessing said to the baby and after Katara's purification. Somehow that leads me to say I adore all these quotes and find the urge to write them all down now.

One thing I didn't like too much was actually how it all ended. While your fighting scenes were amazing, I felt it was almost too easy to kill Ozai. As if somehow he would have blocked the swords or something. Perhaps it was seeing the finale that influenced that particular bit, but in any case that can't be changed now and it does remind me of my curiosity as to whether or not Lord Voldemort could have been taken down with just a really big gun. Hehehe.

I'd also like to mention that since a year had passed since the show started, Katara was probably fifteen by the time of the Comet, with Zuko being seventeen. (This, of course, can be argued with birthdays, so..) Their age difference isn't so big that it might overly-alarm Zuko, I would think...Freshman go to Senior prom on occasion, don't they? And this wouldn't even be such a case.

I'm trying to think of everything in this final review instead of inserting them into other random reviews...Um - ah yes. I do agree with you on Aang's end situation, but I won't say more in case someone reading the reviews doesn't know. But that has nothing to do with the story anyway, so...

This is the sort of story I would like to write, so I'm glad that you've gone and proved it's possible. It's like required literature in the Zutara fanbase, isn't it? Hehehe, I can totally agree with that.

I wish there had been more stormbending; it seemed so crucial in the beginning, and while yes, reviving Aang is pretty darn important, I somehow felt like it would have been featured more. Maybe I'm just fond of the practice. I don't know. The blood-bending creativity was interesting, though. Aang really should have been taught all those things by the time of the finale.

Your canon references were brilliant. Your dialog really did sound like them the majority of the time - it was kind of cool summoning up their voices as I read - and I find it highly amusing that you revealed just how petty the Royal Family was. Excellent Azula, and Ozai was just disturbingly amusing. AHA yes he was. Though I still wish he would have been given more of a chance to show the merciless strength and power that caused Zuko so much fear.

I'm glad Aang got over Katara. Thank you, thank you. But I kind of wonder - did they ever really divorce? XD What with the Ross-like speed of that paperwork...(Sorry, FRIENDS reference.)

Ah, this was an interesting day to spend my day. I probably should have been more productive, but I think you've quenched my Zutara fanfiction thirst for some time, so maybe now I can concentrate instead of thinking about how the finale was just "..." or of how I couldn't wait to end my driving lesson so that I may finally read chapter four. Hahaha, I didn't have any accidents while thinking of your story, if you cared.

Hm...Toph gay...Hm. She's 12, right? Would she realize it? Hm...Her relationship with Zuko WAS super cute, though. And Sokka amused me, and while Suki wasn't there often, she was pretty cool too...

Hakoda and Iroh were love...um...Li and Lo were highly amusing...Piandao was amazing, and I loved it every time he appeared...I wish I could FIND a picture of her wedding gown...And the epilogue was written perfectly. I love those short, sweet notes. Better than any other epilogue I've read or watched recently...Hmph.

Overall, I was very impressed, quenched of my Zutara thirst, eager to look up fanart for this story, and enjoyed the story. I only hope to write something this detailed (and long) once day.

"A spark in the mind, an ember in the heart, a fire in the belly, and destiny in your hands."

I'll try. Hope you continue to. \_

40. [Lady Ronin Tiger](#) chapter 18 . Jul 25, 2008

**OMG STANDARD**

Wow. I feel like I just read a book. A really, really well written book that I couldn't stop reading until I finished it (you wouldn't happen to be a published author, would you?) This wasn't just some fanfic written to make Zutara happen; I feel like I just read the real end of the series! All the characters were so real, and they had their own depth that didn't get portrayed in the series. Everything was wonderful, especially the buildup to Zutara. It happened logically, they were so darn CUTE together, and there wasn't any Kataang bashing. Best of all, the Zutara moments were sweet and not R rated, which I think added to their characters.

I had so much fun reading this. I giggled, cried "oh no!", and squealed the whole way through. Thank you for spinning such a wonderful tale!

Now, if only someone would draw Katara's wedding dress. I would love to see it outside of my mind!

41. [Lady Charity](#) chapter 18 . Aug 27, 2008

**OMG STANDARD**

Oh. My. Goodness

I applaud you. This story was beautiful. You characterized the characters beautifully, the pace was good, the growth of relationships was just wonderful. Your description is beautiful also. Your plot is very original and interesting. I absolutely love how Zuko and Katara gradually grew closer. Reading the end of a wonderful story makes me sad, but also hearty. I love how Toph and Zuko are like siblings. When Toph was sad that Zuko was leaving, it made me feel sad and happy at the same time. Your story is lovely!

42. [Katterrena](#) chapter 10 . May 4, 2008

**FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Because I have been anxiously awaiting this since the second I finished the last chapter, you get to suffer through one of my epic reviews. Feel free to nod and smile at the end and not read anything.

- Azula's "revelation" was pure awesome. As was the complete and utterly awkward Katara/Zuko sweet talking. Toph would be so proud that her nicknames were used in such of an amazing way.

- Katara says that Zuko in bed with her inside the mosquito netting is like "the necklace." I'm assuming that we are talking about the infamous Waterbending Scroll necklace scene. I actually don't agree with Katara. In that scene she was defiant and not intimidated by Zuko

at all but here, she is feeling his intrusion of her personal space VERY acutely. Zuko was an enemy to be overcome back then, now Zuko is her partner and now her "lover." The dynamic is completely different. ... I'm going to stop over analysing now.

- I love Zuko's reaction to Katara's ultimatiums. And the fact that he feels comfortable enough with her to make jokes about the hugely personal topic of her cycle.

- I liked the nod to Maiko's "I don't hate you." I might be able to stomach that line in the show without wanting to throw up.

- Zuko was totally having a hot little fantasy of Katara having a cat fight over him. Naked. Or possibly just white a t-shirt. And then segueing into mud-fights. He is male after all. ;p

- I enjoy that Katara thinks that Zuko and Mai of the same size feet. I made me laugh like a five-year-old.

- THE CAPSLOCK ZUTARA FOLLOWING WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR THE INSERTION OF THE RAEP WORTHY AGNI KAI ARMBANDS INTO THIS ALREADY AMAZING FIC.

- Figures that the "wise old man" archetype is always going to be Uncle to Zuko.

- I like fevered/poisoned Zuko. He was educational. Comes across very well as an extraordinarily frustrated teen with too many hormones and not enough places to go. But he really was never out of character nor was he unbelievable.

- So does this mean that Zuko himself is confirming that from the time he had Katara's necklace he's known what she smells like? Well, that's more stalker-boy than Jet.

I completely enjoyed this chapter. I had been wondering if you were going to bring up the "Zuko and Katara leave the Avatar to make a lovenest in the Fire Nation Oyster District" plot idea. I'm glad to know that it is just as awesome and awkward as I had hoped. Very much looking forward to the next chapter, as always.

43. [Rashaka](#) chapter 10 . May 4, 2008

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

This was intense! Very, very tense. I enjoyed the letter sequence, and the scene with Azula's powers of deduction was great. She's so into deviousness that I can see how she'd jump to the wrong conclusion, the scenario based on human weakness and lies.

The scene of Katara waking up to Zuko and Mai was well-done; fits a lot into a little amount of exposition.

The stuff with Ty Lee was good... you did the set-up thing well. And Ty Lee's second-hand description of Zuko \*still\* managed to be hot in the telling. We got a mental picture and so, I imagine, did Katara. One she'll hold onto...

