

Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem  
Bölcsészet- és Társadalomtudományi Kar

**Sipos Nikolett**

**Fantasy, Adaptáció, Média: *A tűz és jég dalától* a spekulatív  
univerzumig**

Doktori (PhD) értekezés

Témavezetők:

Prof. Dr. Horváth Kornélia DSc, egyetemi tanár  
Dr. Palatinus Dávid Levente, egyetemi docens



Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskola

A doktori iskola vezetője: Dr. Dobos István DSc, egyetemi tanár

Budapest  
2025

Pázmány Péter Catholic University  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Nikolett Sipos**

**Fantasy, Adaptation, Media: From *A Song of Ice and Fire* to the  
Speculative Universe**

Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Supervisors:

Prof. Kornélia Horváth PhD, DSc  
Assoc. Prof. Dávid Levente Palatinus PhD



Doctoral School of Literary Studies

Head of the Doctoral School: Prof. István Dobos PhD, DSc

Budapest  
2025

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	1
1. Introduction .....	2
1.1. Methodology .....	4
1.2. Contextualizing the Research .....	5
1.3. The Main Objectives .....	6
1.4. Structure of the Thesis .....	8
2. Adaptations, Transmediality, and (Popular) Media Convergence .....	12
2.1. Conceptualizing Adaptation .....	13
2.2 Transmediality and Transmedia Storytelling .....	27
2.2.1. <i>Transmediality – a New Phenomenon?</i> .....	27
2.2.2. <i>The Theory of Transmediality</i> .....	28
2.3. Convergence and Deconvergence .....	44
2.4. Connecting the Dots .....	46
3. Transmedia Storytelling and Fantasy .....	50
3.1. Conceptualizing Fantasy .....	50
3.2. “[...] the genre is called fantasy – it’s meant to be unrealistic, you myopic manatee!” .....	65
3.3. Speculative Fiction: The Ultimate Transmedia Genre? .....	70
4. Prequels, Sequels, and Everything Else: the Proliferation of the <i>Game of Thrones</i> Universe .....	75
4.1. The Books .....	75
4.2. The Show(s) .....	86
4.2.1. <i>The Immense Success of Game of Thrones</i> .....	86
4.2.2. <i>The Prequel Made of Fire &amp; Blood: House of the Dragon</i> .....	89
4.2.3. <i>The Spin-offs</i> .....	92
4.4. The Transmediality of the <i>Game of Thrones</i> Universe .....	97
4.4.1. <i>Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken: the Impact of House of the Dragon on the Game of Thrones Universe</i> .....	104
4.4.2. <i>“When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die”</i> .....	107
5. Screen and Text: The Relationship between George R. R. Martin’s Works and the Screen Industries .....	110
5.1. The Authorial Portrait of George R. R. Martin .....	110
5.2. Martin’s Poetics .....	119
5.3. Martin on Adaptations .....	124
5.4. Was <i>A Song of Ice and Fire</i> Meant to Be Adapted, After All? .....	127
5.5. Dealing with the Second Beast: Adapting <i>Fire &amp; Blood</i> .....	131
5.6. The Issue of Authorship .....	133

6. Fantasy, Streaming Platforms, and Transmediality .....	141
6.1. The Adaptation Industry.....	141
6.2. Conceptualizing Fantasy Television .....	146
6.3. Quality, Streaming, Fantasy .....	148
6.4. Conceptualizing Quality Television.....	151
6.5. <i>Game of Thrones</i> as Quality Television: Why HBO Chose to Adapt It .....	156
6.6. Streaming Services as Quality Television? .....	157
6.7. The Proliferation of a Niche Genre on Streaming Platforms: Why Fantasy? .....	159
6.8. Fantasy, the Magical Source for Quality Television.....	160
7. Conclusion.....	165
References .....	179
Összefoglaló .....	196
Abstract .....	197

## Acknowledgements

It has been a long and difficult journey, but one that has been worth it. There are many people to whom I am forever grateful, since they have inspired and supported me all along the way. First of all, I would like to thank my two supervisors, Dr. Kornélia Horváth and Dr. Dávid Levente Palatinus, who have been there for me since I decided to start this journey, and offered me guidance and a great deal of encouragement when I needed it the most.

I would also like to thank all of my former professors and now-colleagues at the University of Pannonia for supporting me along the way, especially my MEd thesis supervisor, Dr. Gábor Kovács, who nudged me to participate in the *Focalisation, Narration and Writing: The Novel* conference back in 2018, where I met my two supervisors and realized that I have to follow my dream of becoming a researcher and a university professor. I would also like to thank my colleague and dear friend Dr. Petra Ihász for her pep talks, and inspiring me with her own Ph.D. journey, while also always being there when I felt like giving up. I would also like to thank all of my students for the best discussions, and giving fresh insight to my research and the things I think about for a living.

I am incredibly grateful for the Eötvös Scholarship of the Tempus Public Foundation, for allowing me to spend three months at the University of St Andrews in 2023, which helped my research in streaming and television immensely. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Zoë Shacklock, who was kind enough to help me along the way, and whose useful insights added a lot to my research. I still remember the moment when I first read her article on *Game of Thrones*, and thinking how cool it would be to become a researcher just like her – at that moment, I would not have thought that I will be lucky enough to work with her just four years later.

But my deepest gratitude goes to two of the most important people in my life: my mother, Éva, who is not only responsible for my obsession with books and great narratives, but also supported all of my dreams since I can remember. And finally, my fiancé, Márton, who, at the very beginning of our budding relationship told me that I should start reading *A Game of Thrones*, since it is at least *just as good* as *The Lord of the Rings*. I started reading the books because I wanted to prove you wrong – neither of us had any idea at that moment about how you just started my career. Without you, I would not have recognized how much I love speculative fiction, and I also would not be where I am at now.

## 1. Introduction

In the last few decades, fantasy has gone through a lot of changes: while in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fantasy narratives were mainly consumed by a niche audience who were interested in the genre – although children were always fascinated by adventurous tales that were filled with dragons, fairies, and other magical creatures –, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fantasy is now more popular than ever before. Supposedly the close connection between children's literature and fantasy may have contributed to the generally negative (and often elitist) judgement of fantasy narratives. However, the fantasy fandom slowly began to expand significantly over time, and the popularity of the genre grew significantly. Classic narratives like C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956), J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000), or J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) contributed a lot to the expansion and overall popularity of the genre, but the extreme technological advancements in contemporary filmmaking also supported the spread of this magical type of storytelling.

The adaptation of fantasy narratives has not been a common practice in Hollywood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, since creating special effects and fantastic creatures was a costly enterprise. However, as the technology in filmmaking became more advanced, the advent of CGI allowed directors and filmmakers to present their favorite fantasy narratives on the big and small screens as well. Productions like *The Dark Crystal* (1982), *The NeverEnding Story* (1984), or *Labyrinth* (1986) heavily relied on the use of puppets and the creation of elaborate sets, which made them quite expensive to make; however, their cultural impact is undeniable, even though they were mainly aimed at a younger audience.

Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003) had an immense influence over the genre. Not only was it different from the previous examples in the sense that it is primarily directed toward an adult audience, by featuring an ensemble cast of famous Hollywood stars and being a great and monumental adaptation, it popularized fantasy narratives for a wider audience, and inspired other creators to adapt fantasy stories that have been already successful in the fandom. While these productions were mostly intended for adults, most of these adaptations were still suitable for a younger audience as well. Besides the adaptations, fantasy as a genre has also been very popular in television, since the 1990s and early 2000s introduced several fantastic narratives, mostly focusing on the young adult audience. Young people all over the world have been captivated by shows like *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (Syndicated, 1995–1999), *Xena: Warrior Princess* (Syndicated, 1995–

2001), *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (ABC, 1996–2000, The WB, 2000–2003), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997–2001, UPN, 2001–2003), or *Charmed* (The WB, 1998–2006). While all of the aforementioned examples contributed a lot to the growing acceptance of fantasy amongst general audiences, the most significant breakthrough was caused by HBO's televisual adaptation of George R. R. Martin's epic fantasy saga, *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

George R. R. Martin (1948) has been a fan of speculative fiction from a very young age, which inspired him to become a writer of science fiction and horror stories. Working as a professional author and a television writer, he became successful in the speculative fiction community – however, he only achieved worldwide success after his epic fantasy saga, *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1966– ) has been adapted into a television series by HBO. The rest is history: George R. R. Martin is one of the most successful fantasy writers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, working on several prequels and sequels to one of HBO's most influential adaptations, *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011–2019). The series became famous for its incredibly detailed and gory depiction of violence, brutality, and sexuality; for the morally grey characters, and for the fact that Martin is never hesitant to kill the major characters. At the end of Season 1, audiences were shocked to see that the fan-favorite Ned Stark was executed by King Joffrey Baratheon – thus, fans' desire to see the morally (almost) imperfect hero on the throne was doomed to fail. While the narrative is set in a world that resembles the Middle Ages, its complex character portrayal and the focus on political plotting make it a truly contemporary narrative. The series became a real touchstone in television history, since it has grown into an international cultural phenomenon, and inspired the making of other fantasy narratives by different streaming platforms as well. Nevertheless, the *Game of Thrones* storyworld has another peculiarity, which makes it an interesting case of modern storytelling: its transmediality.

The first volume of the saga was published in 1996, and when showrunners David Benioff and D. B. Weiss decided to create an adaptation for HBO, they believed that in case the show is going to be a success, by the time they arrive to the part of the narrative that had not been written yet, the saga will already have been finished and they will have a source material to work from. However, the (currently) last volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *A Dance with Dragons* was published in 2011, the same year that the first season aired on HBO – and Martin still has not managed to finish the sixth (penultimate) volume of his series, *The Winds of Winter*. In order to finish the adaptation, the showrunners had to come up with their own ending of the saga: the show was so popular that canceling would have upset millions of fans all over the world (and it would not have been a profitable decision for HBO), and

waiting for Martin to finish the books was not an option, since the aging of the actors (especially those who were playing the younger characters in the show) would have ruined the experience. Thus, by consulting with the author, Benioff and Weiss created their own ending, which means that the adaptation outpaced the original books. While by introducing the televisual adaptation, *Game of Thrones* became a transmedial experience, since audiences could consume the narrative in the written and in a televisual form as well, by coming up with a storyline that has not existed before, *Game of Thrones* became an interesting case for transmedia storytelling. Unfortunately, while several new narrative additions have been published in the last decade that are set in the world of Westeros, the epic fantasy saga is still not finished – thus, we can only guess how the sixth volume would complicate this complex narrative web. However, I argue that by looking at the ways the different transmedial storylines relate to each other, we can still learn a lot from how *Game of Thrones* impacted the way we should look at adaptation theory and transmediality.

### **1.1. Methodology**

This dissertation is focusing on the transmedial nature of *Game of Thrones*, thus, in order to understand how the different media entries of the franchise interact with each other, I had to conduct interdisciplinary research by looking at the theories of different interrelated fields. While thinking about the nature of the narrative universe, I delved into adaptation theory, the theory of transmedia storytelling, television studies, the logic of streaming platforms, and of course literary analysis as well. As the list of these different fields shows, contemporary narrative universes cannot be fully understood by solely focusing on their literary versions – as Simone Murray suggests, we should realize that literature does not exist in a vacuum anymore.<sup>1</sup> Modern narratives are heavily influenced by the phenomenon of media convergence, since once a certain text (be it literature, film, television, or even a video or role-playing game) becomes popular, new media incarnations are soon to be introduced that are set in the same storyworld or are based on the “original” narrative. We can see how the market logic heavily influences the creation of popular narratives, since all the media industries are heavily interested in selling their works to as wide an audience as possible. Following the same logic, as the television adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire* was created, *Game of Thrones* as a franchise was born, and thus the evolution of Martin’s narrative became even more complex. Thus, in order to understand the complex narrative universe of the *Game of*

---

<sup>1</sup> Simone Murray, “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2008): 4–20.



*Thrones* franchise, I combined the theories of adaptation studies (Linda Hutcheon, Douglas Lanier, Thomas Leitch, Simone Murray), transmedia storytelling (Henry Jenkins, Marie-Laure Ryan, Lisbeth Klastrup, Susanna Tosca), media convergence and deconvergence (Henry Jenkins, Lothar Mikos), fantasy (J. R. R. Tolkien, Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Brian Attebery, Farah Mendlesohn), and television studies (Jason Mittell, Catherine Johnson, Andrew Lynch, Mareike Jenner, Robert J. Thompson, Sarah Cardwell).

## 1.2. Contextualizing the Research

Since the adaptation of the epic fantasy saga, several books have been written about the book series and the television show as well, that approach Martin's fantasy from a variety of perspectives. While most writings focus on the adaptation or the franchise in general, a few volumes have been published that solely deal with Martin's text from a literary perspective,<sup>2</sup> while others offer a thematic analysis of the HBO adaptation (occasionally looking into the books as well).<sup>3</sup> These thematic analyses are wide in scope, however, focusing on the issues of feminism, gender, and the depiction of brutality have been amongst the most popular approaches. Many scholars were interested in how the female characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* are presented, since several of them (Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, Arya Stark) are powerful characters, while the show was also criticized for the treatment of women and how rape is used as a plot device.

The remaining volumes mostly approach *Game of Thrones* from a thematic perspective, be it reception studies,<sup>4</sup> feminism,<sup>5</sup> law and politics,<sup>6</sup> philosophy,<sup>7</sup> psychology,<sup>8</sup> or even

---

<sup>2</sup> Anna Gamper, *Beyond the Wall: Game of Thrones aus Interdisziplinärer Perspektive (German Edition)* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH, 2022); Jes Battis and Susan Johnston, eds., *Mastering the Game of Thrones: Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015); Joseph Rex Young, *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form* (New York; London: Routledge, 2019); Jeffrey R. Wilson, *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Lindsey Mantoan, *Vying for the Iron Throne: Essays on Power, Gender, Death and Performance in HBO's Game of Thrones* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2018); Carolyne Larrington, *All Men Must Die: Power and Passion in Game of Thrones* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Gamper, *Beyond the Wall: Game of Thrones aus Interdisziplinärer Perspektive (German Edition)*; Alfonso Álvarez-Ossorio Rivas et al., eds., *Game of Thrones - a View from the Humanities Vol. 1: Time, Space and Culture* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Alfonso Álvarez-Ossorio Rivas et al., eds., *Game of Thrones - a View from the Humanities Vol. 2: Heroes, Villains and Pulsions* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Matthew Brake, ed., *Theology and Game of Thrones* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022), doi:10.5771/9781978707634.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Barker, Clarissa Smith, and Feona Attwood, *Watching "Game of Thrones": How Audiences Engage with Dark Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), doi:10.7765/9781526152183.

<sup>5</sup> Valerie Estelle Frankel, *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014); Anne Gjelsvik and Rikke Schubart, eds., *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones and Multiple Media Engagements* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

science.<sup>9</sup> However, the most popular approach looks at *Game of Thrones* from a historical point of view: it has been widely known that Martin has been strongly inspired by European history when he was writing his epic series, mostly building his narrative on the events of the Wars of the Roses. Thus, most of the scholarly literature on *Game of Thrones* have been written about the historical parallels and influences of the saga, since the historical perspective plays an integral part in this narrative.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.3. The Main Objectives

The list of the aforementioned studies on *Game of Thrones* shows that while several scholarly works have been written about the main themes of the saga, the transmediality of the narrative universe has only been studied in a few articles, which focus on certain elements of the franchise.<sup>11</sup> In order to fill this theoretical gap, this thesis focuses on the narrative transmedia universe of *Game of Thrones*. By looking at the text of the literary series and the different media incarnations that were created in the franchise, this thesis has three main objectives. Firstly, I am going to look at the factors that made *Game of Thrones* such a popular narrative, and analyze how it fits into the fantasy genre in general. While fantasy narratives have been

---

<sup>6</sup> Melissa de Zwart and Jason Bosland, eds., *Law and Law Breaking in Game of Thrones* (Chastwood: NSW LexisNexis, 2015); Stephen Benedict Dyson, *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Eric J. Silverman and Robert Arp, eds., *The Ultimate Game of Thrones and Philosophy: You Think or Die*, First printing, Popular Culture and Philosophy 105 (Chicago: Open Court, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Travis Langley, ed., *Game of Thrones Psychology: The Mind Is Dark and Full of Terrors* (New York: Sterling, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Helen Keen, *The Science of Game of Thrones: From the Genetics of Royal Incest to the Chemistry of Death by Molten Gold--Sifting Fact from Fantasy in the Seven Kingdoms*, First United States edition (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2016); Rebecca C. Thompson and Sean Carroll, *Fire, Ice, and Physics: The Science of Game of Thrones* (Cambridge, Mass. London: The MIT press, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Martin J. Dougherty, *The Wars of the Roses: The Conflict That Inspired Game of Thrones* (London: Amber Books, 2015); Carolyne Larrington, *Winter Is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones*, First edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), doi:10.5040/9780755693375; Brian Alexander Pavlac, ed., *Game of Thrones versus History: Written in Blood* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2017); Ayelet Haimson Lushkov, *You Win or You Die: The Ancient World of Game of Thrones*, First edition (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017), doi:10.5040/9781350989894; Shiloh Carroll, *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones*, Medievalism, volume 12 (Cambridge; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2018); Ed West and George R. R. Martin, *Iron, Fire and Ice: The Real History That Inspired Game of Thrones* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2019); Zita Eva Rohr and Lisa Benz, eds., *Queenship and the Women of Westeros: Female Agency and Advice in Game of Thrones and A Song of Ice and Fire* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Carolyne Larrington and Anna Czarnowus, eds., *Memory and Medievalism in George R.R. Martin and Game of Thrones: The Keeper of All Our Memories* (London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Tom Huddleston, *The Worlds of George RR Martin: The Inspirations Behind Game of Thrones*, 1st ed (Minneapolis: Quarto Publishing Group UK, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Zoë Shacklock, "A Reader Lives a Thousand Lives before He Dies': Transmedia Textuality and the Flows of Adaptation," in *Mastering the Game of Thrones. Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, ed. Jes Battis and Susan Johnston (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015), 262–79; Lisbeth Klasturp and Susana Tosca, "Game of Thrones. Transmedial Worlds, Fandom, and Social Gaming," in *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, Frontiers of Narrative (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 295–314.

famous internationally before the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well, *Game of Thrones* became a great sensation, and its impact is undeniable. Counting on average more than 25 million viewers per episode,<sup>12</sup> it became one of the most successful series in the world, influencing other fantasy series to come. The overall consensus tends to be that Martin's world is "different" than the "traditional" fantasy narratives, because it does not shy away from the depiction of violence, brutality, and sexuality, and it introduces incredibly complex characters instead of the traditional opposition between more black and white characters, who are either good or bad. This makes the story an incredibly good fit for a quality television series, which may have supported HBO's decision to accept Benioff's and Weiss's idea of filming the novels.

