

# FicTag Visualizer: A Tool for Fanfiction Tag Analysis and Three Use Cases in Fan Interpretation

## Abstract

This poster presents *FicTag Visualizer*, an online interface for analyzing the frequency of tags attached to fanfiction on the Archive of Our Own, the largest English-language fanfiction database. We present three use cases to illustrate how the tool can aid research on fanfiction metadata.

## Keywords

webtool, metadata, fanfiction, visualization, literary reception,

## 1. Introduction

The Archive of Our Own (AO3) hosts over 11 million works of fanfiction written and enjoyed by over 5 million people. The site is a rich resource for information about fan communities [1], human-computer interaction [2], and digital social reading [3]. AO3's tagging system is an especially interesting object of study, with tag analysis offering insight into folksonomies [4], cultural evolution [5], and content-level features of fanfiction [6].

*FicTag Visualizer* makes fanfiction tags in our *FicTag Dataset* available to researchers through a Streamlit interface [7]. Our poster presentation offers conference attendees access to the visualizer. Compared to existing tools to analyze AO3 data, like the AO3 Scraper [8] or Fandom Stats [9], *FicTag Visualizer* is easier to use, enables visualization and organization of the data, and gives access to more data: our *FicTag Dataset* covers works uploaded on AO3 from 2008 until 2023. As scraping continues, we aim to cover around 5000 fandoms, 500.000 tags and around 14 million works by the time of the conference.

We present three use cases with *FicTag Visualizer*. Each concerns an aspect of 'fanon', or: 'any element that is widely accepted among fans, but has little or no basis in canon' [10]. Fans refer to the source material fanfiction is based on as 'canon'. Any popular addition to canon is called 'fanon'. By zooming in on various fanfiction tags, patterns emerge in fanon story elements.

The case studies show that:

- *FicTag Visualizer* is easier to use than existing approaches to tag analysis with corpus analysis tools,
- *FicTag Visualizer* can help researchers analyze the interplay between fan discussions and fanfiction content,
- starting points for fanfiction trends – which we call *legacy fics* – can be identified using *FicTag Visualizer*.

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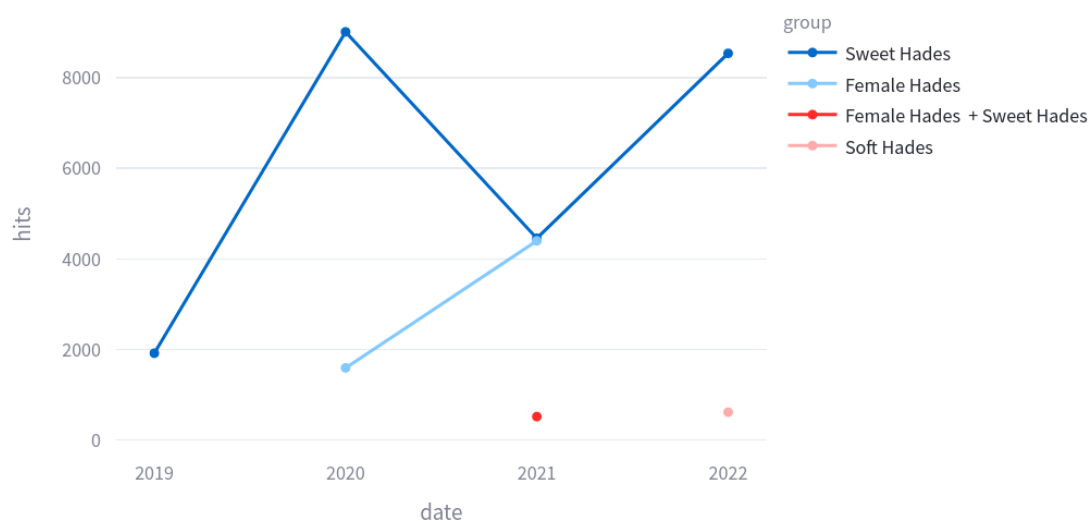
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## 2. Use Cases