The only part that I had trouble with- and this might just be because I read it quickly- was the physical positions of Zuko and Katara and the room at the end of the chapter. Two beds? I thought they were on one bed earlier? I didn't even realize there was more than one bed. And then I didn't even realize they weren't standing at first, then I had to go back and find this sentence:

"He stepped back and promptly slipped, landed hard on his tailbone with his head against the opposite bed."

I am having trouble picturing this whole scene. Is Zuko sitting with his back against the mattress? Is he laying? I also re-read that Katara was kneeling... for the whole conversation? That's a while... unless she's sitting in a martial arts kneel, I suppose, where her back wouldn't get tired.

Once you get back to the description of them standing together (her holding his chest and remembering Ty Lee's words) I can picture it more clearly. It's just that prior part of the conversation... the dialogue was so intense and distracting, and you didn't have much physical description so I could picture the facial expressions and hair-touching but was having trouble conceptualizing the whole scene. Like I said, it could just be that I read too fast, however.

Once you post to LJ, I have a ton more detail-oriented comments to give you. Continued over there...

44. [Lalaith Yamainu](#) chapter 17 . Jul 15, 2008

#### **EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

Aw... they're really divorcing?

\*sniff\*

45. [AzureAquarius](#) chapter 16 . Jul 11, 2008

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I'm glad to see another new chapter! I LOVED Azula's maniacal plans to take out Ozai through the Avatar. That just ties in everything so nicely. I thought she was being overly generous at first, but now that you added these great details, it fits so very nicely into her character. Kudos! AND THE HIPPIES! I missed them so much! It would be killer to see them

again before the Finale...though I have no idea where they would fit in.

There is one thing that bothered me about this chapter though, and I apologize firstly, because you've done such a lovely job with the story, but the last bit with Ursa appearing seemed a little slapped on. It just seemed...a little out of place in this chapter. And I don't think the reactions were strong enough. I'd expect Zuko to react a little more strongly, and even though Ursa has been caught up to the events happening, I'd think that she'd also react stronger towards Zuko's scar. Maybe if that scene was written longer with more details?

But other than that, the story is turning out nicely. Thank you for sharing your creativity!

46. [Blue Eyes Shining Dragon](#) chapter 16 . Jul 11, 2008

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Holy smokes, you're telling me we get to see the finales for Avatar AND Stormbenders in the same week? 0\_0

\*dies of excitement\*

\*resurrects self to finish review\*

Anyway, the story. I liked the way you started it off, and made the Mechanist's death a running theme. I felt Jee's death got shrugged off a bit too easily, so it's good to see that feelings about death are being handled with more depth this time. Likewise, I like how Smellerbee and Longshot finally re-appear.

The scene with Mai is perfection. You get all the characters down perfectly, and end her relationship with Zuko without cavalierly dismissing it. The ways in which Zuko and Katara get to say their "I Love You"s are also very nicely handled.

That said, I had some issues. While the dialogue maintains its usual flow and wit, there are times where it dips into the same cliché, lovey-dovey one-liners that drove me away from Maiko. I also felt Ursa's appearance at the end, while handled well, felt out of place. It's such a significant event, but its placement in the story is a bit flow-breaking.

Nevertheless, this is still a fantastic chapter, and I await the finale with as much baited breath as I do the last episodes of "Avatar" itself. :)

47. [pobox2468](#) chapter 13 . Jun 6, 2008

### **OMG STANDARD**

You are, without a doubt, my favorite Zutarian author and I hope you continue writing fanfics for this pairing. All of your fanfics are very well written.

I'm not sure I reviewed for this story yet, which is quite sad, since this is a brilliant Zutarian fanfic; one of the best I've read so far. The plot is very original and doesn't follow the many cliched Zutarian fanfics. Zuko and Katara's relationship is developed very well and just like I would like it to be, with them slowly starting to trust each other and forming a bond. The characters are very realistic and are in character. I feel as if I'm watching an Avatar episode (and I'm very picky with the characterization in fanfics).

This chapter, in particular, was nicely written. I was about as confused as Katara was during the fight, but then realized I was a bonehead after Zuko mentioned that it was probably all part of the plan. The Zutarian moments were amazing. I don't even know where to begin with those, since all of them were fantastic and it would probably make this review way too long, but they were very well written.

Can't wait to see what happens next! Once again, fantastic job. Keep up the good work!

-pogo-

48. [injoyfruit](#) chapter 13 . Jun 13, 2008

#### **OMG STANDARD**

gah! your story is just so utterly amazing...and that cliffhanger on the last chapter, i mean have they heard of the ember island players? haha, but seriously, u got some serious writing skills. its so beautifully written, and how you write for zuko and katara and their growing relationship...i cant tear my eyes from the computer screen as im reading...

49. [therentyoupay](#) chapter 13 . Jun 7, 2008

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Ahh, I am so impressed with your ability to get such a large amount of writing done in such a short period of time without losing any details. I wasn't expecting another installment of this story for quite some time, so I was pleasantly surprised to see the little notification. J Kudos to you, indeed.

I'm a little annoyed by the surprisingly frequent number of times Katara is utterly oblivious (about the potential for her family to be playing an act—just as she and Zuko were doing—about Azula's capabilities for disaster, about Zuko's certain affection for her, even if that particular unawareness does happen to be loads of fun at times) because for me it always seemed that her flaws mainly revolved around placing too much trust in other people. I feel as she's just a little girl who doesn't quite know what she's doing... I mean, that's what she is, obviously, but I feel like she doesn't handle it with quite as much awareness and grace

as I'd like her to. That's just me being selfish and picky though. And probably not very realistic, for that matter.

(Maybe I'm just too busy comparing her to your Katara in Ozai's Vengeance. I loved her to the core.)

And I have to admit, I was a little disappointed about the way Katara learned about Zuko's scar. It felt like we just moved over it in passing, just a quick reference done by Azula and Katara fell asleep. I'd be lying if I didn't say I was hoping for a little bit more depth about the history of the scar... and, you know, a bit wider of a path leading down towards mutual affection and whatnot. I'm sure that you'll head back to the scar at some point in the story, when Katara and Zuko have enough time to actually breathe, let alone share stories and connect in other ways than learning how to navigate an escape plan. I was just sort of sad that it was introduced (and was passed over) that way.

But oh dear, the plan about the family disowning them? Love, love, love, love, love. I mean, the concept of acting out a facade to protect people is by no means new, but the manner in which you handled it was wonderful. Broke my poor heart when her dad started in. L

Though I am just as confused as Katara—I can't wait to find out if they really know that Katara and Zuko have just been "acting" out their relationship. I mean, Toph is way too perceptive for her own good (you are amazing with keeping her in character and I adore the relationship between her and Zuko, gah, love), so obviously, she knows, but... I don't know. You're very good at keeping people not only entertained, but hooked. And unfortunately for us, you certainly have a knack for creating some serious cliffhangers.

Just like this one. L I am trying to revert to my old "oh! It won't be another couple of weeks before another chapter arrives!" mode again that I had before you went and wrote a wonderful chapter lickety-split. I hope it works.

Good luck! :D Excitement, yay.