Secondly, I am going to look into the question of transmediality: I argue that the fact that the televisual adaptation outpaced the "original" books should change the way we think about the questions of adaptation theory and transmedia storytelling. The technological advancements of the last few decades contributed a lot to the constant evolution of media convergence, for which *Game of Thrones* is a great example; however, the narrative serves as an interesting case since it was the adaptation that continued the storyline of the adapted text, since the novels still have not been finished. Thus, the borders between the concepts of adaptation and transmedia story become even blurrier. In 2019, when I first started to work on this research, I was also interested in how the upcoming publication of the sixth (and possibly seventh) volume will influence the reception and the evolution of the narrative, however, since the books are still not published, this research question will be left unanswered for a while.

Lastly, I am also interested in how Martin's past career as a screenwriter influenced his writings and *A Song of Ice and Fire* in general, since while reading his other works (mostly focusing on his short stories), eager readers can instantly feel the televisual influences that had an impact on his poetics. The fact that the author claimed several times that the adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is something that could never happen, and *Game of Thrones* still became an incredibly successful adaptation, is also worth looking into – thus, after the discussion of Martin's poetics, the penultimate chapter of this thesis is going to analyze the relationship between Martin's original Westeros narratives and their adaptations, namely *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon* (HBO, 2022–). The last chapter of this dissertation will describe the impact of the series, and how *Game of Thrones* inspired the creation of other fantasy shows as well.

---

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Hughes, "Game of Thrones: How It Dominated the Decade – Then Lost Its Way," *The Guardian*, December 30, 2019, <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/dec/30/game-of-thrones-best-tv-2010s>.

The general aim of this dissertation is to give an overarching analysis of the *Game of Thrones* storyworld, while also describing how the evolution of this franchise changed the way we think about adaptation theory, transmedia storytelling, and fantasy. While this thesis will be wide in scope, I believe that it is important that when we are talking about this immense transmedia universe, we consider all of the aforementioned concepts, in order to better understand the underlying processes that shape the evolution of the narrative.

#### **1.4. Structure of the Thesis**

After the brief introduction of the research topic and the main objectives of the dissertation, in order to fully understand how the different media incarnations of the narrative universe of *Game of Thrones* interact with each other, Chapter 2 deals with the conceptualization of adaptations, transmedia storytelling and media (de)convergence. The chapter focuses on the conceptualization of adaptation by contrasting the theories of Linda Hutcheon, Thomas Leitch, Kamilla Elliott, Simone Murray, and Johannes Fehrle. When thinking about adaptations in general, I argue that it is crucial to take the industrial factors into consideration, since they are the most important driving forces behind the process of adaptation. However, we cannot really understand *Game of Thrones* without the theory of transmediality, thus, in the second half of the chapter, I am going to look into the theory of transmedia storytelling. The most famous definition of the term is connected to Henry Jenkins, who defined transmedia storytelling as a story that “unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.”<sup>13</sup> However, while Jenkins approached the phenomenon from a mostly industrial point of view (similarly to Marsha Kinder or Mary Celeste Kearney, whose works were pioneering in the history of the concept), other scholars have been thinking about transmedia storytelling from a narrative perspective. Besides the theories of the aforementioned authors, this chapter is also going to focus on the transmedia theories of Marie-Laure Ryan, Jan-Noël Thon, Lisbeth Klastrup, and Susanna Tosca as well, and I also want to look into the relationship between adaptations and transmedia narratives. This relationship is heavily influenced by the phenomenon of media convergence, which has been a buzzword in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and refers to the idea that the different media technologies are connected to each other – which is also heavily present in the storytelling practices of this era. While media convergence means that stories can spread over different types of media channels, according to Lothar Mikos, this

---

<sup>13</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Updated and with a new afterword (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 97–98.

proliferation will naturally lead to deconvergence and the fragmentation of audiences. Thus, the last section of this chapter is going to take a look at Jenkins's definition of media convergence, and Lothar Mikos's theory of how convergence is closely tied to the process of deconvergence.

After laying down the theoretical background to understand how the transmedia world of *Game of Thrones* works, Chapter 3 ("Transmedia Storytelling and Fantasy") focuses on the special relationship between transmedia storytelling and fantasy, by looking at why the genre serves as a fruitful material for transmedia universes. However, in order to understand this connection, first we need to define what we mean by fantasy. The first section of this chapter deals with the conceptualization of the term by looking at the theories of Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Kathryn Hume, Brian Attebery, Lucie Armitt, Brian Laetz, and Joshua J. Johnston. While fantasy has been widely understood as a mode in the last few decades, I am going to argue that by calling fantasy a genre and talking about the fantastic as a mode, we get closer to understanding the different texts that belong to this category. After coming up with a definition for fantasy, the next section of this chapter is looking at how *A Song of Ice and Fire* fits into the category of fantasy, and how it overwrites (or continues) the traditions that were created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The fantastic nature of the saga is incredibly important if we want to understand why the adaptation of *Game of Thrones* became a success. While before the adaptation of his saga, the author kept stating that his fantasy narrative is impossible to adapt, since it is too complicated and violent, Benioff and Weiss managed to create a quality adaptation, whose first few seasons were highly valued by the fans of the book and the general audiences as well. I argue that the reason why *Game of Thrones* became a transmedia narrative is that it has all the features of fantasy that help meganarrations to become an unlimited source of new media incarnations. Consequently, the third part of the chapter discusses how speculative fiction might be the ultimate transmedia genre, since its features serve as a great source material for narratives that could span over different media platforms.

While Chapter 2 and 3 laid down the theoretical background for understanding the narrative universe of *Game of Thrones*, Chapter 4 ("Prequels, Sequels, and Everything Else: the Proliferation of the *Game of Thrones* Universe") lists all the media incarnations that currently exist in the franchise, including the books, spin-off series, and different video and tabletop games. Since several new spin-offs are added to the franchise (or are cancelled by HBO) almost on a monthly basis, the list of these media incarnations is always open to revision – however, at the time of writing this thesis, I have tried to include all the existing projects that have already been published or are under production. The chapter also looks into

the publication and adaptation history of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon*, thus providing a greater understanding of how this narrative transmedia web started to unfold. While not all of the media incarnations listed add something new to the already existing material (since, for example certain games will only add a new type of experience, instead of complementing the storyworld with a new narrative detail), all of them contribute to the transmedial experience of the narrative, since audiences who are interested in the narrative universe can experience the story in different forms, be it literary, visual, or even a real-life sensory experience. The last section of this chapter focuses on the relationship between the different media incarnations, and aims to analyze how the different transmedia narratives are related to each other, based on the previously described theoretical background.

While George R. R. Martin is mostly famous for *A Song of Ice and Fire*, his other works are also worth discussing. Before publishing his epic fantasy series, he has been an established science fiction and horror author, and also worked as a screenwriter – in Chapter 5, I argue that his experience as a screenwriter contributed a lot to his overall authorial style. After providing a literary portrait of Martin and briefly introducing his major works, in order to help readers contextualize *A Song of Ice and Fire* and understand where Martin was coming from, this chapter is going to focus on his poetics and the adaptations of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Fire & Blood* (2018), while also touching upon the author's take on adaptations. While Martin famously kept declaring in the past that his epic fantasy saga can never be adapted, *Game of Thrones* still became an international sensation, opening the way for other spin-offs in the narrative universe. Thus, the discussion of this idea leads us to Chapter 6 of this dissertation, titled "Fantasy, Streaming Platforms, and Transmediality" which focuses on discussing the features of the adaptation industry and analyzing why fantasy has been a prominent genre on streaming platforms. After the success of *Game of Thrones*, several streaming services started to think about how they could create their own epic fantasy adaptations, in order to copy the success of HBO, which led to the creation of *The Witcher* (Netflix, 2019– ), *The Wheel of Time* (Amazon Prime Video, 2021– ), or *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (Amazon Prime Video, 2022– ), just to name a few. This chapter argues that besides the fact that *Game of Thrones* popularized the fantasy genre for a wider audience, another reason why streaming platforms are turning towards fantasy is that fantasy narratives serve as great source materials for quality television series. As streaming platforms are trying to position themselves as quality brands (just like quality television networks), adapting these already famous fantasy narratives helps them to stay relevant and still achieve their goal of creating quality programs.

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe the transmedia universe of the *Game of Thrones* franchise, and to show how the different media incarnations relate to each other. Since this transmedia story is a peculiar example of how the adaptation outpaced the books and thus gave us an ending that has not existed before, I argue that the evolution of the *Game of Thrones* universe gives us a perfect opportunity to rethink the relationship between adaptations and transmedia storytelling. The dissertation also focuses on the literary and televisual impact of the book series and the television shows, and analyzes how *Game of Thrones* paved the way for the growing popularity of fantasy narratives. However, the most obvious limitation of this study might be that since we are talking about a trending transmedia universe, which is constantly growing, new additions are created every year that constantly change the way how the narrative entries are related to each other. While working on this dissertation, parts of Chapter 4 had to be constantly rewritten after new spin-offs were announced by HBO, while others have been canceled, not to mention the new seasons of *House of the Dragon*. While it is clear that the *Game of Thrones* storyworld is constantly changing, I would argue that it is still worth looking at the current state of affairs, since this ever-evolving universe can teach us a lot about modern storytelling and the relationship between literature and the industrial dynamics of streaming and television.

## 2. Adaptations, Transmediality, and (Popular) Media Convergence

The term ‘transmedia storytelling’ was introduced in 1991 by Marsha Kinder, in her book titled *Playing with Power* – however, the phenomenon can be traced back to much earlier. Transmediality had already existed even before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as there have been numerous instances in history where a certain narrative unfolded on different “media platforms.” With the birth of modern transmedia storyworlds, the border between adaptations and transmedia storytelling is getting fuzzier: although we can say that the majority of adaptations are transmedial (because they usually appear on a different medium than the “original” text), there are cases of transmedia storytelling in which we can talk about adaptations and new incarnations of the same storyworld on different platforms as well. However, there are certain cases where the terms of adaptation and transmedia storytelling collide, like in the case of George R. R. Martin’s epic fantasy saga, *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996– ) and its television adaptation, *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011–2019). Although the television show is based on Martin’s fantasy novels, after finishing the fifth season, the creators had to face a serious problem: the fifth book of the epic fantasy saga, *A Dance with Dragons* was published in 2011, but Martin could not finish the sixth volume, the *Winds of Winter* before the showrunners had to start working on the sixth season. As a result, the television series outpaced the books, and the show was completed in 2019 without the last sequels of the book series. Thus, the last three seasons of the television show are not adaptations in the traditional sense, since they lack the source material that the previous five seasons could rely on. In this thesis, I argue that this solution should change the way that we think about the questions of adaptation and transmedia storytelling, since the way that these texts interact with each other blurs the borders of these theoretical categories. As more and more narrative entries are added to the *Game of Thrones* storyworld, the lines will become much blurrier, and thus, we cannot really speak about clear categories anymore. In the next chapter, I am also going to focus on how the different media incarnation of this narrative universe relate to each other. However, in order to understand these theoretical issues and the narrative relationship between the different *Game of Thrones* media entries, we must clarify the differences between adaptations, media convergence, and transmedia storytelling – and how these concepts relate to each other.



## 2.1. Conceptualizing Adaptation

One of the most prominent theories of adaptation was created by Linda Hutcheon in her book titled *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). The main focus of her study is to debunk the long-held idea that adaptations are secondary works that are not as good as the “original” texts they are based on.<sup>14</sup> Hutcheon rejects the subsidiary nature of adaptations by suggesting that the multiple versions of works “exist laterally, not vertically”<sup>15</sup> – just because a work is *adapted* to a different medium, it does not mean that the adaptation is inferior to the original in any form. In Chapter 1 of her book, she elaborates on this idea by stating that contemporary adaptations are usually seen as secondary and derivative works, that are usually criticized in terms of their fidelity to the original work they are based on or inspired by. However, Hutcheon repudiates this idea by suggesting a different approach: borrowing Michael Alexander’s term, she calls adaptations *palimpsests* that have a double nature, being autonomous and comparative works at the same time. Thus, Hutcheon states (quoting Mikhail Bakhtin) that one can only interpret adaptations if they treat them as a stereophony of “citations, references, [and] echoes.”<sup>16</sup>

The reason why *originality* is a problematic concept in the case of adaptations is that just because a certain text<sup>17</sup> was born before another one that is based on or connected to the aforementioned work, it does not mean that the chronologically first text is *original*, and the second is *unoriginal*. Firstly, based on its very nature, each and every adaptation incorporates the renewal of its source material, since telling the *same* story the *same* way would simply mean the copying of the work it was inspired by to the same medium. Secondly, when it comes to the question of reception, audiences are not necessarily aware that what they are watching or reading is an adaptation. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, many fans were not familiar with the original novels before they started watching the series, and they only started reading the books after they were hooked on the HBO adaptation. For them, the “secondary” (only in a chronological sense) work became the “original”, even though the narrative of the first season was already published 15 years prior. Despite the fact that the debate of “the original versus the adaptation” is still prevalent in almost every fandom where the fans favorite works have been adapted to a certain medium, because of the aforementioned

---

<sup>14</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xii.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text: Essays* (London: FontanaPress, 1977), 160.

<sup>17</sup> Here and in other chapters of this thesis, by using the word ‘text’ I do not only refer to the written text and literary works, but other media entries as well, since the notion of transmediality comprises examples from very different media (books, films, series, video games, boardgames, gameparks, etc.).

reasons, this question does not lead us anywhere if we want to understand how these specific texts are related to each other.

Since adaptations can never be *exactly* the same as their source material, Hutcheon defines adaptation as “repetition, but repetition without replication;”<sup>18</sup> however, when it comes to a more detailed definition of the term, she illuminates it from three perspectives. Firstly, as a formal entity of a product, she defines adaptation as “an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works,”<sup>19</sup> which can happen across different media (although it is not necessary) – this is the interpretation that most people think of when they are talking about adaptations. Secondly, the process of adaptation also involves (re-)interpretation and (re-)creation, thus appropriation and salvaging play an important role in them. Thirdly, she understands adaptations as palimpsests, since they resonate with other works because of their intertextual nature. It is not only their source texts that adaptations refer back to through continuous repetitions, but sometimes other works as well, which are related thematically or historically. For example, in the case of HBO’s *House of the Dragon* (2022– ), there are several scenes in Season 1 and 2 in which the discerning audience can recognize the special Valyrian dagger that already appeared in *Game of Thrones*: the weapon that was used by the assassin who attempted to kill Bran Stark in the first season, and the blade that was used by Arya Stark in the last season to kill the Night King during the battle of Winterfell. Hutcheon’s threefold definition is important because she highlights the fact that adaptation is a process: it is much more than simply introducing an artistic work on a different (or sometimes the same as the original) platform. The process of adaptation also includes a re-interpretation of the original work, that can change the initial “message” or “content” – in case the new work unfolds on a different platform, this process can also be understood as a form of *transmediality*. Reinterpretation is a key factor in the case of adaptations, because the moment a certain text is consumed by a person, they start to interpret it in their own way – if this person later on decides to adapt the story to a different medium, their understanding will naturally shape the original form of the text. Thus, this reinterpretation could be understood as the first step of every adaptation process.

When it comes to the interpretation of adaptations, a distinction should be made between knowing and unknowing audiences, since depending on what kind of an audience we are talking about, the reception of the work in question can be very different. In order to experience a particular work “*as an adaptation* [...], we need to recognize it as such and to

---

<sup>18</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing.”<sup>20</sup> However, the very fact that we can talk about an unknowing audience means that Hutcheon’s idea that adaptations are *extended* and *announced* is not necessarily true. There are several adaptations that are inspired by a certain narrative but do not acknowledge their source texts – yet still can be understood as adaptations. For example, there are several Hollywood retellings of the Cinderella story to the young adult audience, but the adaptation is not announced, and only those who are vigilant enough will see the resemblance to the original work that inspired these adaptations. The TV series *Westworld* (HBO, 2016–2022) also may serve as a great example, since although it borrows the main ideas of Michael Crichton’s 1973 film of the same name, the showrunners broadened the vision of the original concept and included several thematical and literal intertextual allusions to other different works as well.

If an adaptation wants to be successful, it should be made with the intention of being enjoyable both for the knowing and the unknowing audiences as well. If the unknowing audience realizes that the work they are watching or reading *is* an adaptation, it can easily lead them to the “original” work. The very fact that a “secondary” creation can be experienced as primary proves that the idea that adaptations are subsidiary is wrong. Although a lot of book fans tend to be afraid when the copyrights of their favorite narratives are bought to make a film or a series adaptation, sometimes claiming that “the book is better” and that the adaptation is going to “ruin the original” work, Hutcheon describes how “an adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the creation of adaptations has a very strong economic side as well, since they can build on the already-existing audience, and boost the sale of the adapted work and its source material as well, supporting their symbiotic relationship.

Hutcheon also raises awareness about how when the process of adaptation involves transmediality, the audience experiences the adaptation differently than the adapted text. Whether we talk about transmediality or not, she states that in both cases,

adaptation *as adaptation* involves, for its knowing audience, an interpretive doubling, a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing. As if this were not complex enough, the context in which we experience the

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 120–21.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 173.

adaptation—cultural, social, historical—is another important factor in the meaning and significance we grant to this ubiquitous palimpsestic form.<sup>22</sup>

The question arises: how can one recognize an adaptation without being familiar with the original work (or its existence)? Referring to Hutcheon's question about what features of a given film are needed for an audience in order to define it as an adaptation, Thomas Leitch lists four genre markers and one anti-marker (based on the tradition of the younger Dumas) that suggest filmgoers that what they are watching is an adaptation.<sup>23</sup> The five features are: period setting (costume dramas are the most likely to be considered as adaptations), period music, "obsession with authors, books, and words,"<sup>24</sup> and the use of intertitles to give information about the setting and the literary and historical events. According to Leitch,

[t]hese four markers, all essential to adaptations that identify themselves as adaptations, may be contrasted with a trait long and erroneously assumed to be a genre marker of adaptations because it is found in most amatory romances, though in hardly any swashbucklers: reverence for the source text.<sup>25</sup>

Although Leitch's markers are useful when considering films and television series that match these criteria, there are several film adaptations that do not fit his typology but are still adaptations. Leitch's ideas are only relevant in the classic literary adaptations, when the films or television series want to highlight their *literary* value, and raise audiences' awareness of their quality pedigree. The late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century examples, however, point to a different direction: the majority of adaptations are based on artifacts of popular culture, like bestselling books, comics or video games – subsequently, Leitch's markers do not seem particularly useful if we want to understand these contemporary examples.