### 2.1. Hades Is...

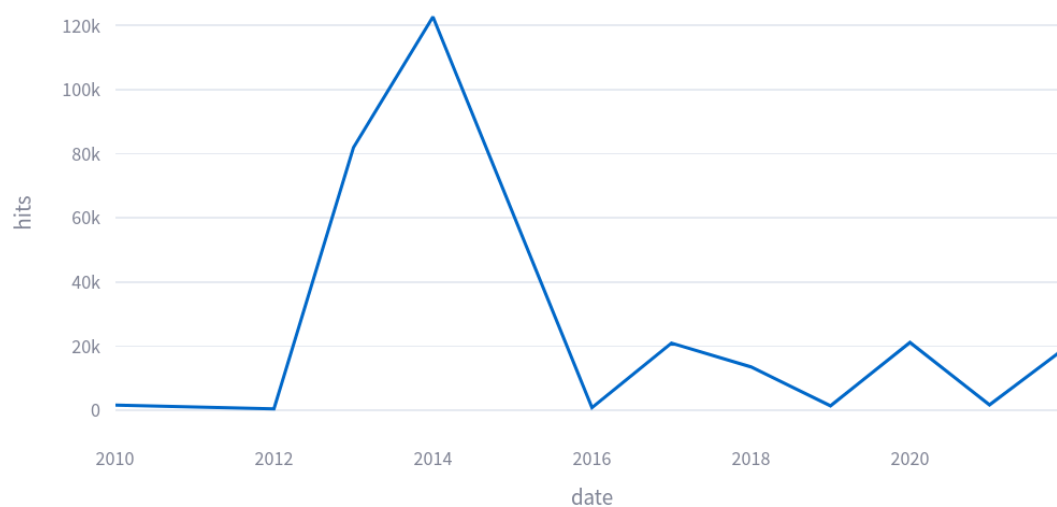
Analysis in AntConc [11] of tags used to describe the Ancient Greek god Hades in fanfiction shows that fanfiction humanizes him. Hades is described as a “mess”, “sweetheart” and “an awkward sap in love.” These characterizations support the observation in classical reception studies that the link between Greek Gods and immortality is weakening in contemporary popular culture [12]. Fanfiction characterization – the fanon around Hades – mirrors this humanization or everydayness of gods. However, scraping tag data, then uploading and searching tags in AntConc is a time-consuming workflow. *FicTag Visualizer* streamlines this process and enables analysis of tags associated with characters. For Hades, these include ‘sweet’ and ‘soft’. Increasingly, Fanon portrays Hades in new ways, tending towards kind and domestic characterisations rather than immortal and threatening ones.



**Figure 1:** FicTag Visualizer’s preliminary overview of Hades’ associated tags, from 2019 to 2022.

### 2.2. Top!Lock and Bottom!Lock

The BBC’s contemporary retelling of *Sherlock Holmes* is a popular inspiration for fanfiction. Stories exploring romance between Sherlock and John Watson are especially popular. In December 2014, Tumblr-user Kinklock coined the term “dark fuck prince” (DFP) to parody fanfiction characterisations of Sherlock as an “out of character dark cold Sherlock” [13]. Satirical use of the term DFP increased on Tumblr in early 2015, which coincides with a decrease in JohnLock stories portraying Sherlock as the “top” 2.



**Figure 2:** Frequency of the ‘Top Sherlock’ Tag from 2012 to 2022 in *FicTag Visualizer*.

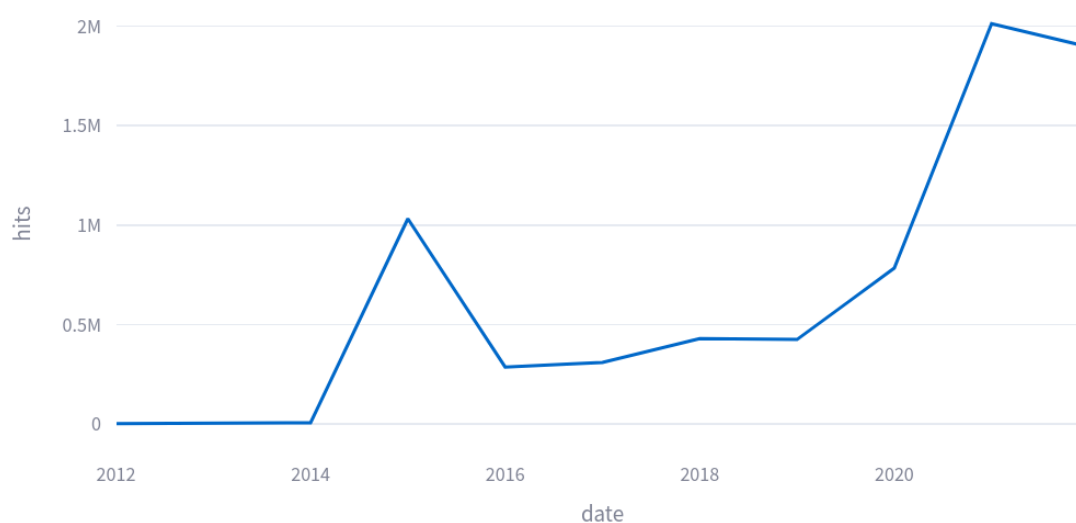
This could indicate either that fan discussion influences or even polices the production of fanfiction, or that fanfiction trends shape the topics of fan discussion. *FicTag Visualizer* offers opportunities to explore this interplay of audience discussion and story content.

### 2.3. Texting Fic

In the 2014 fanfiction *Text Talk* [14], *Harry Potter* characters Remus Lupin and Sirius Black, who live in a non-magical alternate universe, meet when Sirius texts the wrong number. They quickly fall in love. The story is written in exchanges of texts. Since its publication, *Text Talk* has been viewed over 800.000 times, making it the 7th most-viewed Remus/Sirius story ever. We hypothesized that the texting format gained popularity in the *Harry Potter* fanfiction community since 2014 under the influence of *Text Talk*. Using *FicTag Visualizer*, we found an increase in hits accumulated by Texting-fic in *Harry Potter* fandom. *Text Talk* can thus be seen as a "legacy" fanfiction, inspiring many other fans to use the texting format and launching the popularity of the subgenre.

## 3. Conclusion

This poster introduces researchers to *FicTag Visualizer* and illustrates how the tool can help answer various research questions. Additionally, we hope to expand our list of requirements to make the tool meet the needs of potential users.



**Figure 3:** The hits accumulated by *Harry Potter* fanfiction on AO3 using the tag "Texting".

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