50. [CelticGoddess1986](#) chapter 13 . Jun 8, 2008

#### **EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

Aw, He finally said that he loves her, even if it wasn't exactly to her. And Aang needs to grow the F\* up. I know from first hand experience that you cannot make someone love, and that being a petulant child about will most definitely NOT make them love you. And poor Zuzu like having everyone basically want to beat the crap out of him. Katara better be an amazing wife to him!

Seriously lovely chapter, I can't wait for the next one.



## HIS MAJESTY PREFERS BLUE REVIEWS

<https://www.fanfiction.net/s/6240707/1/His-Majesty-Prefers-Blue>

51. [crimsontears82684](#) chapter 50 . 16h ago

### GENTLE CRITIQUE

This was better than I expected. Katara and Zuko were kept in character really well. The rest of the cast was a lil iffy though. The thing with Iroh was really well done. I enjoyed that subplot. This was very sex heavy. Most of the chapters have some sort of limey aftertaste. The later part of the story seemed more PWP then anything else. Good fic though.

52. h chapter 10 . Jul 8

### OMG STANDARD

okay I just have to say that your Sokka/Katara dynamic is SPOT ON! It seems that people rarely get their characterization right in relation to each other but you've done so flawlessly. The scenes where Sokka becomes the protective older brother are hilarious. great work!

53. Guest chapter 41 . Jun 16

### FOCUSED CRITIQUE

I love your writing! It feels really authentic to the story and the characters which I appreciate. But I must admit, I was confused as to wether this was supposed to be a masked ball or not. Does Katara have a mask and what is it like? Personally, I would like more details on the ball and more clarification leading up to it that it is a masked ball. But your writing is great! It's really addictive... :)

54. Jedimasterathena chapter 50 . Mar 31

### OMG STANDARD

\*Throws computer on the floor and stand up with furious applause\*

Just when I thought I was done with fanfiction. Your little story here was wonderful. Even with my crazy life and schedule I read the whole thing in a day and a night. I applaud you. There were places that could have been cleaned up, but it was all cosmetic. You, my friend, had a good story and that's what it's all about. Bravo!

55. Belabor chapter 25 . Mar 15

### FOCUSED CRITIQUE

Okay, I haven't actually read this chapter yet, so this is actually more towards what happened last chapter and then the author's note preceding this one. I realize that this was all written years ago but I still feel the need to share my opinion on this, especially when I read the PM response in the note - the off-putting reaction to genital mutilation after a truly heinous, if not fully enacted, sexual assault.

Fanfiction is not serious business. However, when you include dark themes, there is some debate on how much should be depicted realistically and what should be twisted around to suit a fictional tale and it's purpose. That being said, I found that Katara's actions were completely understandable and even - dare I say? - empowering. In real life, the rapist, the

assaulter, the person who takes it unto themselves that they have the right to bend another person to their will and desires - at most - goes through a lengthy process that puts them in a prison where - maybe - they won't get out ever again. A lot of times the victim either doesn't survive or is so badly damaged that they may never function normally again, whether from the physical or emotional trauma, because they were UNABLE to stop it. Yet, in this universe, you have a young woman with the POWER not only to protect herself, but also to FIGHT BACK. True, it is not her nature to take a life, but having survived a war, and been instrumental in its end, I don't see how she could have simply walked away from her attackers without having caused them any substantial harm when she knows better than anyone that the truly perverse cannot be reasoned with or deterred from their actions.

And from that standpoint, I feel like if you had gone back and removed that from the story, it would have been like saying, "Here is a character who is strong and independent and a warrior, but since that person is female, we're going to strip that away in the face of abuse and pretend like she can't take retribution from the men who almost used her with her own hands." So honestly, props to you for not taking that away from her because I for one, felt satisfied that she had DONE SOMETHING besides run away.

Okay, I'm getting off the soap box now. Awesome story so far and I intend on finishing it.

56. [rsrdiall](#) chapter 50 . Feb 18

#### **OMG STANDARD**

Yes! Quite a fitting end to this awesome story. Well weaved turns and plot twists. Then we even got some of the intricacies of politics among the nations. A story isn't a story without at least one cliffhanger. Thanks so much for taking the time to write this. It's one of my favorite Zutara fics for sure.

57. Charlie chapter 16 . Feb 16

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I stumbled across this fanfiction on a list of good Zutara reads somewhere and have been tearing through it since I began. Obviously this is a pretty strong indicator that I've like it, but I think the moment I realized I love it was this line: "The firebender felt his jaw drop as understanding broke on his mind like an egg dropped from great heights, splattering its brilliance everywhere."

I have found your writing to be wonderfully clever and refreshing; you're smart about all of your plot twists and you're not afraid to get personal/steamy/write about the things I shamelessly admit I came here for in the first place. This fanfic is turning out to be much more than I expected, and for entirely positive reasons. I look forward to continuing with such an excellent read.

58. [paulina101](#) chapter 50 . Jan 10

#### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

This was a fanfastic story. I still prefer Kataang, because I can't imagine Aang and Katara ever drifting apart when Katara is the one person he could not let go and Katara's life truly

began because she met him and he is basically the light and joy in her life. I felt kinda sad at how their relationship in this story had ended as though they only had a crush on each other. But then I saw the true love between Katara and Zuko and I know that if Katara met Zuko first, or if the 100 years war did not exist, Katara would have fallen in love with Zuko. I really love this story and your characterization of all the characters were spot-on. Please keep writing fanfics. I haven't checked out your other works, but I know anything else you have written and will write are works of art. ;)

59. [awakendreams](#) chapter 50 . Oct 26, 2013

#### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

I wasn't sure how a 50 chapter fanfiction that sounded more like a joke fic would play out

but I REALLY enjoyed this. I think you did the attempted rape justice to be honest. It wasn't romancetized or sexualized. It had the needed frustrations. And honestly I'm tired of all the rape/bdsm fanfictions that make it 'okay'. This was actually refreshing to see a change and also valid points.

Beyond that I love the relationship building between characters.

late to the game but still a great fic to read.

60. [Nymphadora](#) chapter 47 . Sep 21, 2013

#### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

Since I'm very close to finishing this story (it's been a fabulous three day marathon of awesome, obsessive non-sleep), I thought I'd finally leave a review. Sorry for failing to do so until now, but this story is like crack. I'm actually really glad I didn't discover it before it was completed, as I'm fairly certain I would have scratched my own eyes out waiting for updates...which would have been counterproductive once they arrived. so down to business. I honestly think this is the best Zutara fic I have ever read. I love the balance of drama, suspense, and humor. I love that you never used infidelity or timid I-don't-know-if-what-I-feel-is-love-or-Stockholm-S yndrome-or-indigestion plot devices to slow the action. You used actual plot. Whoa. Also, I loved the Iroh-related twist at the end, because it wasn't a twist. He told us like five times that he was plotting, but it was so cleverly disguised behind the common, stereotypical, meddling, matchmaking character arc that I mostly dismissed it. And then I was angry and sad, but it made sense once I thought about it. Iroh plays the world like a giant pai sho game, although he is not cold in his calculations. His self-sacrifice doesn't make him a villain, it makes him, in my opinion, the most moral of the bunch. And I love the sexy ninja missions. I'll probably post another (shorter) review at the end, but until then, thank you for this work of utter genius. I'm a pretty tough critic, and I am thoroughly impressed. :)

61. [la Savante](#) chapter 50 . Aug 26, 2013

#### **OMG STANDARD**

Wow. It was a fabulous story. The characterizations, the humour, the plot, the unexpected twists... everything was just great!