While Hutcheon's work has been focusing on the theory of adaptation, Kamilla Elliott concentrates on the difficulty of theorizing adaptation itself: in her monograph titled *Theorizing Adaptation* (2020), she argues that the reason why the theorization of adaptation is so problematic is that theorization and adaptation have a dysfunctional relationship in humanities. She claims that these two notions are on par with each other, thus, according to Elliott, adaptation should be defined in its own terms instead of using the "largely one-way,

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Leitch, "Adaptation, the Genre," *Adaptation* 1, no. 2 (September 1, 2008): 106–20, doi:10.1093/adaptation/apn018.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 114.

top-down process”<sup>26</sup> of theorization. She also highlights that adaptation can be seen as a rival process to theorization, as “progress and return and repetition and variation have [...] been essential not just to the survival of fictional stories but also to the survival of theoretical stories”.<sup>27</sup> In the last chapter of her book, “Refiguring Adaptation Studies”, she proposes that figuration may be a key factor that could help us get closer to the understanding of adaptation: by treating adaptation and theorization as antimetaboles<sup>28</sup>, we could solve specific theoretical problems in adaptation.

In her article titled “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry,” Simone Murray highlights how adaptation studies are problematic and deeply conflicted: although adaptation theorists insist on studying screen culture, the field is still attached to literature and thus cannot get closer to film theory.<sup>29</sup> Murray claims that although there are several comparative case studies that deal with “the book versus the film” dichotomy, analyzing adaptations based on this criteria is an “intellectual tail chasing”<sup>30</sup> that does not lead anywhere. She highlights how

[m]ost striking in such surveys of extant research is the exclusive scholarly interest in what adaptations have been made, and almost never how these adaptations came to be available for painstaking scholarly comparison. Dematerialized, immune to commercialism, floating free of any cultural institutions, intellectual property regimes, or industry agents that might have facilitated its creation or indelibly marked its form, the adaptation exists in perfect quarantine from the troubling worlds of commerce, Hollywood, and global corporate media—a formalist textual fetish oblivious to the disciplinary incursions of political economy, book history, or the creative industries.<sup>31</sup>

Murray’s main argument is that adaptation theory should have been materialized a long time ago – scholars should pay more attention to production contexts and the book industry dynamics if they want to paint a more valid picture of how adaptations work. Before suggesting a new approach to adaptations, she introduces the three major schools of

---

<sup>26</sup> Kamilla Elliott, “Introduction: The Problem of Theorizing Adaptation,” in *Theorizing Adaptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 176.

<sup>27</sup> Kamilla Elliott, *Theorizing Adaptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 163–64.

<sup>28</sup> According to Elliott “[a]ntimetabole is a figure that allows for opposition and mutuality to co-exist; its mirrored horizontal relations dismantle hierarchies and preclude revolution through a process of inversion and exchange, in which each inhabits the other mutually and reciprocally”(Elliott, “Introduction: The Problem of Theorizing Adaptation,” 7–8.).

<sup>29</sup> Simone Murray, “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2008): 4–20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

adaptation studies since the 1950s and the main problems with their approach. The first wave is the era of fidelity criticism, which was characterized by the introduction of comparative textual analyses. The main issue with this phase is its hermetism, and how it avoids the inclusion of “production, distribution, reception, and consumption contexts.”<sup>32</sup> Although most adaptation scholars agree on the idea that fidelity criticism is not useful when we want to understand adaptations, this debate is definitely relevant in the fandom circles, since when a new iteration of an already existing work comes out, the first issue that fans are going to look into is the differences between the “original” and the adaptation, and which one they prefer for what reasons. Thus, we have to make a difference between thinking about adaptations from an academic perspective, and looking at them through audience’s point of view – although scholars tend to discard the issue of fidelity, the majority of fan discussions in terms of adaptations focuses on the concept, since those who are emotionally attached to a certain narrative tend to have strong feelings about the changes that adaptors tend to make in terms of their beloved text. Thus, I argue that the question of fidelity and authenticity (that I am going to uncover later on) should play an important role in our studies if we want to understand fans’ relationship to their favorite narratives, because without taking these two concepts into consideration, we cannot understand how they approach different works.

Murray dates the second wave of adaptation studies back to the late 1970s and 1990s: an era that was heavily reliant on the principles and questions of narratology, structuralism, and Continental semiotics. In this case, the relationship between the text and the film was not so much based on fidelity, but rather how literature and film influenced each other: scholars of the second wave were investigating how novelistic narrative techniques influenced film, and how Modernist writers imitated some film devices. This approach, however, also only focused on textual effects, and isolated the texts from media culture and the production contexts. The third wave of adaptation studies (starting in the 1980s and 1990s) borrowed concepts from post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism, and cultural studies as well, and also introduced the concepts of audience agency, since scholars realized that audiences play a huge part in how an adaptation is received, and can help us to understand the underlying zeitgeist much better. This phase (which, according to Murray, is still alive today) is also radically different from the first one, as the point of adaptations was to interrogate “the political and ideological underpinnings of their source texts, translating works across cultural, gender, racial, and sexual boundaries to secure cultural space for marginalized discourses.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 6.

It is also characterized by the permeability of high and popular culture boundaries (although more and more scholars agree that we do not need this opposition)<sup>34</sup> and the acknowledgment of extra-literary sources (like comics or computer games). Murray points out that although this approach is closer to the ideal theorization, it is also lopsided since while it is interested in the audience consumption practices, it still does not pay enough attention to the production contexts and all the social and economic processes that facilitate the creation of adaptations, and also contribute to the adaptation boom. Murray also describes the influence of political economy, a school of media studies in the 1960s and 1970s, however, it paid more attention to franchising, serialization, and merchandising:

[n]either macro-oriented political economy nor textual- and audience-focused cultural studies were therefore predisposed to examine the how and why of adaptation from the perspective of the authors, agents, publishers, editors, book prize committees, screenwriters, directors, and producers who actually made adaptation happen.<sup>35</sup>

Learning from the mistakes of the previous eras of adaptation theory, Murray suggests that when it comes to analyzing adaptations, we should pay closer attention to production contexts and book dynamics: naming three myths of adaptation studies she claims that one of the biggest pitfalls critics fall into is that when they are talking about “books” or “novels”, they are thinking of the abstract idea of the text, although they should also focus on the material *object* as well. The book market comes with a complex literary economy that should not be disregarded: marketing and publicity processes play a huge role in the constant shaping of literature. The idea that books are “niche” and films are “mass” categories also plays a big role in the value judgment of different works, however, it should be realized that thinking about literature as an isolated category on a pedestal is a myth – literature is also highly industrialized, and it does not exist in a vacuum. One of the most relevant examples for this may be how book publishers tend to build on the success of an adaptation by reprinting copies with a new book cover that shows the movie poster or the main characters of the story, in order to sell it more successfully.

---

<sup>34</sup> When it comes to the opposition of “high” and “popular” culture, I would like to highlight Mieke Bal’s opinion on the matter, who states that “‘high art’ is part of popular culture”. [Mieke Bal, “Introduction,” in *Reading “Rembrandt”: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, Nachaufl, Amsterdam Academic Archive (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 7.]. According to this attitude (which is the one I am going to support throughout the whole thesis), the low or high nature of art is defined by the preconceptions of society – thus, we should not make value judgments on the differences between these two categories. Treating any work as a “high” or “low” cultural production does not lead anywhere, since the reception is always based on the current era. There are several literary examples that were once considered to be texts for the masses (just think of the works of William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens) but are treated as *classics* today because of canonization.

<sup>35</sup> Murray, “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry,” 7.

Murray also repudiates “the belief that adaptation’s trajectory is necessarily from the ‘old’ media of the book to the ‘new(er)’ media of film, television, and digital media:”<sup>36</sup> she claims that “newer media do cannibalize the content of older media, but mediums continue to exist contemporaneously, rearranging themselves into new patterns of usage and mutual dependence.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, she raises awareness about how the rise and fall of literary reputations should be included in adaptation studies, as, for example in the case of contemporary writers who identify themselves as “literary authors”, adaptations can change their reception and the worth of their literary stocks. For example, the Irish author Sally Rooney gained worldwide fame after her book *Normal People* (2018) was adapted into a mini-series of the same name (BBC Three, 2020). In conclusion, Simone Murray suggests that adaptation critics should rethink the way they approach adaptations: instead of focusing on a comparative textual analysis, they should rather observe the way that the material background, the economy and the industry work together. Instead of an aesthetic evaluation, we should rather pay attention to a sociological understanding of the adaptation industry. In order to do that, adaptation studies should combine the methodological insights of the political economy of media (how technological convergence created a commercial media environment), cultural theory, and book history.

The model suggested by Murray “maps relationships among six key stakeholder groups: author societies and the construct of the celebrity author; literary agents; editors and publishers; literary prize judging committees; screenwriters; and film/television producers”.<sup>38</sup> Although she uses a “bookish” model of adaptation, she encourages others to investigate the cross-media adaptation industry in a wider perspective. An example for the industrial nature of adaptations is connected to the “two-way flow of capital (both commercial and cultural)”:<sup>39</sup> when it comes to manuscripts, literary agents fight for the priority attention of editors; publishers “enhance the status of specific literary prizes in their cover-copy in exchange for the promotional fillip and exposure of a literary prize win or shortlisting”, while in turn, these prizes bring audience for film and television adaptations, and thus get promoted themselves.<sup>40</sup> The industrial nature of adaptations is also exemplified in how “publishers engineer bookshop

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



display for film adaptation posters and ancillary marketing paraphernalia, in exchange for production stills to incorporate into the cover designs of film or television »tie-in« editions”.<sup>41</sup>

Using this industry-centric model would be useful for adaptation studies because it would shed light on how adaptation is an important factor in contemporary multiplatform media, and how production and marketing plays a very important role in the reception of certain narratives. She also highlights the converging nature of different media incarnations, and dismisses the idea that literature started to lose its significance because of the constant evolution of digital media:

[r]ather than perceiving the book as the rapidly obsolescing poor cousin to ever-burgeoning screen media, studying the adaptation industry reveals the continuing prominence of book-derived content in the multimedia age. This is true whether or not print formats serve as audiences’ initial point of entry into a content franchise. For even a cursory glance at contemporary mainstream media culture reveals that audiences introduced to book content in screen-media versions often subsequently consume the same narratives in their original novel format, or—where the content is original to screen—audiences may seek out novelizations, making-of books, or companion volumes to prolong, enrich, and potentially complicate their content experience.<sup>42</sup>

I would argue that Murray’s understanding of adaptations is essential if we want to understand the complicated relationship between source works, their adaptations, and transmedia narratives. The technological advancements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and capitalism had a huge impact on the way that storyworlds are created, since social and economic factors play a much more prominent role than before. Literary works, films, series, and other artistic creations do not exist in a vacuum anymore – in this fast-paced and income-driven environment everything becomes an economic product the moment it was created: which explains why the expression “consuming media” is used so broadly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, I would argue that when we are talking about adaptation studies and the issues of transmedia storytelling, we should pay close attention to all the socio-economic background as well, because without it, we cannot have a proper understanding of the way these texts work. However, the very fact that all of these different fields interact with cases of contemporary storytelling means that thinking about them academically is a difficult task to do: one has to

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 14.

immerse themselves in theories of economy, film theory, television studies, and literature as well in order to grasp how different factors impact a transmedia storyworld.

I argue that in today's world, where a significant number of movies and series are adaptations of previous works, or are inspired by certain narratives, we have to take the issue of *originality* into consideration. As Linda Hutcheon argues, adaptations are not vampiric, and they are not secondary in nature – however, if we reject the idea of the subsidiary nature of adaptations, we have to find a way of thinking about their coequal relationship. When it comes to understanding the link between contemporary theories of adaptations and transmedia storytelling, Douglas Lanier's idea of Shakespearean rhizomatics proves to be a fruitful theory that gets us closer to comprehending how the media incarnations of contemporary narratives relate to each other. In his chapter titled “Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value”, Lanier highlights how although we are in an age of post-fidelity, “the residual power of fidelity as a discourse”<sup>43</sup> is still with us today. He dismisses the idea that adaptations should necessarily be read against the “original” work, thinking about them as supplements, rather than equal texts – instead, he builds on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the “rhizome”, highlighting the dynamic nature of adaptations. Lanier states that in Deleuze and Guattari's theory, the rhizome is “both a mode of relation and a form of conceptual structure”<sup>44</sup>, where the two beings are distinct, but they do move independently towards each other. In order to further conceptualize the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari contrast it to the “arboreal”. Lanier summarizes how

[a]n arboreal structure—or, as DG would have it, “the root-book”—traces its ideas and forms back to a single source: a master author, a classic text, a foundational idea, an historical reality. Its various transformations, what DG call “arborescent thoughts,” are organized into homogenous, vertically hierarchical schema and historical genealogies. In an arboreal structure, meaning is conceived in terms of a single root and myriad branches, its growth governed by an entelechy determined by that root. [...] A rhizomatic structure, by contrast, has no single or central root and no vertical structure. Instead, like the underground root system of rhizomatic plants, it is a horizontal, decentered multiplicity of subterranean roots that cross each other, bifurcating and recombining, breaking off and restarting. In some places, rhizomatic roots collect into temporary tangles of connection or nodes that then themselves break apart and reassemble into other nodes, some playing out in dead ends, others taking what DG calls “lines

---

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Lanier, “Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value,” in *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, ed. Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014), 22, doi:10.1057/9781137375773\_2.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 27.

of flight,” that is, altogether new directions of thought, all without compromising the ever-expanding, ever-changing aggregate. What is more, a rhizome has no central organizing intelligence or point of origin; it may be entered at any point, and there is no *a priori* path through its web of connections. [...] A rhizome consists of what DG calls “plateaus,” a plateau being “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination or external end” (22).<sup>45</sup>

It can be seen how the idea of the rhizomatic nature of adaptations seems perfectly applicable to our understanding of contemporary adaptations and transmedia narratives. When it comes to new media incarnations that are based on a certain narrative, the adaptation is *not* going to be secondary to the “original” (except in the temporal sense) — they are going to be horizontally connected. When it comes to *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it is true that the novels were written before the HBO adaptation; however, for several people, it was the series that served as an entry point to the narrative universe. HBO’s *Game of Thrones* is very much based on Martin’s novels; however, it became part of this horizontally built narrative web where all the texts are on the same level. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the “line of flight” can also be successfully integrated into adaptation theory, since these new directions of thought appear in every media incarnation that was inspired by or is connected to a text from that same universe. However, I would like to highlight the fact that while from an academic perspective, the rhizomatic nature of adaptations can serve as a perfect way of understanding how narrative elements are related to each other, it should not be forgotten that from the perspective of the fandom, sometimes adaptations and transmedia narratives can be very much arborescent, where the “root text” (in this case, the “original” work) has a cultural authority over its adaptations. This phenomenon can be seen with many contemporary texts of popular culture, where fans tend to complain if the movie or serial adaptation is not “faithful” enough to its source material, and thus they look down upon the “secondary” work. Nevertheless, there are cases where this problem does not appear at all – although there are several adaptations that are loosely based on (mostly traditional or classic) narratives, they are not necessarily looked down upon, since the audience tends to treat them separately from their “sources”, like in the case of *Westworld* (HBO, 2016–2022), which is based on Michael Crichton’s film of the same name, or *Easy A* (2010), inspired by Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) – or the myriad of Shakespeare adaptations that are set in a contemporary setting. One might wonder whether from the perspective of the audience, the

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 28–29.

question of whether the relationship between an “original” work and its adaptation is going to be arborescent or not depends on how *similar* it is to the “original” (i.e., how easily the audience can recognize that what they are watching *is* an adaptation, or whether it is an *adaptation* or it was only *inspired by* a narrative), however, this issue should be further studied by taking the fandom’s approach into consideration.

The decentralized nature of the rhizome also resonates with Jenkins’ idea of transmedia storytelling, where each and every media incarnation can serve as an entry point to the transmedial universe: in the case of *Game of Thrones*, for example, if one becomes interested in this franchise, they can start by reading any of the books, watching the original series, start with *House of the Dragon*, or even any other text from the narrative universe. Thus, by thinking about adaptations as rhizomatic structures, we get closer to understanding the blurry borders between adaptation theory and the theory of transmedia storytelling.

As I have mentioned previously, although the issue of fidelity is discarded by contemporary theories of adaptation studies, when it comes to the fandom’s approach towards adaptation, fidelity and authenticity both play an important role in how they think about adaptations – although they are closely related, I argue that it is important to make a distinction between them, in order to understand the two ways of how fans interact with “secondary” works. In his essay titled “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation”, Robert Stam talks about the concept of fidelity, however, he fails to define what he means by the term.<sup>46</sup> He states that fidelity “assumes that a novel “contains” an extractable “essence,” a kind of “heart of the artichoke” hidden “underneath” the surface details of style.” However, he discards this idea by saying that such a transferable core does not exist, since the literary text is an “open structure (or, better structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by a boundless context.”<sup>47</sup> However, while I agree with these statements, I would say that from the fandom’s perspective, the concept of fidelity *does* exist. Based on my observations on different fan discussions on social media sites like Facebook and Reddit, I argue that in terms of “original works” and their adaptations, *fidelity* mostly refers to how well a certain adaptation follows the plot of its source material. If it successfully does so, like, for example, in the first seasons of *Game of Thrones*, fans deem the adaptation *faithful*. On the other hand, authenticity rather refers to how well new ideas, characters, or plotlines that are incorporated into the adaptation fit this particular storyworld – whether they seem genuine

---

<sup>46</sup> Robert Stam, “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation,” in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000), 57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

enough for the audience to accept. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, for example, the reason why audiences were not satisfied with how the relationship of Jamie and Cersei Lannister turned out in the last season is not that it did not exist in the books, but that it did not feel *authentic*, based on the character development that was built up in the books and the series as well. Thus, I argue that the issue of *fidelity* refers to how faithfully and accurately an adaptation follows the storyline of its source material, while *authenticity* refers to the new elements that are introduced, and how genuinely they fit the narrative world of the “original” work. Those fans who are not necessarily upset if the adaptation diverges from their favorite narrative can still be critical towards changes that do not “fit” the picture that they had in mind about the source material – thus, making a distinction between *fidelity* and *authenticity* is crucial if we want to take the reactions of the fandom into consideration. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, this issue gets particularly interesting: while in the case of the last three seasons, fans do not have an “original” work to compare the adaptation to, the issue of fidelity and authenticity still have a significant role in fan discussions. In this case, audiences have an imaginary, ideal world in their mind about the narrative that they use as a basis of comparison. Even though several adaptation theorists have been fighting in the last few decades to finally get rid of fidelity criticism, I agree with Casie Hermansson’s idea that fidelity has to be added to the toolbox of adaptation criticism, especially in terms of the audience and the fandom. As Hermansson argued, “opening adaptations up to both/and (both horizontal *and* vertical) instead of either/or will surely result in the more productive criticism and theory that adaptation critics persistently call for.”<sup>48</sup>

As we have seen from the examples mentioned above, adaptation studies have gone through significant changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thanks to the growing interest in, and increasing influence of media convergence. In his introduction to *Adaptation in the Age of Media Convergence*, Johannes Fehrle states that adaptation studies are linked to the issues of mediality and remediation. He writes that

[t]he rise of digital media and the effect it has had on patterns of production, reception, and interaction in a convergence environment, in which new and older media coexist and interact, quite possibly constitutes the single most important development in the material we study as

---

<sup>48</sup> Casie Hermansson, “Flogging Fidelity: In Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse,” *Adaptation* 8, no. 2 (August 2015): 157, doi:10.1093/adaptation/apv014.

adaptation and (trans)media scholars since the advent of film and photography in the 19th century.<sup>49</sup>

As new media forms emerged thanks to the rapid technological development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship between different media incarnations of narrative universes became even more complicated, thus the rigid demarcation of categories such as *original work*, *adaptation* and *appropriation* became ever more problematic. Fehrle supports the idea that the concept of adaptation should be expanded “beyond the original notion of a more or less unidirectional transposition from one medium to another”.<sup>50</sup> Producers have a huge authorial power in how they decide to adapt a certain narrative, and once these newer forms become interactive (e.g. when we are talking about video games where the outcomes are based on the players’ decisions), the boundaries between adaptation and appropriation become even blurrier. Transmedia stories serve as a great example for this phenomenon, where the new incarnations expand and sometimes transform the original universe (even though it must be noted that Jenkins excluded adaptations from this theory of transmedia storytelling), but can still be based on a previous text, just like in the case of *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019) or the *Harry Potter* franchise.