I enjoyed the story the whole way till the end and I am glad I found it. Congratulations on a little masterpiece and thank you so much for sharing it!

62. [blakbird0019](#) chapter 50 . Aug 2, 2013

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

Hey, I just finished this story this afternoon and let me tell you, I was thoroughly impressed. You were very good about grammar and all of that jazz throughout the story. There might have been one or two problems there but I either overlooked them or I just forgot them. Anyway, good job there :) Also, you were very good about descriptions and verbs. I don't really recall any instances in which you overused a word or phrase and you kept the storyline interesting. Your characters, I think, were pretty consistent throughout the story. I'm not so sure if they were exactly in character from the original show the whole time (especially Katara and Zuko) but, then again, this takes place a year later and people can change. I loved that plot twist with Uncle Iroh's betrayal. I didn't see that one coming until right before it was revealed and, even then, I just couldn't see it. Sadly, as soon as I thought of that idea, I got this absurd notion that he was actually trying to take over the Fire Nation and would duel it out with Zuko before taking him down. It didn't seem logical at all to me but that was the scene that immediately popped into my head. I'm so glad you didn't go that way. It was much more in character of Iroh to be fulfilling this complex plan just to help Zuko. It was also much nicer to my heart and my opinion of him. It would be devastating to have an evil Uncle :( I also liked how things didn't go completely smoothly between Katara and Zuko, even after they realized their feelings for each other. It was more realistic that way. Zuko can't completely change for Katara and vice versa. All in all, I loved this story and was sad to finish it. I'll probably read this again sometime. I always reread a story if I love it. Keep writing that Simple Misunderstanding. I read that one before this and I'm really liking that one so far :) Sorry for not reviewing that one yet but I like waiting until the end most of the time so that I can write a thorough review.

63. [chaos theory 42](#) chapter 8 . Jun 21, 2013

### **OMG STANDARD**

Priceless. Thank you for this. This chapter was awesome.

64. [SiriuslyPink](#) chapter 4 . Jun 8, 2013

### **EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

I know reviews make things a lot easier when it comes to writing, but withholding the next chapter until you get a certain number of reviews? No.

But Katara is in a bad position, haha. She could always lie. But to be frank, the truth isn't bad either. She hopped in a tree to get rid of the guard, heard some voices, was curious, and listened in. And heard hardly anything. She only suspects he's stealing from the country,

which is totally off course from him being the masked man.

So Zuko got himself into an Azula supporter group and is taking them out?

65. [Guest](#) chapter 28 . Apr 17, 2013

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

you are a wonderful person! I have never seen a fic were the author valued her or his reviewers and reviews as much as you do. It's incredible and a really beautiful way to show your audience that you cherish their opinion. I read this fic a few years ago were the chapter which you changed now was freshly written. And it really put me off. And now, years later, I come back and you changed it in such a nice way and...sigh... I'm in love

66. [Aeasel](#) chapter 50 . Apr 17, 2013

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

first of all, I would like to thank you for writing this 200k of amazingly epic fic. This is the very very first zutara fic I have read and finished (in my very new beginning in the zutara fandom ) and I just want to say there is nothing better than a well written and well planned fic to fully suck me into a fandom. I am here to stay u\_u

So where to start? Believe me when I say that I've read a gajillion fanfics for a buttload of ships and fandoms all across the board from books to shows to boybands...and I gotta say this is some of the best fic in terms of writing and characterization I have ever read . I can hear the dialogue spoken by the characters from the shows...like seriously most of the time I'm like 'geezus this is EXACTLY what sokka would say genius writer you are amazing ' etc etc.

The action scenes are actiony and perfect (dynamic kapowness done right). The dialogue is grade A and I have to say even your OC's are fleshed out and believable . The slow development of romance from a little bit of a simmer to full BLOWN SEXSHUAL TENSION HOLY CRAP THERE WERE PARTS THAT I LITERALLY COULDN'T HANDLE I JUST HAD TO SPIN AROUND IN JUST CHAIR FOR A SEC CUZ TOO SUCH TENSIONNNNN was perfectly done. if there is one thing that bothers me to no end it's rushed romance. Just the general zuko hotness.. which btw I've been wanting to comment on this since like chapter 10 but either zuko just has the most raging libido or katara is just that drool worthy because he gets a hard on so easily next to her geezus maybe I've just been reading to much slash or something... but hahaaaa as much as the image of iroh bathing making the perfect bonerkill I still think an arrow in the shoulder is the perfect tool to kill the mood never have I read such a heady scene doused that quickly...ahh it was great

BUT all the good things aside...I have to admit that I was extremely let down by your decision on Iroh's role in this story. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate that you gave Iroh so much more of a role than the tea loving confucious uncle that he is prone to being... and I

appreciate your choice s on your story ...but as a person who LURVES THE UNCLE TO BITS it was so hard for me to stomach what Iroh did in this story. Although it is revealed that he did it as a self sacrifice for Zuko... I just can't help but think that there could have been a better way where Iroh didn't have to 'betray' his nephew and become an fugitive and a martyr of sorts for the better of Zuko's lordship : (

so anyway ..I generally leave ranty reviews for stories that give me plot of feelings... well you can see how many feels this fic gave me. I love it... but just iroh makes me sad. But miss author person you did swimmingly and I bow to you for being awesome

67. [AnimeLover'sInTown](#) chapter 44 . Apr 9, 2013

#### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

This is a stretch even in fiction standards... You understand that you are making a vital character OC yes? Meh, too late now I guess.

68. [River WolfGirl](#) chapter 48 . Apr 9, 2013

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Um, please do me a favor and change Kaia to Kya (Katara's mother) and Kana to Kanna (Gran Gran) Thank YOU!

69. Guest chapter 25 . Mar 17, 2013

#### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

Stupid virgin bitch doesnt know shit about life. Your story sucks balls and anyone who likes it is just cause theyre immature like you. Wtf, you took Avatar and made it something fucking crazy, that means somethings wrong wit u.

70. [chazsvp2](#) chapter 50 . Jan 11, 2013

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Hi, I'm Chaz, sitting here in England, basking in the afterglow of this incredible rollercoaster ride.

This fic was brilliant, definitely one of the very best, most in-character, most satisfying and downright well written fics I've ever read. And my god, you even managed a plot! More than that, a good, interesting, twisting plot! With excellent pacing! For a MATURE reader – way harder than any teen rated fic, I reckon, and much harder to pull off without falling for the cliché.

The ending was very satisfying, in more ways than one ;) man, you're such a tease. I'm glad of the happy ever after, with two sons! (twins?!) and I loved how the villains were not obvious in this, despite the temptation to simply use Azula who is around.

I adored Toph in this, you nailed her habits and way with words so perfectly – Zuko and Katara's characterizations go without saying, I was thrilled with the ways they acted as I wasn't expecting because they are, in fact, quite unpredictable people – it really gave them

life. For example when Katara was running for Zuko's office with Mai's appearance not because she feared Zuko was being unfaithful, like I thought she was, but because she was scared for his life. The characters surprised me a number of times, but never in a way that was out-of-character, just delightfully in-character! Iroh, too, and Sokka... In fact I'd just be listing names, I cannot fault your interpretation of character. I did feel there was a noticeable lack of Aang and Appa presence most of the time, but since this is Zutara and as he already dominates the actual series, his absence in this fic doesn't actually matter and if anything, it was preferred. A oneshot on Toph and Aang's budding romance at the side would have been pretty adorable, if you wanted to improve on anything, but that would be just that – a cherry on the already yummy warm perfectly baked cake. Katara's reluctance to marry was great, too – not too quick to say yes, not too late to make us bored, either – spot on pacing. Your descriptions of customs and inter-cultural relationships and the difficulties that come with it were expressed beautifully and creatively, such as the scene where Katara scolded her people for scoffing at a Fire Nation man's restraint, or how she described what grief was in the Southern Water Tribe. You were sensitive to your readers and in-depth with your characters, enough to make some loveable new ones, like Lin and Yohu. It was hilarious at times, incredibly hot and intimate in others, stressful and nail-biting and exciting at all the right points and above all, a hell of a lot of fun. I've had a running of sleepless nights and I swear to god you almost cost me my degree (I picked this fic up during exam period T-T) but I regret nothing.

You are a very talented writer and I really hope you carry on writing whatever you want to in the future, if you don't already. I really recommend you post this fic on a Tumblr or LJ account so it gets the attention it deserves, if you ever have the time and patience ;- ) I can't believe it's taken me this long to come across this work – I've been under the impression that Fandomme's Stormbenders was unbeatable, but this, too, is stellar writing.

Thank-you very much for sharing your work with us, and I hope to hear of more of you in the future. Please take care : )

71. [Lyoness of Avalon](#) chapter 27 . Jan 10, 2013

#### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

It was a touch forced, but the way they were feeling could easily turn into an argument. It would probably take a few extra paragraphs to develop. The characters could take that time, it wouldn't take more than a few extra minutes in-story.

Outside of that, I think what Katara did made sense with her character and I'm glad you recognize the problems and responded to some of the things people mentioned in the last chapter.

And Zuko's last line made my mind scream fairy tale. I want Cinderella style, what with the aforementioned ball. I can't wait to see how you work them out.

72. [MidoriPanda](#) chapter 21 . Jan 6, 2013

### **OMG STANDARD**

I really regret the need to get up early tomorrow. If I could I'd stay up all night reading this fic. I wanted to give you an enormous review once I was done with the whole thing but I simply can't. **Your story is overwhelming, and I think the thing I like the most is the characterization: They're so magnificently portrayed that I can totally see that happening after the events in AtLA!** (take note, I like the cannon couples as well and I root more for the idea of their romance being forbidden or so...).

I'm in love with you and your fic. Keep on writing!

Midori

73. [ColdRelief](#) chapter 50 . Jan 6, 2013

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

So I read this over the course of three days, and though I apologize for not reviewing each chapter individually, I can't not review after finishing it.

Wow.

**What started out as a really good lemony zutara fic turned out to contain a surprise twist, and an insightful look into the relations between the nations.**

**It looks you enjoyed exploring the cultural differences, a complication that only bettered your development of character.**

As for your choice in villain, though I did not expect it until halfway through the execution of Bau Li (**by the way, your portrayal of Mai and depth of her character should be commended, it only increases the value of Zutara relationship here**) that I realized what was happening. However, this should not be insult to your skills as an author. Fan fiction works and is so popular partly because readers go into a story already understanding character motives. If any original character's first line was 'I must capture the hero for my own personal gain' the audience would not have the sympathy that Zuko gets in every fic that starts with his season one (or Ponytail) persona saying "I must capture the Avatar to regain my honour". Readers enter fan fiction with preconceived notions of character; this is my excuse for ignoring the subtle hints dropped earlier in the work that lean towards your villain.

Iroh, due to his 'cool uncle' character, would have been my last guess at the start of this or any fic. Nevertheless I have all sorts of head canons as to his behaviour before the death of his son and consequential epiphany. Is it any wonder he puts up with Zuko not changing his ways until seventeen, when he must have been at least fifty and grieving before he himself truly challenged his nation's rule?

I don't know if you will even see this, as it has been over a year since completion, but anyway, **I thoroughly enjoyed your work,** and hope you enjoyed writing it.



74. Guest chapter 33 . Dec 16, 2012

**OMG STANDARD**

OMG

75. [Rexnos](#) chapter 50 . Dec 1, 2012

**FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I was ready to throw a tantrum when you made Iroh the villain, but I honestly like how you did it. It would have been out of character for him to actually turn on Zuko, but forcing Zuko into pursuing him in order to bring true honesty to his regime seems reasonable. Poisoning Katara seemed a bit weird though. I wasn't quite sure what to make of it. It felt a bit forced, like you used it as a plot device to build tension, which it did.

Anyway, I really liked this story. I felt like Zuko and Katara had a lot of chemistry, though more when they weren't trying to be political about it. The scenes with the Blue Spirit and Red Demon in the streets felt the least inhibited and most real. I feel like both of them would have enjoyed the surge of danger in their suddenly peaceful lives.

Great stuff,  
Rex

76. [Mistress of the LivingDarkness](#) chapter 50 . Nov 17, 2012

**FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

That was an amazing story! It was so full and it had me so enthralled! I loved Katara and Zuko's slow romance. That was so masterfully done! I loved the added dimensions of culture shock with the two and the intricate planning that went into so many of the characters and their backgrounds. Hakoda made this story for me when he and Zuko got into their fights. Iroh was so well done. At first (when you introduced him as the baddy) I was horrified and questioned your reasoning, and then he explained and I was absolutely blown away by all the pieces falling into place! I was so worried when Mai came back into the picture. I loved how you handled her emotional state. It was so right! I came looking for a really good Zutara tale, and I found one. Thank you for writing this and finishing it! It was an absolute pleasure to read!

77. Guest chapter 10 . Jul 12, 2012

**OMG STANDARD**

ohhh my jesus this story is so so good! its more well written than all the other zutara stuff. after the 1st chapter i was hooked, i can't wait to finish reading this ;D

78. [jmac1220](#) chapter 49 . Jan 8, 2012

**EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

No words can express how thrilled I am that you are back! Your story is a masterpiece! Ranking up there (in my opinion) with "Stormbenders" in the Zutara hall of fame!

With all do respect to the amazing Like A Dove, I do think that Zuko would wait if Katara asked. As he places honor so high, He would not break a promise. Especially a promise to one he loved.

Your story is worth the wait! Thanks for staying with it even when RL was hectic.

79. [Scar-Faced Hundred](#) chapter 49 . Jan 6, 2012

**OMG STANDARD**

Yay hurrah hurrah! At last, an update! I was afraid you had fallen off the face of the Earth, but I just knew that you wouldn't do that to us. :D I look forward to the grand finale, and keep up the amazing writing!

DFTBA,

Jo

80. [SaucePear](#) chapter 48 . Dec 4, 2011

**OMG STANDARD**

This story is amazing, I hope you continue it.

I've enjoyed all your plot twists completely (especially the bit about Iroh's most excellent idea - genius!) and I think your characterizations are superb.

I also really like the way you handle your lemons, tasteful but also very erotic.

Please keep writing, your plots are amazing and it's a pleasure to read what you post!

81. [Witch of Darkness](#) chapter 48 . Sep 14, 2011

**FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Hello,

Let me start by saying that I just read your story in about 3 days at the expense of several homework assignments so kudos. As an avid reader of both fanfiction and fantasy/romance I can safely say that you have tremendous talent and should seriously consider writing original stories. You have a knack for balancing romance with plot as well as comedy with drama. This is a rare gift and I wish to commend you. Additionally, you overtly challenge the sexism and eroticization of rape so common in both fanfiction and romance novels in general. Your Katara is strong, competent and sexually actualized. There are too many stories out there that equate violence and domination with romance so encountering such a wonderful counter-example is a great pleasure.