Fehrle proposes the idea that the main factors in the evolution of adaptation studies are

the rise of new media as containers for adapted stories [...]; the transformation of audiences [...]; [and] the transformation of production, distribution, and marketing structures under globalized neoliberal capitalism, including the rise of a franchising logic impacting (adaptive) text clusters in their form, content, production, marketing, and reception.<sup>51</sup>

Not only did the new media forms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century lead to new ways of interaction, but they also had an impact on the development of new forms of storytelling. According to Fehrle, when we are trying to find an answer for where the boundaries lie exactly between “official” and “unofficial” texts, we must rather concentrate on what we gain by discussing the latter as adaptations.

When it comes to the examination of adaptations, I am going to build on Hutcheon’s definition of adaptations, Murray’s theory of the adaptation industry, and Lanier’s idea of the rhizomatic nature of adaptations, because all of these theories show something essential about

---

<sup>49</sup> Johannes Fehrle, “Introduction: Adaptation in a Convergence Environment,” in *Adaptation in the Age of Media Convergence*, ed. Johannes Fehrle and Schäfke-Zell Werner, Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 10.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 15.

the nature of adaptations. Hutcheon's theory discusses how adaptation is not only a product, but a *process* as well, while also highlighting the importance of the different media they are introduced in. However, in the case of a huge media franchise like *Game of Thrones*, the industrial nature of the different media incarnations should also be considered – which can be supported by the ideas introduced by Simone Murray. However, when it comes to thinking about the different media entries of the franchise, their rhizomatic nature should also be taken into consideration, since they are organized horizontally. In order to truly capture the nature of the *Game of Thrones* universe, however, we should also turn to another theory, that is closely connected to adaptation studies: transmediality.

## 2.2 Transmediality and Transmedia Storytelling

The term 'transmediality' has become a buzzword at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and several theorists worked out their own interpretation of this phenomenon. In general, according to Elizabeth Evans, "the term 'transmediality' describes the increasingly popular industrial practice of using multiple media technologies to present information concerning a single fictional world through a range of textual forms."<sup>52</sup> However, if we talk about transmediality as a phenomenon in which a world is introduced through several other media forms, what do scholars mean by transmedia storytelling? In order to have a deeper understanding of these terms, we need to offer an overview of the key moments of the history of transmediality and its theories.

### 2.2.1. Transmediality – a New Phenomenon?

Although the theory of transmediality only appeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it does not mean that the phenomenon itself is completely newfangled. In the general understanding of the term, we talk about transmediality when a certain fictional world is presented on different media platforms, but these channels do not necessarily have to be modern. In his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), Jenkins points out the similarity between modern transmedia narratives and Greek mythology: he explains how the reason why today's students tend to struggle with *The Odyssey*, is that they do not have the same background information and reference about the storyworld as the contemporary audience had. Homer was able to create an epic from an existing array of information, that the audience were familiar with – these storylines existed in oral and written forms as well. We can also see the

---

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life* (New York, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 1.

Bible as a transmedia story, as the different biblical stories were not only readable, but they were also recounted in sermons in Latin, where the audience, who were usually not familiar with the language of their most sacred text, could enjoy these stories in their visual format by looking at the murals on the walls of the church. These instances were all transmedial as the contents appeared on different platforms, however, whether they can be understood as early instances of transmedia *storytelling*, differs in the different theories. I would argue that these examples definitely have a transmedial nature, since they appear on different platforms, however, one aspect of the modern interpretation of transmedia storytelling includes the idea that in order to talk about transmedia storytelling, different segments of information should be distributed on several platforms.

### 2.2.2. *The Theory of Transmediality*

The term transmediality is usually connected to the name of Henry Jenkins, however, the concept was first used by Marsha Kinder in her book titled *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1991). In her book, she talks about “transmedia supersystems constructed around figures like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,”<sup>53</sup> concentrating on the children’s media market. These supersystems are described as

a network of intertextuality constructed around a figure or group of figures from pop culture who are either fictional [...] or ‘real’ [...]. In order to be a supersystem, the network must cut across several modes of image production; must appeal to diverse generations, classes, and ethnic subcultures, who in turn are targeted with diverse strategies; must foster ‘collectability’ through a proliferation of related products; and must undergo a sudden increase in commodification, the success of which reflexively becomes a ‘media event’ that dramatically accelerates the growth curve of the system’s commercial success.<sup>54</sup>

Kinder approaches the concept of transmediality from an economic point of view: in her interpretation, the very aim of this phenomenon is to teach children how to be consumers in a capitalist society. As children are playing out stories with their beloved characters, they also learn how to be a consumer. I would argue that Kinder’s theory is essential if we want to understand the nature of transmedia storytelling, since (as I have already discussed it in connection to Murray’s theory of adaptation), one of the reasons why adaptations, transmedia

---

<sup>53</sup> Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games from Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 38, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08131>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 122–23.



narratives, and media franchises are so popular today is that if an audience becomes interested in a certain storyworld, they will be more likely to turn to similar stories, which will create more profit for the media companies in turn. Kinder's argument on how action figures teach children how to be consumers in a capitalist society, however, may be understood in a broader sense as well, as this idea is true for other toys as well that are marketed on television or social media. Overall, one cannot simply discuss transmediality without focusing on the economic aspects as well.

Mary Celeste Kearney also addressed transmediality from a commercial angle. Elizabeth Evans summarizes how in her article titled 'Recycling Judy and Corliss: Transmedia Exploitation and the First Teen-Girl Production Trend', Kearney

describes[s] the expansion of US radio plays *A Date with Judy* (1941) and *Meet Corliss Archer* (1943-1956) into short stories, films, television programmes and comic books. Kearney goes on to link industrial upheaval within Hollywood to the transmedia developments of these stories and suggests a possible historical origin for the practice that would evolve into the transmedia text.<sup>55</sup>

Kearney calls this process "transmedia exploitation", which consists of "the repeated *adaptation* of an established entertainment text into different media forms" and "the *promotion* of a text's reputation as a successful entertainment property when marketing later versions produced in different formats."<sup>56</sup> Thus both Kinder's and Kearney's approaches mainly focus on the marketing dimension of transmediality and how it can generate more profit for the entertainment industry. Elizabeth Evans highlights that

[w]hereas Kearney's model is still evident in the entertainment industry's ongoing desire to produce content based on already successful properties through literary adaptations, sequels, spin offs and franchises, modern multi-platform practices have taken on a different edge with the emergence of digital technologies and the various modes of engagement they allow for.<sup>57</sup>

Although the media landscape has definitely changed in the past few decades, and narratives are born with the intention of offering true transmedia experience (which is different from the unidirectional, and somewhat passive consumption practices of the past), the economic benefits of this practice should not be left out of the investigation, as introducing a story on

---

<sup>55</sup> Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Celeste Kearney, "Recycling Judy and Corliss: Transmedia Exploitation and the First Teen-Girl Production Trend," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004): 281.

<sup>57</sup> Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life*, 22.

several different platforms means that the audience (in case of a successful initiation) will likely want to consume *more* of that narrative, thus creating more profit for the industry.

In Chapter 3 of *Convergence Culture*, titled “Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedia Storytelling”, Jenkins introduces his theory through the famous *The Matrix* franchise, which was created with the intention of integrating multiple texts on different media platforms (films, web comics, anime, computer game, multiplayer online game), so that the audience can have a multifaceted experience. According to Jenkins, “[a] transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.”<sup>58</sup> The reason behind the use of multiple media platforms is that “each medium does what it does best.”<sup>59</sup> narrative texts are able to introduce the deep inner world of different characters through the description of their thoughts and feelings; films and series offer an aesthetic, visual experience, while video games serve as a means of making our own decisions in the fictional world through a playable character,<sup>60</sup> thus creating a truly immersive experience. The different elements of the transmedia narratives are also self-contained, which offers audiences the decision on which media entry they would like to start with – this way, all of the transmedia texts can serve as entry points to the narrative universe, thus expanding the market and attracting more and more fans to the storyworld.<sup>61</sup> This feature allows people who would not necessarily be interested in a certain media to become consumers: in the case of the *Game of Thrones* franchise, for example, those who are fans of television series but are not avid readers may turn to the original book, after they are hooked on its adaptation, or vice versa. However, Jenkins highlights that it is really important that the different media incarnations should not retell the same story over and over again: audiences who read across media will get a much deeper experience, which in turn motivates them to consume more from the particular transmedia narrative, while adding new information and experience will help the continuous existence of the franchise that is supported by consumer loyalty. Nonetheless, the introduction of different media is not only beneficial for loyal fans, but is also able to “attract different market niches.”<sup>62</sup> As Jenkins suggests,

---

<sup>58</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Updated and with a new afterword (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 97–98.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>60</sup> In some cases, players can choose from a certain set of characters they want to play with.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling 101,” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, March 21, 2007, accessed: 17 May, 2025, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia\\_storytelling\\_101.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html).

<sup>62</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 98.

[f]ilms and television probably have the most diverse audiences; comics and games the narrowest. A good transmedia franchise works to attract multiple constituencies by pitching the content somewhat differently in the different media. If there is, however, enough to sustain those different constituencies—and if each work offers fresh experiences—then you can count on a crossover market that will expand the potential gross.<sup>63</sup>

Jenkins states that transmedia stories are also supported by the horizontally integrated nature of the entertainment industry: the presence of a single company across different media sectors enables and also helps the flow of content across media. This feature leads to strong economic advantages, as in the case of a successful narrative, companies can achieve a greater revenue from several different media incarnations of the *same* narrative universe than from a single story on a single medium. In his article about how Warner Bros. tried to take advantage of *The Matrix*'s cult following, Ivan Askwith calls this type of storytelling synergistic.<sup>64</sup> In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins defines synergy as “[t]he economic opportunities that emerge in a context of horizontal integration where one media conglomerate holds interests in multiple channels of distribution”<sup>65</sup>. He states that “[e]verything about the structure of the modern entertainment industry was designed with this single idea in mind—the construction and enhancement of entertainment franchises.”<sup>66</sup> Once the audience gets emotionally attached to a certain narrative universe, they will keep consuming the new items, thus creating more revenue for the same company. This phenomenon is maybe best illustrated by the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which is based on a series of comic books, and currently introduces three to four new films each year – although the number of Marvel films and comic books is almost countless, fans are still interested in the new media incarnations, and up until 2023, MCU has earned more than \$25 billion worldwide.<sup>67</sup>

Jenkins also highlights that creating a narrative universe by a single media company has another advantage as well: if several media companies would decide to cooperate, it would be difficult to reach integration and coordination between their projects. Transmedia stories can become successful if only one creator or creative unit maintains control over the master

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ivan Askwith, “A Matrix in Every Medium,” *Salon*, May 12, 2003, [https://www.salon.com/2003/05/12/matrix\\_universe/](https://www.salon.com/2003/05/12/matrix_universe/).

<sup>65</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 333.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>67</sup> Samantha Delouya and Travis Clark, “All 31 Marvel Cinematic Universe Movies, Ranked by How Much Money They Made at the Global Box Office,” *Business Insider*, accessed May 17, 2025, <https://www.businessinsider.com/marvel-movies-ranked-how-much-money-at-global-box-office-2021-11>.

narrative, just like in the case of *The Matrix* project.<sup>68</sup> Jenkins proposes that licensing in the entertainment industry will give way to “co-creation”, in which “the companies collaborate from the beginning to create content they know plays well in each of their sectors, allowing each medium to generate new experiences for the consumer and expand points of entry into the franchise.”<sup>69</sup> He argues that the problem with the licensing system of the early 2000s was that the new works were typically copying the previous examples, duplicated experiences that were already achieved better by old media, and did not respect the consistency of the franchise – these characteristics all contributed to the bad reputation of franchises, as the economic advantages were more important than the artistic vision.<sup>70</sup>

One of the most distinctive features of transmedia narratives is that “[t]he whole is worth more than the sum of the parts”<sup>71</sup>: each new text adds something new to the pre-existing material, and by putting these media incarnations together, fans are able to create a whole narrative universe. This phenomenon is the driving force behind forum discussions on the internet where using the currently existing parts of franchises and transmedia stories fans discuss their own theories about different narrative universes – which is supported by the encyclopedic nature of transmedia narratives. In the case of the *Game of Thrones* franchise, the books served as the basis of the narrative, but as they were later complemented with adaptations and other books as well, the storyworld started to expand exponentially.

The new ways in which stories are created in the era of franchises and transmedia stories also lead to a necessary change in the ways we think about stories. Jenkins highlights the fact that film critics talk about “a collapse of storytelling”, however, we should rather see this phenomenon as “the emergence of new story structures, which create complexity by expanding the range of narrative possibility rather than pursuing a single path with a beginning, a middle, and end.”<sup>72</sup> The very nature of these stories lead to the fact that not every viewer will watch (read, or play – depending on the nature of the narrative) films and series the same way. In her book titled *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, Janet Horowitz Murray introduces three types of consumers:

---

<sup>68</sup> These strong economic motives are not only present in transmedia stories: when we look at the current operation of the media industry, we can realize how more and more narratives are built on serialization in order to create more profit. As Jenkins suggests, “[e]verything about the structure of the modern entertainment industry was designed with this single idea in mind—the construction and enhancement of entertainment franchises” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 106). Franchises keep audience interest and also enable the constant growth of the fanbase, as new additions to the same narrative universe keep raising interest and they also serve as new entry points to the storyworld.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 121.

the actively engaged real-time viewers who must find suspense and satisfaction in each single episode and the more reflective long-term audience who look for coherent patterns in the story as a whole...[and] the navigational viewer who takes pleasure in following the connections between different parts of the story and in discovering multiple arrangements of the same material.<sup>73</sup>

These new story structures (and most transmedia stories) are also characterized by being built up from several different sources: the more informed the audience is about a certain narrative universe, the deeper the experience. Jenkins uses the example of the *X-Men* movies: although all of them can be enjoyed without knowing *anything* about the characters or the world of the X-Men, when one has some background information about the story, it is much more likely that they are going to enjoy them more.<sup>74</sup> In these modern myths, most of the characters and earlier events are only reintroduced: filmmakers are building on the fact that most of the audience is familiar with what is going on in this world – there is no need to explain Magneto’s and Professor X’s relationship history in each and every *X-Men* movie, as it was previously discussed in other films and comic books, but if the audience knows about their power dynamics, they are going to realize other tiny details that lead to a deeper understanding of the narrative. Thus, we can see how contemporary Hollywood draws on the myth structure of the ancient times, when myths were told by relying on the general knowledge of the audience, without having the need to introduce every character from scratch: this allows scriptwriters to start with the action instead of the transitional sequences. The mythical nature of these narratives also appears in the fact that most protagonists and antagonists of modern transmedia stories are based on archetypes or so-called stock characters, that can be further discovered by acquiring additional insights about them as we get to know the story.<sup>75</sup>

The last possible feature of transmedia stories in *Convergence Culture* is “additive comprehension”—a term coined by game designer Neil Young.<sup>76</sup> Additive comprehension means that by adding a small detail to a certain media incarnation, the interpretation of the whole narrative is turned upside down, like in the case of the director’s cut of *Blade Runner*, where Deckard discovers an origami unicorn, which resulted in audiences’ questioning of whether Deckard is a replicant or not.

---

<sup>73</sup> Janet Horowitz Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 257.

<sup>74</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 123.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 124–25.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

Jenkins also created two important blogposts on the topic of transmediality: the first one was written in 2007, one year after *Convergence Culture* was published, titled “Transmedia Storytelling 101”. The content mainly builds on his ideas discussed in his book but it also contains some additional reflections, based on the developments that happened between the publication of the book and the date of the blogpost. After giving a detailed definition of the term and reflecting on the economic nature of transmedia storytelling, Jenkins highlights the encyclopedic nature of these narratives and how “[m]ost often, transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories.”<sup>77</sup> As in this case, there is no master narrative that gives us all the information about the story, the different extensions of the universe can have several functions: some of them maintain audience interests (Jenkins instances the *Doctor Who* BBC radio dramas that were aired during the decade-long hiatus of the television episodes), help the audience explore the characters and their motivations more deeply (e.g. the *Dawson’s Desktop* project that introduced the main character’s correspondence connected to *Dawson’s Creek*), “flesh out aspects of the fictional world (as in the web version of the Daily Planet published each week by DC comics during the run of its 52 series to ‘report’ on the events occurring across its superhero universe),” or bridge between sequels (like in the case of *The Clone Wars* animated series, between *Star Wars II* and *III*).<sup>78</sup> The last function may be adding “a greater sense of realism to the fiction as a whole”: the most famous example for that might be the fake documents created for *The Blair Witch* project.<sup>79</sup>

Jenkins also emphasizes how transmedia storytelling became “the ideal aesthetic form for an era of collective intelligence.”<sup>80</sup> The term was created by Pierre Lévy, “to refer to new social structures that enable the production and circulation of knowledge within a networked society.” This phenomenon is thriving on forums (Quora, Reddit) and social media sites (Facebook, Twitter and even Instagram) where fans of different stories share their own ideas and theories about stories and narrative universes, and working together as knowledge communities to find clues about how a certain storyline will turn out.<sup>81</sup> According to Jenkins,

---

<sup>77</sup> Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling 101.”