Regarding this story in particular, your pacing is very good and your characters are extremely compelling. You bring an element of complexity to them while still leaving them identifiable as the cartoon archetypes we know and love. One thing to watch: you tend to refer to characters as "the waterbender" or "the noblewoman;" this gets a tad repetitive at times. Trust your reader to know who you're talking about or clarify the passage so that the identity of the character can be easily inferred.

At the moment I have a lot of homework piling up so I do hope you finish this story soon. I need a continued reason to avoid it.

Best wishes and happy writing,  
WoD

82. [Masayume85](#) chapter 1 . Aug 28, 2011

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

I really wish that this review could do justice to just how much I have been enjoying this story, but I seriously doubt it will.

I'm the type of person who usually only reads completed stories because I hate getting into something for fear that it will never be finished. I took a chance with your story because I was intrigued after seeing some artwork on Deviant Art. I really hope that you can find the time to finish this because I am dying to know what happens. For once, I can't begin to predict, because this is probably one of the freshest takes on a post-War fic I've read in a while.

There's a wonderful mix of dialogue and detail, I'm never left bored or skipping things just to get to certain parts, because you'll never know what you might miss. I love your OCs and how they have strong presences of their own without being the total focus.

Gotta be honest though, when the situation with Iroh first came up I almost stopped reading because my first thought was how could anyone try to make Iroh the bad guy? But I'm glad I pushed on to read his motivation and explanation, because that made the story for me. It brought it all together and made the bond between Iroh and Zuko, along with Zuko and Katara's growing bond all the more solidified for me.

I've tried to be good about reading your author notes at the beginning and end of each chapter, and while I didn't read any other reviews of this story, it was rather disturbing to me to hear about the backlash towards Katara's sexual assault and her handling of the situation. I thought it was brilliant. Not in the whole "I support that kind of thing" way, but just that, Katara does not just indiscriminately kill people and it's natural that much of Aang's ideology would rub off on her. Plus, she's 16 at this point, nearly got raped, I

wouldn't think she was thinking things all the way through much either. My gut reaction would be extremely similar. Besides, I am so sick of sexual assault of any kind being okay in anything, not just fanfiction. God forbid Katara retaliate. Though, I do think she would have had more of a crisis of conscience about bloodbending again, but that's probably the only thing that has bugged me at all about this story.

I love Hakoda. I love how you're handling him in this and his interactions with both Zuko and his children. For a man that pretty much left his kids on their own for a good couple of years, coming back into their lives and trying to reassert his authority is going to be a bit of an issue. Especially since, essentially, Katara is an adult in their culture at this point. Regardless of how pig-headed he has been, it's great to see that he's coming around, though I always knew he would.

I'm kind of running out of things to say, even though I thought I had so much more. Basically, I really do hope you can write more to this soon. I know life gets hectic, but you are on to something amazing here. This story is a great blend of all different kinds of themes and tugs at so many different feelings and emotions, it's been an amazing ride so far.

83. [nightDREAMERms](#) chapter 25 . Jun 30, 2011

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

Hello, Greetings from a reader who just finished the almost-rape/genital mutilation arc. I've also read your note in the beginning of this chapter.

I must say, that although you've made yourself very open to the criticisms of your readers, I think you might've been a TAD too hard on yourself... Sometimes, we as authors, get caught up in the line of thinking as your Character. When you write them, you stop thinking like yourself- and start thinking like them. When, I first read the genital mutilation section, I did think much like the reader you wrote the note to. That, it would not stop further rape, as rape is not a sex crime as many think, but a power crime. It's I'm stronger than you and THUS can do what I want to you.

However, I realised that wasn't the point of what you were writing. You weren't making a political statement of how to clinically treat rapists or molesters. And you concede in your note, that you wrote to how a TEENAGE girl in that situation, and with the ability to, would act. This is true.

But you sorta of slid over the fact that, not only are you writing about a teenage girl, you are writing about KATARA. The Sugar-Queen with a temper. She's not known as the team member that thinks about Mercy, and contemplates about how her actions will mentally affect her or the law-breaker.

That's Aang.

She's Katara, gun-ho about helping others and just as gun-ho about dishing the just desserts to bad people who have hurt her or the otherwise innocent. **You were writing in Katara's voice.** Her very angry, very sad, very scared, very self-righteous tone- that saw these men as rapists, not people. Not someone she should pity but sick beings who had likely hurt others before her and would continue doing such.

Now.. I'm quite sure, if you had placed a bit more detail into that train of thought for Katara's actions, ianam1983 would've been more pleased with the content of that chapter, as they seemed concerned with the logistics of the plot. As it is, **I think you were rushing to get Katara back to Zuko so you just sorta skimmed over the anger and punishment, which without insight seems quite unbelievable for Katara to just do on a whim.**

**Now, is she likely to regret later like all people who make rash decisions based on the moment.** Yes. But does that mean, she would've never acted that way in the first place. Not really.

84. [The Lady Demon](#) chapter 48 . Jun 26, 2011

**OMG STANDARD**

Wow, i love this story! Is it done? Because sometimes I can't tell...like right now. Gosh, it's so good! And made me paranoid about my parents or little brother reading some of it from over my shoulder. XD

Anyway, if this isn't done then BY GOD finish it PLEASE!

85. [Elora MacCoinnich](#) chapter 47 . Mar 15, 2011

**OMG STANDARD**

I seriously love this fic! **I really like your writing style - you portray action, humor and romance so well.** I just started watching Avatar TLA a few months ago courtesy of my kids...I found myself becoming more and more absorbed by the story line and I am almost finished with Book 3. I found it funny that while watching a few of the last episodes I kept recalling moments from your story - little things like Zuko rubbing the bridge of his nose - your story just stays with me! Thanks so much for sharing it!

86. [Cel](#) chapter 45 . Feb 25, 2011

**FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

First of all, I'm not one of the people that will hate you for having a plot twist and I almost always follow through a story to the point where I know it's either lost it's charm/jumped the shark/whatever, and I don't think you did. However, this is probably the second time

where the plot has been a bit poorly explained/based on so much circumstantial stuff.

Some of Iroh's motives don't seem to make a lot of sense to me. Like when he wanted to be discovered: he wanted the Fire Lord and the Blue Spirit to be in the same room... well, people will already have that confirmed by Bau Li's guards who saw the Blue Spirit, but the Fire Lord never left the ball. Or, wouldn't it be just as effective to hire a hit man to knock Zuko out and dress as the Fire Lord? That way they would literally see Zuko's face and the blue spirit. Also, the fact that Iroh wanted to make it seem like he was treacherous so that Zuko would show he values the fire nation over his family; that just seems way too risky. There are about a million ways both of them could have been hurt or killed before that plan ever came to fruition. Either it's stretching believability that Iroh 'knew' it would turn out alright, or he was risking his nephew's life for the sake of... giving him a little more credit as Fire Lord? Also, couldn't the whole thing backfire and people see the fire lord as heartless, or worse Iroh could actually start an insurrection?

It's just not adding up very well. That's kind of the risk with political plots - the more elaborate, the more likely they are to fail and this one would have dire consequences should anything go wrong. In particular, if I were Iroh, I'd worry about the movement gaining too much support.

I mean it's not like it's a bad story overall, but its larger plots tend rely on things going just as so which tends to make it a bit unbelievable. Don't get me wrong, I still really enjoy it, but I figure critique is always more helpful than praise.

87. [swampophelia](#) chapter 45 . Feb 25, 2011

### **OMG STANDARD**

you my dear should be reading George R. R. Martin. You just did a Rob and the Red Wedding there. ;)

Believe me, that was a VERY GOOD COMPLIMENT.

88. Guest chapter 44 . Feb 21, 2011

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

I only discovered this story recently, and I had been enjoying it up until this latest chapter.

You do comedy very well; the scene with Hakoda in a "meeting" is priceless. You also have good pacing and do passable action and romance scenes. "Minor" characters, like Toph or even your OCs, are also very well done, with distinct voices.

What you don't do well is present your story with confidence. I would gently suggest to cut out your ANs, for one it is your story and you don't need to justify your decisions to your audience. For two, the actual content of the notes are offputting. Do we really need to know how much you hate Mai for example? I was fully expecting you to write her badly - which you didn't - from your ANs alone. The same goes for Iroh - curiosity would have made me continue reading, if not for the AN foreshadowing.

I do fall into the camp of disliking OOC so I will stop reading while your story is still a pleasant experience for me, but I wanted to give some advice in what I thought were its major flaws pre-"Iroh" development.

Again, I really think you do comedy well and show potential as an author. Drama, we can disagree on. ;)

I recommend you read Fandomme's Avatar fanfiction for good, strong drama pieces if you haven't already. Good luck with your story and I do hope you can make it work for your other readers. Sadly for myself, the promise of smut doesn't outweigh the character assassination of Iroh.

89. [PsychoHaired](#) chapter 44 . Feb 21, 2011

**OMG STANDARD**

OH. MAH. GAWD.

90. Tuatha chapter 44 . Feb 21, 2011

**GENTLE CRITIQUE**

I'm reserving judgement. This fic has been great so far, in fact it's been fantastic, so I'll stick around for a few chapters. But I agree with Kimberly T., this is extremely OOC. Iroh and Ursa are the two people who have ALWAYS loves Zuko unconditionally. If you have a legitimate reason, I'll love it. If not... Well, you know.

Congratulations of a fantastic story so far, I'm loving every second of it. But I'm really hoping you have a strong finish as well.

91. [CrimsonKitsune333](#) chapter 44 . Feb 21, 2011

**OMG STANDARD**

This story is awesome, I can't wait for your next update! Cookies for you!

92. BlahBleeBlah chapter 1 . Aug 15, 2010

**OMG STANDARD**

I like it:D Can't wait till the next chapter.

93. [smokey-eyed amazon warrior](#) chapter 4 . Sep 12, 2010

**OMG STANDARD**

Nice chapter. You are one of few authors whom I believe has great skill in their writing abilities. Your prose is effortless and well done. Excellent work, ShamelessLiar. I hope to see the next chapter up soon.

94. Christina chapter 3 . Aug 18, 2010

**OMG STANDARD**

Your writing is solid and compelling. I really appreciate good grammar and format and I think that it just enhances already good writing. I also think that it's realistic and well thought out. Keep on being awesome!

95. [Kimberly T](#) chapter 45 . Feb 25, 2011

### **EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

My last review said I would give you only "One more chapter, to explain away this apparent butchering of a main canon character. Make it as long as you have to, but make it good."

Well, you made that explanation more than good, and I'm definitely sticking around for more!

I suppose owe you an apology for comparing what you did in Chapter 44 to the character mangling that has been done so often by DC and Marvel Comics, who have turned at least half of their title heroes into villains at one time or another, usually with very poor justification. ...On second thought, no I don't apologize. Because your author note at the end of that chapter was apparently designed to deliberately mislead; to imply that you had Iroh turning to villainy just for the sake of the story. If you had not intended to imply that, then it could definitely have been better phrased.

Understand, I don't disapprove of your many author notes! It would be the height of hypocrisy if I did; of my 84 Gargoyles stories here at FFnet, one titled "Kimberly's Ramblings" is composed solely of my many lengthy author's notes on the Life Goes On series! But I don't attempt to mislead the readers in those notes; if I can't answer a reader's question yet without giving everything away, then I just say 'wait and see', or 'this will be explained soon, promise!'

Anyway, on to this chapter's revelations, and Iroh. Yes, everything he's done is now tragically in character, or nearly so. "Regret can burrow beneath the skin, Master Katara. It can infect a man and kill him slowly with the knowledge of wrongs he has committed and drive him to do mad things..."

The story "Drinking Tea and Waiting" also deal with Iroh's crushing guilt and not-quite-death-wish, and the real reason he chose to stay in Ba Sing Se. But what you've done here takes his guilt and need for penance in a very different direction, and so much deeper... wow.

'Drive him to do mad things', indeed. Iroh really was taking chances with Zuko's life, by sending Chu Tan after him and then bragging about it to fellow conspirators. As a veteran of forty years of combat, he should have known that even a raw private can kill a seasoned combat veteran if he gets a lucky shot. And he should know that Luck does not favor Zuko, generally speaking. That plan wasn't really thought through all that well...

And apparently neither was the rest of the plan. Right now, it seems as if Iroh is setting himself up as a sacrifice. To be executed by Zuko for treason, in order to show the entire Fire Nation just how ruthless and determined his nephew is; to remove all doubt that Zuko



will do whatever it takes to be the strong Fire Lord his country needs. Well, that'll be good for Zuko's reign, and by extension good for the rest of the Fire Nation. But what Iroh doesn't seem to have thought about is what the execution will do to Zuko himself.

If Zuko kills Iroh believing that his uncle did indeed turn traitor, it will pretty much rip out his soul; his ability to trust ANYBODY ever again, even Katara. How could he trust anybody at all, knowing they might someday turn on him? Katara could swear from sunup to sundown a thousand times that she'd never do that, and point out the many times she'd proven herself a trustworthy partner, but Iroh had done that too, when he saved Zuko from Azula even after Zuko harshly rejected him (2nd season premiere), and in so many other, smaller but no less important ways while they lived as refugees. Zuko knew to his core that his uncle loved him and would never betray him... until now.

But if Zuko kills Iroh for treason and then Katara tells him that it was all 'an excellent plan' that Iroh concocted, a plan to sacrifice himself so that the rest of the country will see his nephew as a strong ruler... the guilt will eat Zuko alive. Even if Iroh leaves behind a letter telling Zuko that he did exactly what he wanted, and he forgives him and etc, there will be crushing guilt... Survivor's guilt. Who else has Zuko known who saved him at the ultimate personal cost, and whose last words to him were basically "I did it all for you"?

Whether she actually died and Ozai's story in DOBS was a bald-faced lie for a stalling tactic, or whether she was actually banished and is still alive out there somewhere, the fact remains that Zuko's mother sacrificed herself for him, and he's always known it. And known deep down that the reason she sacrificed herself for him, was his weakness and failure in front of the Fire Lord in the throne room. If not for that poor display, then if Azulon had really wanted to make Ozai suffer (and had really intended for a child to be sacrificed; I've always had my doubts about that, but that's another story), he would have told Ozai to kill off the child he loved most, which was clearly Azula. But after that comparative show of weakness in front of everybody, a truly ruthless ruler would have picked Zuko to die in order to cull out the weak and unfit for the throne.