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> cf. Henry Jenkins, “Spoiling Survivor: The Anatomy of a Knowledge Community,” in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006).

[t]ransmedia narratives also function as textual activators – setting into motion the production, assessment, and archiving information. [...] Transmedia storytelling expands what can be known about a particular fictional world while dispersing that information, insuring that no one consumer knows everything and insure that they must talk about the series with others. Consumers become hunters and gatherers moving back across the various narratives trying to stitch together a coherent picture from the dispersed information.<sup>82</sup>

The case that fans are able to fill in different gaps in the story is supported by the fact that transmedia texts often “introduce potential plots which cannot be fully told or extra details which hint at more than can be revealed.”<sup>83</sup> Building on these gaps and excesses, transmedia stories unfold and grow exponentially, usually resulting in what Lothar Mikos calls a mega-narration.<sup>84</sup>

Jenkins’ second blogpost discussing transmedia storytelling was published in 2011, titled “Transmedia 202: Further Reflections,” which is based on his presentation at the 2011 San Diego Comic-Con, where he talked about some controversy around the definition of transmedia. One of the additions to his previously discussed texts is that besides transmedia storytelling, he proposes different logics “for thinking about the flow of content across media. We might also think about transmedia branding, transmedia performance, transmedia ritual, transmedia play, transmedia activism, and transmedia spectacle, as other logics,” but in his theory, he mainly focuses on transmedia storytelling.<sup>85</sup> He also implicitly criticizes the transmedia definition of the Producers Guild of America, that was created in 2010, when PGA officially recognized the title of “Transmedia Producer.”<sup>86</sup> According to PGA

[a] Transmedia Narrative project or franchise must consist of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe on any of the following platforms: Film, Television, Short Film, Broadband, Publishing, Comics, Animation, Mobile, Special Venues, DVD/Blu-ray/CD-ROM, Narrative Commercial and Marketing rollouts, and other technologies

---

<sup>82</sup> Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling 101.”

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Lothar Mikos, “Transmedia Storytelling and Mega-Narration: Audiovisual Production in Converged Media Environments,” in *Media Convergence and Deconvergence*, ed. Sergio Sparviero, Corinna Peil, and Gabriele Balbi, Global Transformations in Media and Communication Research - A Palgrave and IAMCR Series (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 358.

<sup>85</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia 202: Further Reflections,” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, July 31, 2011, accessed: 17 May, 2025, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining\\_transmedia\\_further\\_re.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html).

<sup>86</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Hollywood Goes ‘Transmedia,’” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, April 27, 2010, accessed: 17 May, 2025, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/04/hollywood\\_goes\\_transmedia.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/04/hollywood_goes_transmedia.html).

that may or may not currently exist. These narrative extensions are NOT the same as repurposing material from one platform to be cut or repurposed to different platforms.<sup>87</sup>

Although the PGA definition of a transmedia narrative is seemingly similar to Jenkins' approach, the minimum amount of three storylines in their description seems a bit arbitrary. Christy Dena criticizes this definition by pointing out that this number should rather be decreased to two, because there are different kinds of transmedia projects that do not belong to the category of franchises as they only appear on two media platforms.<sup>88</sup> Jenkins suggests that when we think about defining transmedia, "we need to come back to the relations between media and not simply count the number of media platforms."<sup>89</sup>

In this blogpost, Jenkins also discusses the differences of seriality and radical intertextuality. In his definition, seriality means "the unfolding of a story over time, typically through a process of chunking (creating meaningful bits of the story) and dispersal (breaking the story into interconnected installments)."<sup>90</sup> Jenkins highlights how American television evolved from episodic to serialized structures, although most television shows combine the two: usually there are some episodic elements that appear or are "solved" in a single episode while serial elements tend to unfold through several episodes, serving as a means of keeping audience interest. According to the author, this shift was crucial in the evolution of transmedia storytelling, because it prepared audiences for a new form of narrative structure. According to Jenkins, in case some texts or textual structures move within the same medium, we can talk about *radical intertextuality*.

In his article, Jenkins also talks about multimodality, an important feature of transmedia storytelling: the term was coined "by Gunther Kress to talk about how educational design taps the affordances of different instructional media, but applied by Christy Dena to talk about transmedia narrative."<sup>91</sup> The essence of multimodality is that each element of a certain narrative universe is represented differently in different mediums, based on the affordances of these platforms. For instance, when we think about characters (Jenkins uses the example of the DC Comics superhero Green Lantern), their visual representation is going to look different in a comic book, a computer game or a movie. However, just because a certain

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Christy Dena, "PGA's Transmedia Producer!," *Christy Dena's Field Notes From Earth*, April 5, 2010, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.christydena.com/2010/04/pgas-transmedia-producer/>.

<sup>89</sup> Jenkins, "Transmedia 202."

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



narrative universe is multimodal, it does not necessarily become transmedia storytelling, because it also needs to include radical intertextuality.

Jenkins also separates two types of transmedia systems: while *high end* transmedia systems usually contain a major blockbuster movie or a television show and their extensions, a *low end* transmedia system is made up of an independent or low-budget movie, a comic book or a web series that are connected to a live experience. Although we should not make any value judgments based on these two categories, according to Jenkins, it is important that no matter what kind of a transmedia system we are talking about, digital media extensions should not be prioritized over any type of media practice – just because a transmedia universe does not include computer games, for example, it does not make it less of a true transmedia experience. However, games can play a peculiar role in the theory of transmediality, as their immersive nature allows fans to interact with the material to a great extent.

Jenkins states that “[t]he Hollywood based model of transmedia assumes a story told or a world explored across not simply multiple media but multiple texts, which can be sold to audiences separately and which represent multiple touch points with the brand.”<sup>92</sup> What is different in Jenkins’ use of the term, is that these texts do not have to form a single narrative, because transmedia stories are usually characterized by the inclusion of several dispersed plotlines. He highlights the debate around Alternate Reality Games: according to one side, ARGs are completed texts on their own, while another approach suggests that they are a part of a larger entertainment franchise. Jenkins mentions three famous examples: *The Beast* (2001) was developed by Microsoft to promote Stephen Spielberg’s *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001); *I Love Bees* (2004) was created to publicize the famous FPS game, *Halo 2* (2004); and *The Lost Experience* (2006) that served as a way of expanding the storyline of the TV series *Lost* (2004–2010) between Season 2 and Season 3. The author argues that while all of the aforementioned ARGs are completed texts in their own right, they also work as parts of larger entertainment franchises, but there should be closer conceptual research on this question.

In connection to the question of participation, Jenkins mentions some previous debates that can be divided in two categories. The first one is related to interactivity and participation: for the author, “interactivity has to do with the properties of the technology and participation has to do with the properties of the culture,” while both of these can be present at the same time.<sup>93</sup> The second debate is associated with continuity and multiplicity: Jenkins points out

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

that discussions on transmedia tend to focus on the importance of the canon and continuity, but we should also celebrate a more open-ended approach, the phenomenon of multiplicity, that can include the same stories and characters. When we focus on the latter, fan-produced media will also become a part of the transmedia process, but we will still be able to differentiate between the official canon and fan alternatives. Jenkins closes his essay by highlighting that transmedia is still a developing practice, and we do not have a clear-cut definition for what does (not) belong to this category – the only practice he wants to exclude is “‘business as usual’ projects which are not exploring the expanded potential of transmedia, but are simply slapping a transmedia label on the same old franchising practices we’ve seen for decades.”<sup>94</sup>

Although Jenkins’ work on transmedia storytelling is essential and serves as a key reference point for academics, the main problem with his theory is that he thinks about transmedia storytelling in terms of authorship, where there is a mastermind who plans out a storyworld that will spread across platforms. As Radha O’Meara and Alex Bevan argue, in the case of modern transmedia narratives, as they “are commonly large in their scale, budget, and the number of people employed, it is reductive to credit particular individuals for this work and implicitly dismiss the authorial contributions of many others.”<sup>95</sup> Not only is it important to acknowledge that “[t]ransmedia texts and storyworlds can be genuinely collaborative or authorless creations, in which the harmony of various creators’ intentions may be unnecessary or even undesirable”<sup>96</sup>, but we also should not forget about the fact that there is an immense number of transmedia narratives where these huge franchises were not planned systematically, but born naturally, without any conceptual planning beforehand. In the case of the *Harry Potter* universe, for example, the books were followed by the movie adaptations, which were in the meantime supplemented by video games, theme parks, merchandise, and different paraphernalia. In terms of authorship, O’Meara and Bevan come to the conclusion that “[a]uthorship never exists inside the limits of a single, male mind. Rather it is a field of relations among various players and stakeholders.” When it comes to transmedia narratives, the author of the original text, the people working on producing the storyworld, and also the corporation who is funding the franchise are included in authoring the narrative in question.

Raphaël Baroni et al. also criticize Jenkins’ theory, since they argue that

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Radha O’Meara and Alex Bevan, “Transmedia Theory’s Author Discourse and Its Limitations,” *M/C Journal* 21, no. 1 (March 14, 2018), doi:10.5204/mcj.1366.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Jenkins' model is based on an ideal conception of what transmedia storytelling *should* be: a top-down coordinated project based on collaborative authority and developing coherent storytelling free of logical inconsistencies and redundancies. This model, which applied only partially the defining principles Jenkins identified, failed to consider how the entertainment industry actually uses transmedia.<sup>97</sup>

Additionally, Baroni et al. highlights that if we take Jenkins' idea of transmedia storytelling being a top-down coordinated process, then biblical stories, Greek myths, and all the transmedia narratives which are results of a bottom-up, grassroots phenomenon cannot be considered *real* transmedia narratives, since they were not deliberately created as such. "Furthermore, those historical antecedents do not satisfy another core principle of transmedia storytelling: the fact that it should offer a "unified" experience, relying on "additive comprehension" (Jenkins 2006: 127), meaning that every installment has to bring new information to/about the story."<sup>98</sup>

Jenkins' theory is also criticized by Marie-Laure Ryan, who argues that one of the biggest pitfalls of Jenkins' transmedia storytelling theory is that it is not a common phenomenon. In her article titled "Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?", she suggests that by building on Jenkins' definition, contemporary transmedia narratives like *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *The Hunger Games* are not cases of transmedia storytelling, since they are examples for the snowball effect, results "of a bottom-up, grassroots phenomenon".<sup>99</sup> According to Ryan,

[i]n the snowball effect, certain stories enjoy so much popularity, or become culturally so prominent, that they spontaneously generate a variety of either same-medium retellings or crossmedia illustrations and adaptations. According to Jenkins's definition, by contrast, transmedia storytelling is a deliberate attempt to make media converge around a shared narrative content.<sup>100</sup>

I argue that when it comes to contemporary transmedia narratives, Ryan's term of the snowball effect seems to be a more suitable term to describe them, since most of the time we

---

<sup>97</sup> Raphaël Baroni, Anaïs Goudmand, and Marie-Laure Ryan, "Transmedial Narratology and Transmedia Storytelling," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, ed. Jørgen Bruhn, Asun López-Varela Azcárate, and Miriam De Paiva Vieira (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024), 376, doi:10.1007/978-3-031-28322-2\_16.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>99</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, "Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?," *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 7, no. 2 (2015): 2, doi:10.5250/storyworlds.7.2.0001.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

do not talk about a conscious, preplanned transmedia experience, but rather a natural, bottom-up process that begins the moment a narrative deems to be successful.

She also argues that “transmedia storytelling involves, but cannot be reduced to, what Richard Saint-Gelais (2011) has called transfictionality, namely, the migration of fictional entities across different texts.”<sup>101</sup> In the Saint-Gelaisian understanding, according to Ryan, transfictionality has three elements: expansion (prequels, sequels), modification (e.g. changing the ending), and transposition of a plot into a new setting. In contemporary transmedia narratives, we can mostly talk about expansion and modification, since transposition is highly discouraged by copyright holders. As I am going to discuss it later on, Ryan argues that one of the biggest problems with the concept of media convergence is that scholars fail to discuss what media converges around. In this article, Ryan also states that something similar, which is that what holds the different stories of a transmedia narrative together is that they take place in the same storyworld. Thus, “[t]he term “transmedia storytelling” is therefore a misnomer: the phenomenon should rather be called transmedia *world-building* (see Weiler 2009; Wolf 2012).”<sup>102</sup>

In Ryan’s understanding, Jenkins’ theory is not only problematic because in practice, most transmedia narratives are products of a bottom-up planning process instead of a top-down one, but that in the case of top-down narratives, like *The Matrix*, for example, Jenkins’ idea that all of the media incarnations can serve as an entry point to the universe is simply not true. In the case of *The Animatrix* (2003), for example, there are too many plot holes that make it impossible for an unknowing audience to understand what is going on, thus, “[t]he feature films provide a much more efficient entry point—what is called a “mothership” in the TV industry (see Jenkins 2006; Mittel 2014)—than the other documents.”<sup>103</sup>

When it comes to the participatory nature of transmedia storytelling, Ryan proposes to distinguish three types of interactivities. External interactivity

consists of the freedom of making choices among documents presented by a system to the user. [...] The second is *internal interactivity*, which is inherent to some of the documents of a transmedia system. In internal interactivity, the user’s mode of participation is narrowly scripted by the system. [...] But the user’s actions do not leave permanent traces on the system; once you have finished playing a video game, the game world will revert to its initial state for the next player and the game can be replayed under the same conditions. The third type is truly

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 8.

*productive interactivity*, which leaves durable traces on the system, so that the user's contributions can be seen by other users.<sup>104</sup>

Although Jenkins' theory can serve as a useful starting point when thinking about the nature of transmedia universes, it definitely has its faults. On the other hand, other theorists have also proposed new ideas that should be considered when it comes to the analysis of transmedia storytelling. In their introduction to *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon propose a different approach towards storyworlds, that is based on the field of narratology. Ryan and Thon argue that the term media convergence suggests that

media are currently entering a new phase of control over culture and over our lives, capturing us in their increasingly thick web. But until we are able to tell what it is that media converge around, the term will remain a buzzword—as it was the slogan of a 2003 technology exhibit in New Orleans: 'Come worship at the altar of convergence' (Jenkins 6).<sup>105</sup>

They propose the idea that it is narrative that should be in the center of media convergence in a concrete and an abstract sense as well: while the former refers to the specific stories or storyworlds different media are converging around, the latter is associated "not with a particular narrative but more generally with the abstract type of content constitutive of 'narrativity,' a content that we can define as that which all stories share."<sup>106</sup> If we focus on the abstract sense of the center of media convergence, then the focus will be aimed at the features of different types of media: "what can medium *x* do in terms of storyworld creation (or representation) that medium *y* cannot?"<sup>107</sup> <sup>108</sup>

When it comes to the relations between narratological concepts and media categories, Ryan and Thon suggests "that these relations cover, at least theoretically, a scale ranging from 'medium free' to 'medium specific,' with various degrees of transmedial validity in the middle. Or to put it another way, the transmedial applicability of narratological concepts

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>105</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, eds., "Storyworlds across Media: Introduction," in *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, Frontiers of Narrative (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Although Ryan and Thon approach the problem of media convergence differently, it is important to highlight that when Jenkins talks about transmedia storytelling (which is an emblematic example of media convergence), he also talks about how in the case of these stories, each media incarnation is created in a way that "each medium does what it does best" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 98.). So even though Jenkins does not concentrate on the narrativity of these mediums, in his theory of transmedia storytelling, he acknowledges the importance of the different platforms and their function.

ranges from ‘all media’ to ‘one’ or perhaps even to ‘none’”.<sup>109</sup> According to them, we can make a distinction between three categories: *medium-free* components can appear in every type of medium (“character, events, setting, time, space, and causality”),<sup>110</sup> while “a *transmedially* valid yet not medium-free concept is interactivity.”<sup>111</sup> The last is the category of *medium-specific* components, which “can occasionally be extended to other media through a metaphoric transfer”.<sup>112</sup>

In connection to the narratologist approach of transmedia storytelling, Lisbeth Klastrup and Susanna Tosca highlight the importance of *transmedial worlds*, that serve as a basis of transmedia narratives:

[t]ransmedial worlds are abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms (see Klastrup and Tosca, “Transmedial Worlds” 409). That is, TMWS are mental constructs shared by both the designers/creators of the world and the audience/participants. The TMW is not defined by the material entity of any particular instantiation (the media platform) but by the shared idea of the world, a sort of platonic approach that situates the ontological status of the TMW in a disembodied plane. We call this mental image “worldness,” and a number of distinguishing and recognizable features of the TMW originate from the first version, or *instantiation*, of the world but can be elaborated and changed over time.<sup>113</sup>

According to the authors, the experience of worldness has three dimensions: *mythos* (the backstory of the world), *topos* (the geographical and the time setting), and *ethos* (the moral codex of characters). They argue that if a certain narrative extension does not conform to these three aspects of a storyworld, it can cause dissatisfaction and an uproar in the fan community.

Transmedia narratology, in general, can be defined as “the expansion of the discipline beyond the medium of language-based narrative for which it was originally developed, to narrative media such as film, drama, comics, and video games.”<sup>114</sup> According to Baroni et al.,

[a]n important part of media-conscious narratology is the distinction between medium-free concepts (i.e., semantic concepts that apply to narratives in all media because they define

---

<sup>109</sup> Ryan and Thon, “Storyworlds across Media: Introduction,” 3.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca, “Game of Thrones. Transmedial Worlds, Fandom, and Social Gaming,” in *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, *Frontiers of Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 296–97.

<sup>114</sup> Baroni, Goudmand, and Ryan, “Transmedial Narratology and Transmedia Storytelling,” 365.

narrativity, such as character, action, setting, causality, motivation), transmedial concept (i.e., concepts applicable to several, but not necessarily all, media, such as narrator, focalization, and interactivity or concepts inspired by another medium, such as camera-eye narration), and medium-specific components, such as frame, gutter, and speech bubble for comics.<sup>115</sup>

Transmedia narratology can help scholars to understand how the different media incarnations work together, and describe their relationship across different media. However, Baroni et al. suggests its biggest danger lies in the fact that in order to understand these connections, researchers have to be able to develop skills in multimedia analysis, and also take the entertainment industry into consideration.

The difference between Jenkins' view of transmedia storytelling and the narrative approach that was described previously is that while Jenkins focuses on the economic background and the way these media entries work together, the narrative approach rather focuses on the storytelling. Jenkins' definition of transmedia stories only focuses on the special type of storytelling where the original intention of the creators is that they are going to offer a transmedia experience, like in the case of *The Matrix* – however, there are several *transmedial* instances where even though the original intention was not there, certain narratives expanded into transmedial storyworlds, like in the case of *Harry Potter* or *Game of Thrones*. As it has been mentioned previously, Marie-Laure Ryan thus makes a distinction between two poles of transmedial storytelling (since we cannot talk about exact, distinct borders): “[t]he first pole is what could be called the “snowball” effect: a certain story enjoys so much popularity or becomes so prominent culturally that it spontaneously generates a variety of either same-medium or cross-media prequels, sequels, fan fiction, and adaptations”,<sup>116</sup> like in the case of the two aforementioned examples. The other pole is the Jenkinsian transmedia storytelling or commercial franchises, which are “represented by a system in which a certain story is conceived from the very beginning as a project that develops over many different media platforms.”<sup>117</sup> I would argue that although the Jenkinsian approach serves as a great way to understand the true nature of transmediality, restricting this definition to the sheer number of narratives which were planned to be transmedial from the very beginning would narrow down the usability of this theory, and thus it would be more useful to think about transmedia storytelling as a broader umbrella term for storyworlds that expanded to different types of media over time, being end-products of a bottom-up process as

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>116</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, “Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality,” *Poetics Today* 34, no. 3 (01, 2013): 363, doi:10.1215/03335372-2325250.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

well. In this thesis, I am going to utilize the narrative approach to transmedia storytelling in order to understand how the different media entries of *Game of Thrones* work together to create a complex fantastic storyworld.

### 2.3. Convergence and Deconvergence

Before digitalization and the rapid development of telecommunication, there have already been cases where certain narratives appeared on different media platforms (usually in the case of adaptations), however, media convergence was born thanks to the technological developments of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The term was coined by Jenkins, who defines the phenomenon as

the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who's speaking and what they think they are talking about.<sup>118</sup>

Media convergence played a very important role in the emergence of modern transmedia storytelling, because the cooperation of media industries made it possible to create original and coherent transmedia franchises like *Star Wars* or *The Matrix*. By constructing storyworlds that appear on different types of media, not only can companies cater for the needs and desires for audiences who would like to experience a story in different ways, but it also means that they are going to profit much more from the same core narrative by creating spin-offs, sequels, prequels and other media incarnations. Thus, media convergence is also closely connected to participatory culture: in the convergent environment, the audience is constantly encouraged to collect more information about certain types of content, thus participation will become an important feature of this phenomenon. Not only do audiences have the opportunity to collect vast amounts of information about any storyworld that they are interested in on the internet, but they may also have a say in the shaping of certain franchises (even though they have less influence than media companies). One of the most emblematic examples for this phenomenon may be the resurrection of *The Expanse* series (SyFy, 2015–2018; Amazon Prime Video, 2019–2022). The popular science fiction show was originally created by the

---

<sup>118</sup> Henry Jenkins, "Introduction: 'Worship at the Altar of Convergence': A New Paradigm for Understanding Media Change," in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Updated and with a new afterword (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 2–3.



SyFy Channel, which canceled the show after its third season. Disappointed fans decided to start a campaign in order to save their favorite sci-fi show, by creating an online petition, a hashtag (#SaveTheExpanse) on Twitter and writing emails to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. The attempt was a success: in May 2018, Bezos announced that Amazon Studios will buy the rights of the show and will stream the upcoming seasons on Amazon Prime.<sup>119</sup>

In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins highlights two contradictory trends that appeared in American media: firstly, “new media technologies have lowered production and distribution costs, expanded the range of available delivery channels, and enabled consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways”,<sup>120</sup> while secondly, we can see the concentration of ownership. Thus, the free flow of ideas, according to Jenkins, is “both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process”.<sup>121</sup> However, Lothar Mikos points out that convergence is a dialectical process that is closely connected to deconvergence as well.

According to Mikos, convergence creates different channels for content, which leads to the fragmentation of film and television and also of audiences.<sup>122</sup> Although fragmentation can be seen as an unfortunate case, it can have positive effects as well: those who become interested in a certain element of a transmedia story, for example, will likely look up the different media incarnations of that particular storyworld. With regard to modern transmedia stories, fragmentation is a natural process: thanks to the large size of these universes, it is almost impossible to become familiar with each and every incarnation of these storyworlds. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, for example, even the mastermind behind the original story needed help when he was writing the encyclopedia of Westeros, *The World of Ice and Fire*: in a blogpost written in 2006, Martin stated that the two co-authors, “Elio [M. García] (sometimes known as “Ran”) and Linda [Antonsson] are the hosts and webmasters at Westeros.org, with its terrific concordance and colorful rolls of arms, and I have long had the feeling that both of them know a lot more about the Seven Kingdoms than I do”.<sup>123</sup>

Media franchises are interested in creating transmedia stories, because once a certain narrative finds its audience and acquires popularity, they can create audience loyalty by

---

<sup>119</sup> Tom Risen, “TELEVISION: How Fans Saved ‘The Expanse,’” *Aerospace America*, October 18, 2018, accessed: 18 March, 2023, <https://aerospaceamerica.aiaa.org/television-how-fans-saved-the-expanse/>.

<sup>120</sup> Jenkins, “Introduction: ‘Worship at the Altar of Convergence’: A New Paradigm for Understanding Media Change,” 17–18.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>122</sup> Mikos, “Transmedia Storytelling and Mega-Narration: Audiovisual Production in Converged Media Environments,” 160.

<sup>123</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Bantam to Publish The World of Ice and Fire | George R.R. Martin,” *George R. R. Martin*, accessed March 23, 2023, <https://georgerrmartin.com/bantam-to-publish-the-world-of-ice-and-fire/>.

introducing new stories in the same world. However, Mikos suggests that instead of using the term transmedia storytelling, we should rather use the term *mega-narration*: he states that

from a production point of view, transmedia storytelling is the systematic planning of a story throughout different platforms—and not one story on different or multiple platforms (see Evans, 2011; Simons et al., 2012). From the beginning the diverse narrative and aesthetic possibilities of different media outlets are part of the development of the story.<sup>124</sup>

We can see how Mikos supports Jenkins' idea of a transmedia project – the reason why mega-narration as a concept could be more beneficial, when it comes to the description of modern franchises like *Game of Thrones* or *Star Wars*, is that in the case of these storyworlds, the very act of creating an immersive narrative universe is more important than “the linear dramaturgy of suspense”.<sup>125</sup> According to Mikos' definition, mega-narration is “an industrial practice to engage audiences with a story universe as a global brand”.<sup>126</sup> The author highlights the Marvel Cinematic Universe as an example: in the case of this franchise, MCU became a brand that sells movies “that are based on comic books and extended by computer games”,<sup>127</sup> however, transmedia stories are systematically planned in order to create a coherent storyline, in which each media incarnation is created on its own specific platform in order to provide a certain type of audience experience. Even though the Marvel films are connected to each other, it is not their transmedia feature which defines them, but rather the expansion of the storyworld they belong to. The reason why in this case media convergence is closely linked to deconvergence, is that each and every element of this universe will have its own audience and fanbase, and it is more than likely that not every fan of a certain Marvel film will be enthusiastic enough to familiarize themselves with the whole cinematic universe, thanks to its vast size. However, each media incarnation can serve as an entry point to the narrative universe, thus making convergence possible.

## 2.4. Connecting the Dots

With this brief theoretical overview, I wanted to highlight that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is almost impossible to understand the process of adaptation without talking about media convergence, participatory culture and transmedia storytelling, because these concepts are closely related to

---

<sup>124</sup> Mikos, “Transmedia Storytelling and Mega-Narration: Audiovisual Production in Converged Media Environments,” 161.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 161.

each other. The technological developments of the last few years made it possible to create mega-stories on different platforms, and thus constructing wide, loyal fanbases. Producing expansive narrative storyworlds on different platforms can be beneficial for several reasons: firstly, by introducing stories on different platforms, these franchises can cater to the needs of different audiences. Gamers will likely be attracted to video games, while those who love watching content on different platforms will turn to films and series. Secondly, as this phenomenon causes the widening of the audience, it comes with economic advantages as well: the more consumers a franchise attracts, the more revenue it gains – and, on the other hand, the different media incarnations can serve as marketing tools as well. Thirdly, those fans who will be interested in at least one of the media incarnations of a certain storyworld, will have the opportunity to dig deeper into the narrative universe by immersing themselves in other texts as well. Thus, we can see how supporting transmedia stories is not only beneficial for Hollywood, but also for the audience as well.

In his chapter titled “Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation: Concepts, Forms, and Strategies”, Jens Eder is focusing on the context of commercial transmedial production by exploring the interrelations and implications of transmediality and adaptation. He also argues that

[t]ransmedial experiences and multitexts are mainly the result of concrete economic and practical interests. In transmedia production, different media serve different markets, open up different access points to the presented worlds, tap different target groups, and make contents available in different spheres of life: posters in the public sphere, DVDs in private domestic spaces. [...] All in all, transmediality helps to spatially and temporally expand the overall production.<sup>128</sup>

Eder argues that transmedial multitexts have four general strategies. In the case of *multiple exploitation*, “[t]he individual texts are not linked with each other, but stand alone as relatively equivalent items differing primarily in their mediality”<sup>129</sup> — like in the case of adaptations. In the case of *transmedial supplementation*, “[t]he multitext [...] centers on a core ‘megatext’ (mothership, tentpole), such as a movie or a television series”<sup>130</sup>. In this case, we talk about paratexts that surround the mothership text and provide additional information about it.

---

<sup>128</sup> Jens Eder, “Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation: Concepts, Forms, and Strategies,” in *The Politics of Adaptation. Media Convergence and Ideology*, ed. Dan Hassler-Forest and Pascal Nicklas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 72.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 76.

The third strategy consists of the functional integration of the individual elements in the context of a temporal sequence and/or a whole experience [...]. The elements contribute to the understanding of the whole in their own media-specific ways and are, ideally, ordered according to some calculated temporal dramaturgy.<sup>131</sup>

This strategy can be best illustrated with *The Matrix* franchise, where all of the media incarnations supply information that is necessary to wholly understand the films. Lastly, the participation strategy requires the involvement of the audience through active participation (be it user-generated content, voting, etc.). Eder argues that

[t]he comparison of these four strategies – multiple exploitation, supplementation, functional integration, and audience participation – brings to light a central dilemma of transmedial production: the stronger the integration of individual texts, and the more active the users, the higher the chances are that the texts complement each other and lead the users from one medium to another one. At the same time, however, the demands on the users increase, as does the risk of losing them as consumers of the overall production.<sup>132</sup>

With the advent of new storytelling modes and the increased interest in adaptations, the concepts of adaptation and transmedia storytelling are harder to distinguish from each other, since from the moment a certain narrative is adapted into a different medium, it will become a transmedial experience – and with the new additions to the “original” source material and the different franchise elements, any already existing narrative can eventually become a transmedia story, based on the model of Ryan’s snowball effect (just like it happened with the *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings* universe). Each adaptation will be kaleidoscopic, since it builds itself up from more or less the same elements, but the end result will be different than the source material. Although fidelity criticism as such is mostly looked down upon by adaptation scholars, we cannot disregard the question of fidelity in fan circles. As David Levente Palatinus highlights, the issue of authenticity and accuracy plays a significant role in the fandom when it comes to discussing new adaptations of already existing books, movies, games, or television shows: the question is not how accurately a certain adaptation follows its source material, but rather how authentic it is to the overall ethos of the work in question.<sup>133</sup> Thus, with the concept of authenticity it is inevitable to introduce new narrative elements or

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>133</sup> David Levente Palatinus, “From Niche to Mainstream? Screen Culture’s Impact on Contemporary Perceptions of Fantasy,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien in Central Europe: Context, Directions, and the Legacy*, ed. Janka Kaščáková and David Levente Palatinus, Routledge Studies in Speculative Literature (New York, NY: Routledge, 2023), 167–68.

change the original story to a certain degree, which will likely result in a transmedia experience. In her essay titled “Adaptation – Remediation – Transmediality”, Barbara Straumann also highlights how “the distinction between transmedia extension and adaptation is not clearcut. [...] [A]daptations represent reinterpretations so that viewers are offered a new perspective and experience with each adaptation. It is possible, therefore, to discuss adaptations and appropriations of much earlier texts as transmedia phenomena.”<sup>134</sup>

I would argue that *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its television show adaptation, *Game of Thrones* had a great impact on the way that we should look at the questions of the theory of adaptation and transmedia storytelling, since as the last three seasons of the adaptation outpaced the source material (which is still not finished, so one can only wonder how the upcoming two volumes of the book series will differ from Benioff’s and Weiss’ rendition), it is hard to decide whether the series in question is an adaptation or an independent narrative – or both at the same time. However, using a label for this peculiar and to a certain extent unique phenomenon does not add anything to our understanding of the complexity of the narrative universe: the significance of this example lies in the hybridity and the rhizomatic nature of the storyworld, and how the interconnectedness of the different transmedial elements created a new form of storytelling. In the upcoming chapter, I am going to describe the different media entries of the *Game of Thrones* universe, and how these elements relate to each other.

---

<sup>134</sup> Barbara Straumann, “13. Adaptation – Remediation – Transmediality,” in *Handbook of Intermediality*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (De Gruyter, 2015), 258, doi:10.1515/9783110311075-015.

### 3. Transmedia Storytelling and Fantasy

The transmedia franchises of the last few decades proved that there is a special relationship between this peculiar type of storytelling and speculative fiction: while a significant number of transmedia stories are either science fiction or a different subgenre of speculative fiction (science fantasy, dystopia, etc.), a considerable body of them belongs to fantasy. One of the most influential examples is the *Star Wars* science-fantasy media franchise, which originates in George Lucas' 1977 film (*Episode IV: A New Hope*) and consists of several movies, television and animation series, video games, comic books and novels, only to mention a few. Two American comic book publishers, DC Comics and Marvel Comics also made history with the way they expanded their original comic stories into two multi-billionaire media franchises, that are made up of numerous comic books, adaptations, movies, series and video games as well. While these franchises expanded naturally, the Wachowskis' *The Matrix* universe was a planned transmedia project and still continues to be one of the most famous and influential science fiction transmedia stories of all time. In the meantime, however, fantasy stories also started to proliferate over different platforms, like *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* or Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher*, all of which consist of different types of media entries. But why is speculative fiction such a fruitful source for transmedia stories? In order to better understand this special connection and to lay the theoretical background for the upcoming chapters on the *Game of Thrones* universe, this chapter is going to focus on conceptualizing fantasy and discussing why *A Song of Ice and Fire* belongs to this category. In the conclusion, I am going to focus on why speculative fiction may be understood as the ultimate transmedia genre by illuminating its features that make SF narratives especially (but not exclusively) suitable for transmedia projects.

#### 3.1. Conceptualizing Fantasy

Fantasy as such is a very difficult notion to conceptualize since the different works that are traditionally thought of as "fantasy" can differ a lot from each other. Although there are some features and elements that define the exemplary works (the existence of magic and magical creatures, sorcery, knights, etc.), just because the fantastic enters a certain narrative it does not necessarily make it a fantasy story. For example, several science fiction texts have fantastic elements in it, but they are still considered to be science fiction. In order to understand what I mean by the term, I am going to introduce the most influential theories of fantasy.

One of the most famous theories on fantasy and fairy-stories can be linked back to one of the most influential writers of fantasy, J. R. R. Tolkien. In his essay titled “On Fairy-stories”, Tolkien discusses what he means by fairy-stories and fantasy. In the first section, he defines fairy-stories by talking about what they are *not*: he differentiates them from traveler’s tales, stories of dreams, and beast fables as well, arguing that they should be presented as true; furthermore, “[m]ost good ‘fairy-stories’ are about the *aventures* of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches.”<sup>135</sup> In “Origins”, he looks at the history of fairy-stories and their possible origin, whether they are the results of independent evolution or invention, inheritance, or diffusion, coming to the conclusion that what really matters is their effect that they have on their reader. He also challenges the assumption, that children are the target audience for fairy-stories, deeming it “an accident of our domestic history.”<sup>136</sup> He claims that children do not like fairy tales more (or even understand them better) as adults:

[b]ut in fact only some children, and some adults, have any special taste for them; and when they have it, it is not exclusive, nor even necessarily dominant. It is a taste, too, that would not appear, I think, very early in childhood without artificial stimulus; it is certainly one that does not decrease but increases with age, if it is innate.<sup>137</sup>

The last sections of Tolkien’s essay focus on the main features of fairy-stories. As the “Introduction” of *Tolkien On Fairy-stories* promptly summarizes, “Tolkien uses the word *fantasy*, with its derived meaning of “unreality” to encompass both the working of the imagination and the result of that work, sub-creation, the making of a Secondary World.”<sup>138</sup> From the perspective of this thesis, it is really interesting that Tolkien argues that narrative is the most effective vehicle for fantasy, since presenting it visually (for instance, in painting) is technically too easy, and it often results in silliness or morbidity – however, we can see how from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, portraying fantastic pieces on screens have been a common practice, that did not (necessarily) result in the aforementioned feelings.

Lastly, Tolkien argues that fantasy has three essential features: Recovery, Escape, and Consolation. *Recovery* stands for the recovery of something that has been lost in the fantastic world, while *Escape* allows reader to escape from one world to another. However, he believes that this escapism is not a negative thing at all: if we understand it as the Escape of the

---

<sup>135</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” in *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, Expanded ed., with commentary and notes (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 32.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger, and Douglas A. Anderson, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, Expanded ed., with commentary and notes (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 13.

Prisoner, it is understandable, just as if we take it as the Flight of the Deserter, in the face of “the Morlockian horror of factories”.<sup>139</sup> Lastly, Escaping Death, which is the biggest desire of humankind, leads us to the *Consolation* of the Happy Ending, which Tolkien calls the *eucatastrophe*:

[t]he consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous ‘turn’ (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale): this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially ‘escapist’, nor ‘fugitive’. In its fairy-tale – or otherworld – setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.<sup>140</sup>

Thus, at the end of the essay, he argues that the story of Christ is the most successful fairy-story, since it has one of the greatest eucatastrophes at its heart. Therefore, we can conclude that according to Tolkien, the most important features of fairy-stories and fantasy in general are that they are not *only* for a child audience, but those who have a taste for them, while just like mythology, they are closely connected to language. Lastly, recovery, escape, and the eucatastrophe all play an integral part in the genre.