Zuko's mother vanished when he was a child. Children understand they need protecting. But if another loved one ends up sacrificing himself because Zuko was perceived as weak and unfit for the throne when Zuko is an adult and actually ON the blasted throne, then in Zuko's mind it will only underscore the fact that he is indeed weak and unfit, that he's a terrible ruler, oh why hadn't he insisted that Uncle take the throne at the end of the war? The guilt, and the second-guessing of nearly all his decisions from this point on, will indeed make him a poor ruler and he'll be toppled sooner or later. Then Iroh's sacrifice will have been for nothing...

Also, if Iroh is counting on Katara, now that she knows the whole truth, to intercede for him

and beg that his life be spared and for him to be just banished to Ba Sing Se forever... then he is really, really taking a very big chance. How many of the onlookers will decide that the Fire Lord is indeed rather weak, if he lets the words of a pretty lady sway him away from executing a traitor?

And then there's what Sokka said: "Look, there was this – ah – thing... that happened... and I should probably tell you about it before somebody else-" Looking forward rto finding out about that thing!

96. [Maverick48](#) chapter 45 . Feb 25, 2011

### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

I think I get it, I think I got it!

Oh no. This can't be. Iroh is willingly framing HIMSELF and sacrifice HIMSELF to prove that Zuko can rule justly and legitimately in the open? But this will be such a magnificent cost to Zuko. I can't imagine how Zuko will feel when he learns the truth and all this could have been avoided had he not donned the Blue Spirit mask within his own kingdom.

Alas, woe to me for wanting Zuko injured. Haha, I guess that's not happening. **But what an unexpected turn this chapter was. BIG PROPS to you for making me doubt Iroh last chapter.** I'm not sure who you were referring to in the end notes but from a single reader's perspective, I've got to say my peace:

I sincerely do hope that you haven't taken any of the harsh criticisms of plot from the last few chapters too hard. Honestly, **I feel that with 45 chapters and over thousands of words, you've managed to so beautifully captivate my imagination from characters both canon and original to thrilling plot devices and humor-filled dialog. This story has genuinely brought me much joy and satisfaction** that I often find lacking from other fics. So I want to thank you for sharing this incredible masterpiece with me and I'm with ya till the end. :) Great work.

97. [cyke93](#) chapter 45 . Feb 25, 2011

### **EDITORIALIZED GOSSIP**

a most excellent chapter! i was so happy you updated and i admit that i may have raced my eyes too much in reading that i may have over skipped some details. there was def. information over lord and i think you'll get many confused readers. either way, i think i know what iroh was up to. hearing the blue spirit was back, iroh was concerned over the way in which zuko conducted himself. if zuko comes down on iroh as well as the other noble families, then to the eyes of the people, zuko was doing the right thing and wasnt attacking the other nobles for political gain. it is a plot within plots, and i love it, just like how katara

and zuko have to disguise their relationship in order to get married. you're writing is truly great and i commend you on the detail and plot twists of this chapter as well as this story.

i love what you did with iroh, on the show he was this fun loving uncle but he was a general for many years and he did many terrible things in his youth. iroh is going to sacrifice himself so that in the eyes of the people, zuko would assert himself as fire lord. even if you made iroh completely evil, i would still keep reading, this is a great story that just got even greater. i read what some people had to say and it amazes me how fast they jump to conclusions. this is a story afterall, YOUR story and i'm glad you stuck with your guns.

keep up the excellent work and update soon ! id love to have some zuko/katara intertactions coming up.

98. [Lilako](#) chapter 45 . Feb 25, 2011

### **FOCUSED CRITIQUE**

\*SPOILER ALERT\*

MOOOOAR! D: Thank you... I highly expected you to rectify the "OOCness" of Iroh's actions, after my initial shock. At first, when Iroh began to explain, I felt as dizzy and confused as if I had been there at that table, drinking the drugged tea right along with Katara. But then it all made more sense. So no, other than the fact that Iroh's explanation was being received from Katara's point of view, and she was still under the effects of the drugs, there isn't really any "fuzzy logic" in that scene. I admire how you were able to make what Iroh was talking about clear, without being too obvious about it, and all the while, Katara can barely think straight,...this isn't coming out right. . I blame insomnia.

I love the scene in which Mai tells Zuko he's an idiot and she knew it was him the whole time. She's so in character. I luff it! :D

Poor Zuko. / Although I agree that in order to fully mature into his role and completely accept the mantle of his position, Iroh needs to take a step back and remove himself from the equation. It just sucks that Zuko's going to have to endure this to get there.

I sincerely hope I'm making sense right now. It's a quarter to 5. In the morning. Which is only bad because I have to be up all day tomorrow (technically today). But the point is, 1.) I hope I'm making sense. . And two, if you DID make any little logic slips, grammar errors... Logic and grammar are my Bible. And I didn't see any lapses in this chapter.

So...yay for another awesome chapter. I've actually been with this story since a couple of months after you started it, I just haven't been reviewing much. :) I admire your writing.

(I guess my brain decided to continue on with this rant) **One thing I love about your story is the cultural aspect.** So many fics completely leave that facet out of the plot, even though people's cultures greatly influence every other aspect of their lives, and therefore the story. You do an excellent job of making the characters' cultures color all aspects of their lives.

\*wracks brain\* All the characters are in character, except of course Mai leaving Zuko, which we've already discussed. So thumbs up there.

I do want to make a comment about the lemon though. (I thought this when I read the previous chapters, I just never reviewed them) Don't get me wrong. I DO like lemon. **XD But maybe some details could be left out.** I love Zutara. I've stuck with them for years after the show. I don't even watch the show now. And I like Zutara lemon. But I just don't care how shiny their pubic hair is. XD If I'm quoting that right.

Well... Hope my rant hasn't been too boring. It's mostly praise. Keep up the amazing job. You're right up there with Fandomme with me, and that is the highest compliment I can give.

(and nao, at five, I sleep )

99. Cel chapter 39 . Feb 2, 2011

#### **GENTLE CRITIQUE**

I don't mean to be a bother, **but I really felt the way you had Zuko going off with Mai didn't really work.** I can understand that he'd want to avoid suspicion of being the blue spirit, but he's done that for a large amount of time before Mai or Katara were involved. However, Mai going as the red demon to avoid being implicated made no sense to me. Wouldn't the best way to prove her innocence to be at the party (or whatever) where lots of people can see her, while the blue spirit and red demon kill her father (probably somewhere where people will find him while Mai is out)? Then Mai would have a steadfast alibi as opposed to going on an odd trip and not being at the large celebration. It just doesn't make any sense to me.

Overall I like the story, just that didn't seem to gel for me (and you did ask for feedback on this chapter).

100. DesertCat chapter 40 . Feb 10, 2011

#### **OMG STANDARD**

Thank you for this wonderful story! I love what I've seen so far, and I'm hungry for more! **You have an intelligent, streamlined writing style, and your innate grasp of politics between the four nations adds so much reality to the tale.** You're also able to keep everyone so in character! Zuko fluctuates between his normal self and angry 'ponytail Zuko' wonderfully as the situation calls for it, Iroh is the perfect mixture of meddling and caring, but Sokka in particular is **Perfectly in character.** You've got his cheesy jokes pegged- **they never fail to make me laugh out loud!** Keep up the great work! Can't wait for the next chapter!