One cannot speak about fantastic literature without mentioning Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970), in which the author examines the theory and the poetics of the genre. The basis of Todorov’s understanding is that when talking about literary studies we have to use literary expressions instead of borrowing terms from other social sciences. He criticizes Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* by saying that his classification is too theoretical: Frye talks about abstract categories which do not even exist in literature, instead of describing actual, substantial text types. Todorov also rejects Frye’s typology due to its characteristics taken from philosophy because this way “literature becomes [...] a means of expressing philosophical categories”.<sup>141</sup> According to Todorov, we talk about the fantastic when something happens in the world we know that cannot be explained by the laws of this world. If the reader (or a character) chooses a solution for this supernatural phenomenon, it becomes uncanny or marvellous. When the supernatural events

---

<sup>139</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 72.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>141</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, A Volume in the CWRU Press Translations (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 16.



receive an explanation at the end, we talk about fantastic-uncanny (Henry James: *The Turn of the Screw*) but if an incredible thing can be explained, we talk about the uncanny (Agatha Christie: *And Then There Were None*). The fantastic-marvelous ends with the acceptance of the supernatural (Villiers de L'Isle: *Véra*), and in the marvelous (which can be hyperbolic, exotic, instrumental or scientific) we have to accept new natural laws (see science fiction or fairy tales)<sup>142</sup>. One of the biggest problems with Todorov's approach towards fantasy is that it does not get us closer to its 21<sup>st</sup>-century understanding, since instead of focusing on the genre, he rather thinks about how the fantastic as a mode enters certain texts. From the examples listed above, it can be seen that he takes science fiction, fairy tales, Gothic stories and mysteries under the umbrella term of the *fantastic*, which, as I will argue later on, can complicate our understanding of *fantasy* in general.

According to Todorov, the fantastic originates in rhetorical figures, thus it is always linked to fiction and literal meaning: it is only language that can show us what does not exist. That is one of the main reasons why fantastic texts usually have a first person singular focalizer:

the represented (or “dramatized”) narrator is suitable for the fantastic, for he facilitates the necessary identification of the reader with the characters. This narrator's discourse has an ambiguous status, and authors have variously exploited it, emphasizing one or another of its aspects: as the narrator's, the discourse lies outside the test of truth; as the character's it must pass this test.<sup>143</sup>

When talking about the themes of the fantastic, Todorov focuses on the semantic or thematic aspects of the works by creating two main categories: the themes of the self and the themes of the other. In fantastic texts there is “a generalized determinism, a pandeterminism: everything, down to the encounter of various causal series (or “chance”) must have its cause, in the full sense of the word, even if this cause can only be of a supernatural order”.<sup>144</sup> The two most important themes of the self are metamorphosis, which is linked to the transition from mind to matter, and vision, which can appear through the use of several symbols (mirror, glasses, etc.).

By talking about the themes of the other, Todorov mentions two important, interrelated topics: sexuality and death. These two concepts usually refer to the relation between the self and the unconscious, and enable readers to think about topics that may fall into the category

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 44–54.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 110.

of taboo. In the conclusion Todorov points out that there is no direct relation between an image and its meaning, they are simply compatible and co-present due to the polysemy of the image.

According to Todorov, the social function of the fantastic is to combat against censorship and to transgress the law by introducing topics that are prohibited by social customs. Although the minimal narrative can be described as a movement between two equilibriums, in fantasy there is a small difference: it is not an ordinary, but a supernatural event which modifies this equilibrium.

One of the main problems with Todorov's approach to the fantastic is that it heavily relies on the effect of hesitation. There are several fantasy stories where the fantastic is the part of the narrative world and the reader or the character do not hesitate at all: they accept what is happening without a question. In *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), for example, although Frodo and Sam *do* cross a threshold and they have to face things that are outside of their comfort zone and of the things known to them, they believe in everything that they experience and they do not question the appearance of magic that is beyond their previous life experiences. In Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995), the existence of talking panserbjørne, witches and compasses that are able to answer any questions in the world are part of the fantastic world and there is not a moment of hesitation – yet we still consider it to be fantasy.<sup>145</sup> While Todorov's approach to the *fantastic* is an important theoretical example of structuralism, it has little to do with the texts that contemporary readers call *fantasy*: Todorov is rather concentrating on texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century which contain fantastic elements. Although his analysis plays a crucial role in our understanding of how the fantastic works (and his theoretical framework can be used when we are trying to analyze fantastic narrative texts), unfortunately it does not get us closer to conceptualizing fantasy as a genre. As Brian Attebery also points out in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992):

Todorov has confused matters greatly in *The Fantastic* (1975), which has almost no bearing on the kind of fantasy we are discussing here—a product of diverging meanings for the word *fantastic* in French and English. “La littérature fantastique” is an entirely different genre, confined almost exclusively to the nineteenth century and represented in English by such texts as Henry James's “The Turn of the Screw.”<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Although it is true that in the following two books, *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) the hesitation appears when Lyra and Will enter parallel worlds.

<sup>146</sup> Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 20.

Rosemary Jackson, in her book titled *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) talks about how hard it is to categorize fantasy because we cannot point out exact schemes, structures and features that are true for all the works we consider to belong to this category. She talks about fantasy as a ‘mode’, as the “literature of ‘unreality’” because it enables to identify structural features of different literary works.<sup>147</sup>

For when we speak of a mode, what can we mean but that this particular type of literary discourse is not bound to the conventions of a given age, nor indissolubly linked to a given type of verbal artefact, but rather persists as a temptation and a mode of expression across a whole range of historical periods, seeming to offer itself, if only intermittently, as a formal possibility which can be revived and renewed?<sup>148</sup>

Talking about fantasy as a mode could also be very useful in the sense that modern narratives usually appear on different types of media and we cannot look at fantasy as *only* a literary genre anymore. The continuous technical advancements of film-making and animation enabled the creators of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century to adapt and write fantastic narratives (and other forms of speculative fiction) for the big and small screen, thus helping fantasy to become a rather popular phenomenon, which is constantly changing. Regarding fantasy as a mode enables us to also emphasize the role of media convergence in relation to different types of narratives (literary, filmic or video game). Another important factor is that fantasy had different forms in the past: romance literature, ‘fantastic literature’ (see the works of Poe, Kafka, Maupassant) and other tales describing abnormal states – looking at fantasy as a mode could help us to identify certain aspects and values that these works have in common while enabling them to evolve and change. According to Jackson, “there is no abstract entity called ‘fantasy’; there is only a range of different works which have similar structural characteristics and which seem to be generated by similar unconscious desires”.<sup>149</sup>

Jackson suggests that fantastic narratives written in this mode could be further categorized as romances, fantastic literature, or tales of abnormality or interesting psychological states. We can observe, however, that fantasies are similar in the sense that they always invert and re-combine the elements of the real world in order to create something other, something different.

---

<sup>147</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2009), 4.

<sup>148</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre,” *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 135–63, doi:10.2307/468283.

<sup>149</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 4.

In the second chapter, Jackson discusses why she considers fantasy as a mode, rather than a genre. She starts her analysis by introducing the etymology of the word ‘fantastic’: it comes from the latin *phantasticus* (which originates from the Greek word, φαντάζω), meaning ‘to make visible’, ‘to manifest’. If we look at fantasy from this particular point-of-view, we soon realize that in this sense every single fictional narrative could be regarded as fantasy, as they are born from an imaginary activity, a manifestation of certain thoughts. According to Jackson, every text that is about ‘other than human’ is considered to be fantasy, because they do not represent life realistically. Fantasy is different in the sense that it introduces and manifests unreal elements and handles them as if they were real. Jackson concludes that “the fantastic is a mode of writing which *enters a dialogue with the ‘real’ and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure*” (orig. emphasis).<sup>150</sup>

Understanding fantasy as the literature of subversion comes from structuralist analysis, and it has nothing to do with thematic readings. Firstly, when we read fantasy, we may realize that it resists allegory and metaphor by taking everything literally, thus becoming metonymical, by transforming into the *other* thing.<sup>151</sup> If we think about *A Game of Thrones*, one example may be the Stark motto: *Winter is coming*. In this case, it is not only the cold season that is around the corner: the Others (in the show they are also called White Walkers) are the embodiment of “winter”, the greatest threat to humanity.

Fantasy is also subversive in the sense that it undermines the current dominant orders. According to Jackson, fantasy appeared in the times of cultural stability (mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century) because it helped to express the repressions of people, who were not resonating with the cultural order.<sup>152</sup> In this sense, Jackson’s theory can be connected to Freudian theory because fantasy works as a tool to express the restrained desires that society experiences. This way, as Jackson points out, fantasy is similar to Freud’s term, *das Unheimlich*, or the uncanny.<sup>153</sup> The German term has two levels of meaning: the first one describes something familiar, that is connected to the feeling of being ‘at home’, while the other meaning explains the disturbing facet of this word: a hidden, concealed, perturbing side. Fantasy uses the same transformation: it employs familiar elements while expressing something alien, something that is *beyond*.

Thinking about the subversive nature of fantasy, one might be interested in *why* fantasy works this way. One possible answer may be that by talking about underlying issues of our

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 38.

culture and society in a different setting helps readers to think about these problems critically, without experiencing the anxiety of facing these issues in the real world – in this manner fantasy can also work as a way of escapism, while at the same time it provides a solution for the underlying worries or dissonances one might have, just like in the world of dreams.

One of the main criticisms that Brian Attebery expressed of Jackson's theory is that although it is fruitful in the textual analysis of certain texts like Kafka's "Metamorphosis" or Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, she claims Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (and thus the later texts that are based on the Tolkienian traditions but we still call fantasy) to be a failed attempt:

[t]he trouble is, when she gets to the Tolkienian expression of the fantastic, she attempts to use her theory as a standard. The function of fantasy is to express desire in a subversive guise, she says, but Tolkien's fantasy attempts to do something else. Rather than broadening her theory to fit the exception, she concludes that *The Lord of the Rings* is a failed fantasy, and along with it the works of Kingsley, MacDonald, LeGuin, and Lewis. Her comments on the genre converge curiously with those who condemn it from the perspective of mimetic theory: it evades reality. The reality she is speaking of is interior, rather than exterior, but the tone of her accusation is the same [...].<sup>154</sup>

Although the academic consensus in the last few years has been following Jackson's idea of thinking about fantasy as a mode, I would argue that talking about fantasy as a genre and calling its mode the *fantastic* may be a more practical and more useful approach. While it is true that modes as literary discourses are bound to change throughout history, genres are also able to adapt and evolve – and just because fantastic elements appear in certain texts, like in the case of Gothic literature or science fiction, calling them fantasy could lead to a very broad understanding of the term which would complicate the discussion of *more* fantastic texts (i.e. those that contemporary readers and audiences claim to categorize fantasy). Throughout this chapter, I will argue that by referring to the fantastic as a mode and to fantasy as a genre, these misunderstandings and theoretical rabbit-holes could be avoided, and it would help us think about the fantastic works of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century in a much clearer and more precise way, by simply avoiding the inclusion of texts that would lead our analyses and theories astray.

In her book titled *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984), Kathryn Hume explores (as the back cover suggests) "how fantasy and mimesis contribute to literary representations of reality:

---

<sup>154</sup> Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 21.

offering forms of escape in adventure stories, pastoral, farce and pornography (...).”<sup>155</sup> In the preface of the book, Hume creates her own broad definition of fantasy by stating that “[b]y fantasy I mean the deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal. The works covered range from the trivial escapes of pastoral and adventure stories to the religious visions of Langland and Dante.”<sup>156</sup> Although her approach towards fantasy is shared by several other theorists whose understandings of fantasy this chapter is going to introduce, I would argue that treating fantasy as a broader umbrella term that contains every text that includes *unreal* elements can lead to confusion, as fantasy nowadays is also understood as a very specific genre. Thus, we could argue that Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* share characteristics and thus can be categorized under a term that is different from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* or any myths that Hume and other theorists like to put under the broader term of fantasy. The solution I suggest is that we should make a distinction between *the fantastic* and *fantasy*: by the fantastic, I understand all the elements that are unrealistic and non-mimetic, while fantasy should be used as the term for the genre, whose definition I am going to uncover later on.

Hume also highlights how, by creating her definition of the term, she does not wish “to relabel all western masterpieces ‘fantasy’, but fantasy *is an element* in nearly all kinds of literature, especially the narrative, the most important exceptions being realistic novels and some satiric and picaresque works.”<sup>157</sup> However, if we decide to follow her typology, how do we categorize those works that contemporary readers and audiences define as fantasy, like *Harry Potter*, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Witcher*? Again, instead of using the same terms for two interrelated but now entirely separate phenomena, I suggest that we should call the non-mimetic elements that are present in texts the *fantastic*, while creating a stricter and narrower definition for the *genre of fantasy*.

In the opening chapter of *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), Brian Attebery considers two definitions of fantasy: one of them refers to it as a formula, while the other one defines it as a mode. According to the author, fantasy is both a formula and a mode, however, while the former is too trivial, the latter is too vast, thus he prefers the concept of genre. Subsequently, Attebery decides to focus on fantasy as a genre, while uses the *fantastic* when talking about

---

<sup>155</sup> Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

the mode, as “the genre category does seem to be a useful way of designating stories that are more alike than required by the mode, and yet less uniform than dictated by the formula.”<sup>158</sup>

In Chapter One, “Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula”, Attebery suggests that if we take Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* as the center of fantasy, the genre has three essential features. The first one is the impossible, a break with reality, or “some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law.”<sup>159</sup> The second characteristic of the structure is the comic, which does not necessarily mean a happy ending: the comic feature only refers to the fact that fantasy begins with a problem that is solved by the end. The third feature is Tolkien’s “eucatastrophe”<sup>160</sup>, which creates wonder in the reader: according to Attebery, “[t]he concept of wonder, as a key to fantasy’s impact, may be best understood as an alternative formulation of the idea of estrangement.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, if we look at fantasy from a point-of-view where we look at Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* as the prototype of the genre, we can see how this form

makes use of both the fantastic mode, to produce the impossibilities, and the mimetic, to reproduce the familiar. The conventions of swords-and-sorcery are not part of the definition: the genre can include stories without hobbits or rings of power or evil magicians. Fantasy does impose many restrictions on the powers of the imagination, but in return it offers the possibility of generating not merely a meaning but an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness. This we call wonder.<sup>162</sup>

While in *Strategies of Fantasy* Brian Attebery discusses some strategies that can be used when analyzing fantastic texts, in his book *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (2014) he describes the history of fantasy as the history of *mythopoiesis* (modern myth-making).<sup>163</sup> In his understanding it was Christian myth that served as a model for the structure of fantasy – thus the main point of the genre is to rearrange, reframe, and reinterpret these myths, in order to redefine “the relationship between contemporary readers and mythic texts”.<sup>164</sup> Using John Clute’s term, he refers to the earlier versions of fantastic texts that used the fantastic mode as taproot texts. According to Clute,

---

<sup>158</sup> Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 11.

<sup>159</sup> Brian Attebery, *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 17.

<sup>160</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 75.

<sup>161</sup> Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 16.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>163</sup> Brian Attebery, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2014).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

[o]nly in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when (at least in the West) a HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS emerged among writers and readers, did a delimitable genre now called FANTASY appear. Before that there were writings which included the FANTASTIC – and such works can be described as taproot texts.<sup>165</sup>

Clute and Attebery list several examples that belong to this category: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Beowulf*, *Nibelungenlied*, *Edda*, *Mabinogion*, the Arthurian literary cycle, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In the chapter *Taxonomic Interlude: A Note on Genres* Attebery talks about how the fantastic can be found in many genres, and he comes back to the idea of defining the genres as “fuzzy sets” – a definition that was described in his earlier, well-known work, *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992). He proposed that “all genres are what logicians call fuzzy sets: categories defined not by a clear boundary or any defining characteristic but by resemblance to a single core example or group of examples (strategies)”.<sup>166</sup> We can say that a literary text or a film is *mostly* fantasy or is *like* fantasy, thus allowing us to understand how different genres can hybridize, like in the case of science fantasy. He comes to the conclusion that “the interesting question about any given story is not whether or not it is fantasy or science fiction or realistic novel, but rather what happens when we read it as one of those things”.<sup>167</sup> In the case of *Frankenstein*, for example, reading it as a philosophical Gothic novel, a horror story or a piece of science fiction creates very different readings.

In the other chapters Attebery talks about 20<sup>th</sup>-century fantasy writers (Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien) and how they were writing their stories based on Christian myths, and how the genre became popular in the 1960s. After the historical overview he discusses colonial fantasy, the growing popularity of angel stories, and postcolonial fantasy.

Following the footsteps of structuralist literary theorists and building on Todorov's definition of the fantastic, Lucie Armitt has written two books about the fantastic that, although give an interesting overview of how the fantastic can appear in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary texts, has unfortunately little to do with what we mean by fantasy since the 1950s (which is also the type of fantasy that this thesis is going to focus on). In *Theorising the Fantastic* (1996), Armitt examines how structuralist, psychoanalytic, feminist and postmodern theories can be used to think about the literature of the fantastic.<sup>168</sup> However, her second book

---

<sup>165</sup> John Clute and John Grant, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Orbit, 1999), 921.

<sup>166</sup> Attebery, *Stories about Stories*, 49.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>168</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, Interrogating Texts (London ; New York: Arnold : Distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin's Press, 1996).



on the genre, titled *Fantasy* (2020) is even more misleading: while readers of this volume would expect to read about the origins and the analysis of the genre, Armitt only provides a brief definition of the term, by concentrating on its non-mimetic nature. She claims that “the key aspect of any fantasy narrative is the mechanism whereby the reader is permitted entry into another world”<sup>169</sup>, thus creating a very loose definition that would also include science fiction.<sup>170</sup>

Instead of coming up with a definition of fantasy, Farah Mendlesohn, in her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) creates a systematic approach to the construction of the genre, concentrating on the language and the rhetorics of specific works. Mendlesohn’s main question was how a text becomes fantasy or “alternatively, the way the fantastic enters the text and the reader’s relationship to this”.<sup>171</sup> Based on this approach, she creates four categories of fantastic narratives: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal. In portal-quest fantasies the hero of the story enters the fantastic world through a portal, and there is usually a goal that must be achieved by the end. This category is usually descriptive and exploratory, and the reader gets to know the new world through the eyes of the protagonist (e.g. C.S. Lewis: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis Carroll: *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*). The second category is immersive fantasy, where the fantastic serves as a norm for the main character and the reader as well and there is no explanatory narrative (China Miéville: *Perdido Street Station*, or George R.R. Martin: *A Song of Ice and Fire*<sup>172</sup>). According to Mendlesohn, this category is very close to science fiction: “once the fantastic becomes assumed, it acquires a scientific cohesion all of its own”.<sup>173</sup> Intrusion fantasy is different in the sense that it is “the bringer of chaos”.<sup>174</sup> In these worlds, normality has its own structure, and when the fantastic element retreats from it, everything becomes organized again. Intrusion fantasies rely heavily on descriptions, as they have to explain how the fantastic elements enter the story, and they also have to keep the readers amazed and surprised in order to prevent them from becoming accustomed to the magic

---

<sup>169</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Fantasy*, The New Critical Idiom (London New York: Routledge, 2020), 10.

<sup>170</sup> Although Armitt fails to come up with her own exact definition of fantasy, she highlights that “[e]asily the best [definition] I have encountered, not least for its succinct clarity, is articulated by H. Bruce Franklin: ‘On one side lies fantasy, the realm of the impossible. On the other side lie all forms of fiction that purport to represent the actual, whether present or past ...’ (Franklin 2009: 23).” (Ibid., 4.)

<sup>171</sup> Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>172</sup> Although *A Song of Ice and Fire* could be considered to belong to the category of immersive fantasy, one might argue that it is also an intrusion fantasy. At the beginning of the story, the majority of the main characters are not familiar with the magical creatures and the magic that later appears in the book. Dragons do not exist anymore, the Others are part of old tales and legends, and the use of magic usually surprises most of the characters.

<sup>173</sup> Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 14.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

elements (Bram Stoker: *Dracula*, J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter* series). Mendlesohn's fourth category is called liminal fantasy, which is quite rare: in the world of the story there is some kind of leakage through a portal where the fantastic could enter the world, but the protagonist and the reader refuses to cross the threshold (e.g. Philip Pullman: *The Subtle Knife*). Mendlesohn links the term to Todorov's hesitation or uncertainty but refuses to use these expressions because she thinks "that hesitation is only one strategy employed by these writers".<sup>175</sup> Another key feature of the liminal fantasy is that although the main characters of the story do not find anything odd in the fantastic situation that arises, the reader realizes its strangeness and wants to remind the characters that something is wrong.

The last category that Mendlesohn mentions is called 'the irregulars' – all the texts that distort the forms she had mentioned, and they demonstrate "the incredible potential that exists in the genre".<sup>176</sup> Although the author built her taxonomy around creating categories of fantastic texts based on their rhetorical structures, at the beginning of the book she starts with a "health warning" describing her intention of not creating rules but "a portal into fantasy, a tour around the skeletons and exoskeletons of genre".<sup>177</sup> Mendlesohn's taxonomy can serve as a useful basis for the analysis of fantastic texts, since the relationship that the main characters have with the fantastic always plays an important role in the narratives. In the case of the *Harry Potter* series, for example, magic is introduced through the perspective of a young boy who only learnt about the existence of supernatural things on the day he turned 11, which keeps the wonder alive for the readers, who never know what they will get in the upcoming chapters. This solution also hints at the subtle message of the book series, which is that children may have a hidden potential that is waiting to be discovered. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is, however, a more complicated case, as the different point-of-view characters experience the fantastic in different ways: while Bran's narrative can be understood as portal-quest fantasy, as after he goes beyond the Wall, his journey of becoming the new Three-Eyed Raven begins, the immersive nature appears in the fact that dragons used to exist (and continue to do so, after the first volume) and magic plays an essential role in Essos. However, this immersive existence of the fantastic is closely related to the concept of thinning<sup>178</sup>, since as humans started to have more and more power in westerosi history, they started to destroy

---

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>178</sup> By the term *thinning* I understand the diminishment of a previous, more positive and healthy world, "the passing away of a higher and more intense reality". (Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 942.)

magic. Lastly, in the form of the Others, the fantastic gains an intrusive nature as well, since it is the looming danger of the White Walkers that endangers everyone in the realm.

In the examples mentioned above, we could see how different theorists think about fantasy in very different ways – however, the method that they use is that after choosing some texts that resemble the features of fantasy (or at least their general concept of it), they create a definition that can be used to categorize these texts. In this thesis, when talking about fantasy, I am going to define fantasy as a genre, and talk about the fantastic as a mode. Although most of the aforementioned texts came to the conclusion that fantasy is a mode, I argue that treating *fantasy* as a genre and talking about the *fantastic* as a mode can be more fruitful for two reasons. Firstly, even though the current academic landscape prefers talking about fantasy as a mode, the practicality of the real world shows that when it comes to the marketing and the categorization of books, films, series or television shows, fantasy is always used as a *genre*. One of the main reasons why this approach is criticized is that fantasy is everchanging, thus calling it a mode is more suitable; however, as Attebery also points out, all genres are fuzzy sets that change throughout the history of literature. If we include the mythic, fairy tale, Gothic and science fiction examples that were used by theorists who look at fantasy as a broader umbrella term, it complicates our understanding of what is meant by fantasy when it comes to 21<sup>st</sup>-century everyday language use, since although they share the inclusion of the fantastic as such, they are different from the more modern version of the term. Secondly, I would argue that the mode of these texts we call *fantasy* is also important to be taken into consideration, however, calling it *the fantastic* is more fitting since this way, it can include texts that do not necessarily belong to fantasy in the modern texts (e.g. examples of magic realism, fairy tales, etc.) but still employ fantastic elements. By applying these two terms, we could avoid overgeneralization and could also draw a cleaner line between fantasy narratives and stories that have some fantastic elements in them (like science fiction or horror), and could get a deeper understanding about the nature of these different categories.

In their article titled “What Is Fantasy?”, Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston also treat fantasy as a genre – they even go further by stating that it is a *transmedia* genre, as novels, movies, games and even paintings can be labelled as fantasy. The reason why even illustrations can be included in this definition is that, according to Laetz and Johnston,

narratives occupy a fundamental place within the genre. For paintings, drawings, and the like are only recognizably fantastic given some narrative background that tells us what wizards,

trolls, and dragons look like. Plausibly, it is what allows us to see that a drawing depicts an elf, for example, rather than a child with odd pointy ears.<sup>179</sup>

Although their definition of fantasy is complex, it gives a very detailed and thorough overview of the genre, by naming five characteristic features. In their understanding,

fantastic narratives are fictional action stories with prominent supernatural content that is inspired by myth, legends, or folklore. Further, this content is believed by few or no audience members and is believed by audiences to have been believed by another culture. Moreover, it is not naturalized, solely allegorical, merely parodic, simply absurd, or primarily meant to frighten audiences. These are all important elements for a definition of fantasy, though the relations they bear to one another might be debatable.<sup>180</sup>

While in most of the aforementioned theories wonder plays a crucial role in the definition of fantasy and the fantastic, Laetz and Johnston decided to omit this sense from their understanding of fantasy, claiming that although wonder can definitely appear in fantastic works, there are several examples where it simply does not play a role: one can think of B-movies and second-rate novels (or even dark fantasy, where the emphasis is on horror and dread, rather than wonder), or texts that are building on previous narrative traditions. Also, those who are experienced fantasy consumers “are unlikely to experience wonder at the supernatural content of these works, even if their interest in the genre partially stems from experiencing this as youths, when they likely first discovered it.”<sup>181</sup>

Building on the aforementioned theories, I argue that fantasy could be defined as a genre in which stories break with reality (although the degree to which it is different can depend on the story, since we can talk about more *realistic* fantasies, like *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where magic is so diminished that it only appears in certain cases), where the focus is on the fantastic instead of science (like in the case of science fiction) or the feelings of horror and dread (like in the case of horror). Fantasy narratives are also comic in nature, as they propose a problem that is solved by the end (which is usually connected to the problem of thinning), and they also have a rich mythical lore that can be expanded.

---

<sup>179</sup> Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston, “What Is Fantasy?,” *Philosophy and Literature* 32, no. 1 (2008): 161–62, doi:10.1353/phl.0.0013.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 168–69.

### 3.2. “[...] the genre is called fantasy – it’s meant to be unrealistic, you myopic manatee!”<sup>182</sup>

In a 2005 *Time* magazine article, writing about Martin’s then newest volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, titled *A Feast for Crows*, Lev Grossmann names Martin “the American Tolkien”. He states that although Martin is not the best-known fantasy writer in America, as Christopher Paolini, Robert Jordan and Ursula K. Le Guin are more widely acknowledged, “of those who work in the grand epic-fantasy tradition, Martin is by far the best”.<sup>183</sup> Grossmann’s catchy title for Martin soon became a catchphrase all over book covers and the internet, thus helping Martin attract an even greater fame.

However, even though both J.R.R. Tolkien and George R.R. Martin have made significant contributions to the fantasy genre, and their impact definitely left a mark in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-centuries, their epic fantasy series are different from each other. *The Lord of the Rings* is famous for its depiction of moral clarity and the Manichaean opposition of good and evil, and it lacks the depiction of sexuality and visual portrayal of brutality. In the meantime, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the polar opposite: with the delineation of sexual and violent scenes, Martin paints a more explicit, harsh and immersive picture about his fantastic world.

When it comes to the common characteristics of these two epic fantasy narratives, both of them share the same elements that are usually employed in fantasy narratives. Both of their settings resemble an age that is similar to the Middle Ages, where chivalric values are essential for the positive characters. The existence of magic and supernatural creatures is also intrinsic to both Middle Earth and Westeros, although in the case of the latter, thinning plays a stronger role. In both cases, the main characters are trying to fight an existential threat: while in *The Lord of the Rings*, the main enemy is Sauron and human greed for the One Ring complicates Frodo’s journey to destroy it, in *A Song of Ice and Fire* it is the Others who endanger humanity, while the power struggles between the ruling houses of Westeros distract people’s attention from the real danger. Lastly, both of these narratives have a very detailed, rich, mythical lore that serves as a background. Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion* (1977) serves as a legendarium of Middle Earth, giving a description of the history of the First Age of the World, while George R. R. Martin’s *Fire & Blood* (which is sometimes jokingly referred to as

---

<sup>182</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien vs George R. R. Martin, Epic Rap Battles of History, 2016, accessed: 17 May, 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAAp\\_luluo0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAAp_luluo0). Epic Rap Battles of History is a popular YouTube video series created by Nice Peter and epicLLOYD. They create rap battles featuring characters from history and popular culture. This particular quote is from the rap battle of J.R.R. Tolkien and G.R.R. Martin, where Tolkien is criticizing Martin for creating a fantasy series which is too realistic.

<sup>183</sup> Lev Grossman, “Books: The American Tolkien,” *Time*, November 13, 2005, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1129596,00.html>.

the *GRRMarillion*<sup>184</sup>) serves as a history of the House Targaryen from Aegon's Conquest to the regency of Aegon III Targaryen. From a publishing perspective, there is another major contrast between the two: while Martin's opus was written and edited by the author himself, *The Silmarillion* was only partly written by J. R. R. Tolkien, since the book was published posthumously, after the author's son, Christopher Tolkien completed and edited his father's manuscripts.

Although both of these fantastic worlds share some characteristics, they could not be more different from each other. Martin is frequently praised for the depiction of "morally gray" characters (Jamie Lannister, the Hound, Varys, Margaery Tyrell, etc.) and the illustration of sexuality and extreme violence. He also employs numerous point-of-view characters, whose personality has a great impact on how they see the world, which results in a somewhat unreliable narration – unlike in the case of Tolkien, where the events are narrated by an all-knowing, omniscient narrator. Because of all of these characteristics, Martin's prose is often deemed to be realistic,<sup>185</sup> thus seemingly contradicting the fantasy genre; however, his epic fantasy series still belongs to the genre.

In his book *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form*, Joseph Rex Young investigates how Martin follows the fantasy formulae to such good effect.<sup>186</sup> In the first chapter of his book, "The American Pratchett? – Muck and Morality", Young explores how *A Song of Ice and Fire* relates to *The Lord of the Rings*, and to what extent Martin can be called "the American Tolkien". When talking about Martin's role in fantasy, Lev Grossmann argues that

[w]hat really distinguishes Martin, and what marks him as a major force for evolution in fantasy, is his refusal to embrace a vision of the world as a Manichaean struggle between Good and Evil. Tolkien's work has enormous imaginative force, but you have to go elsewhere for moral complexity. Martin's wars are multifaceted and ambiguous, as are the men and women who wage them and the gods who watch them and chortle, and somehow that makes them mean more. A Feast for Crows isn't pretty elves against gnarly orcs. It's men and women slugging it out in the muck, for money and power and lust and love.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> "The Citadel: FAQ - 2.1.12. What Is Fire and Blood or the GRRMarillion?," *Westeros. The "A Song of Ice and Fire" Domain*, 3 November, 2014, accessed: 14 August, 2024, [https://www.westeros.org/Citadel/FAQ/Entry/What\\_is\\_Fire\\_and\\_Blood\\_or\\_the\\_GRRMarillion](https://www.westeros.org/Citadel/FAQ/Entry/What_is_Fire_and_Blood_or_the_GRRMarillion).

<sup>185</sup> Sandra Alvarez, "George R. R. Martin's Quest for Realism in *A Song of Ice and Fire*," *Medievalists.Net*, May 14, 2013, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.medievalists.net/2013/05/george-r-r-martins-quest-for-realism-in-a-song-of-ice-and-fire/>.

<sup>186</sup> Joseph Rex Young, *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form* (New York; London: Routledge, 2019), 4.

<sup>187</sup> Grossman, "Books."

The idea that Martin does not look at the world through a “good versus bad” perspective is unassailable, as all the point-of-view characters who appear in *A Song of Ice and Fire* have complex personalities. As the different chapters are focalized through the main characters, we can see through their narration how all of them believe that what they are doing is the *right* thing – however, the basis of what is *right* or *wrong* changes a lot, depending on their personal values. One of the most emblematic characters of the first volume, Ned Stark is fighting for justice: he wants to prove the realm that the three royal successors, Joffrey, Myrcella and Tommen are not Robert Baratheon’s biological children, so Joffrey’s claim to the throne is illegitimate – and as a result, stirs up a civil war. Daenerys Stormborn, the Targaryen princess is motivated by her right for the Iron Throne: she believes that since her father, King Aerys II Targaryen was killed during Robert’s Rebellion and she is the only survivor from the royal family, she is the rightful heir to the throne. While her intentions are good (she wants to free the slaves she encounters on Essos, and she cares about oppressed), she cannot deal with the consequences of her deeds: after freeing the Meereenese slaves, she realizes that the city cannot get out of the economic collapse that her action caused, and thus leaves Meereen. Robert Baratheon’s wife, Cersei Lannister is driven by her constant greed for power (and only cares about those that she loves), while Brienne of Tarth follows her strict ethical code driven by knightly virtues.

Young suggests that the statement that Martin utilizes morally ambiguous heroes while Tolkien paints a picture about the fight between good and evil has two main errors: in terms of their complexity, not only are Martin’s characters not so different from Tolkien’s (and the introduction of their moral ambiguity is also not an innovative, new phenomenon), but “the importance of his muck to the impression he creates of those characters”<sup>188</sup> is also overlooked. Young points out that E. R. Eddison, David Lindsay, Mervyn Peake and J. K. Rowling all raised questions about the nature of good and evil, and it is not something that Martin invented: “[a]s in Martin’s work, evil in Rowling’s world is a human thing; as in Peake’s, the literary supernatural highlights moral issues rather than putting such issues to rest.”<sup>189</sup> It even appears in *The Lord of the Rings* in the form of the One Ring, which in a way corrupts the ringbearer and brings out the worst of the person who uses it.

Young also emphasizes how the role of dirt in the novels is not simply to make the story more realistic, but it is a deliberate authorial choice that contrasts the story to Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Building on Northrop Frye’s ideas about narrative registers, Young

---

<sup>188</sup> Young, *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form*, 11.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

concludes that while Tolkien concentrates on high-mimetic modality, Martin builds on irony, but both of them apply these ideas to a medieval setting. He points out that ‘medieval’ has two sides: on the one hand, it can suggest an antique glamour (a world of knights and princesses, a fight for noble values), but the term can also be used for primitive barbarity (cf. the dark Middle Ages). According to Young,

[t]he point is that just as Tolkien edits his narrative discourse to recreate the heroic effects of medieval literature, Martin perpetuates a recognisable tradition in *medievalist* literature in order to critique the medieval world. Westeros is not filthy due to realism. Martin’s world is awash in ordure for the same reason that directors such as Terry Gilliam order extras to smear mud on their faces – to encourage the impression that the story is set in an unjust, backward time and place, happening to the reader’s intellectual and cultural inferiors.<sup>190</sup>

However, dirt plays another important role that is connected to Frye’s ironic modality: *A Song of Ice and Fire* is full of characters who want to be looked up to by others, but “end up being looked down upon as vainglorious fools whose arrogance led them to predictable humiliation.”<sup>191</sup> Two great examples are connected to Tywin Lannister, the Lord of Casterly Rock, who always wanted to be in charge, constantly fighting for more power – however, he is killed by Tyrion Lannister, his son whom he despised, in a privy chamber. Martin also dedicates several pages to the description of Tywin’s funeral, and how even though he was praised as “an *extraordinary* man”<sup>192</sup>, no one around him can think about anything but the hideous smell of his rotting corpse. Thus, according to Young, Martin’s characters are *alazons*, who see themselves greater than they actually are – “[i]n this sense, Martin is essentially the American *anti*-Tolkien.”<sup>193</sup>

Although the world of Westeros is full of characters who like to think highly of themselves, while they are constantly put in ironic situations by the author, in order for Martin to critique chivalric ideals, some of his characters gain dignity sometimes. Young mentions the example of Syrio Forel, the “dancing master”<sup>194</sup> who trains Arya Stark to become a swordfighter. When in the first volume, Ser Meryn Trant wants to take Arya from Forel’s

---

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> George R. R. Martin, *A Feast for Crows* (London: Harper Voyager, 2011), 119.

<sup>193</sup> Young, *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form*, 29.

<sup>194</sup> George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones* (London: Harper Voyager, 2011), 514.



lesson, Syrio fights Trant and the Lannister guards nobly and heroically, thus dying a high-mimetic death in honor.<sup>195</sup>

Young claims that Martin's use of the ironic term and the fact that his characters gain dignity sometimes makes him very similar to Terry Pratchett, as both of them follow the same authorial strategies. Both Pratchett and Martin use lots of irony and toilet humour, and they keep introducing different *alazons* in order to mock the literary convention – thus, Young claims that instead of calling Martin “the American Tolkien”, it is much more fitting to think of him as “the American Pratchett.”

Because of the detailed depiction of violence, sexuality, and bodily functions, and the unpredictability of the plot, the narrative of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is often deemed to be realistic. One of the reasons why the epic fantasy series became popular is that readers never know what to expect: after the infamous death of Eddard Stark, whom many believed to be the hero of the story, readers realized that Martin's world does not work the way that the majority of fantasy narratives do, where the hero always prevails. Consequently, the series garnered widespread attention for the fact that in the first five books, more than 300 characters died.<sup>196</sup> All of these features make *A Song of Ice and Fire* a *realistic* fantasy, in the sense that just like in the real world, not everyone gets justice. Characters who are on the wrong side of the ethical spectrum can gain power (the most famous example being Ramsay Bolton), while the fate of those who are more deserving (Ned, Arya, or Sansa Stark) usually takes a turn for the worst.

Subsequently, Martin successfully takes the elements of the real world and recombines them in a way that the ethical problems that appear in this quasi-fantastic setting can be translated to an eternal human experience. The constant fight for power, human greed and pettiness, and the ignorance of global problems are all themes that Martin introduces in a fantastic setting so that the readers can think about these contemporary problems in an escapist narrative. To borrow Rosemary Jackson's idea about fantasy, Martin's text is also subversive because it subverts all the ideals that people have about the Middle Ages: instead of painting a picture about an idealistic world, where knights are noble, and beauty and virtue are qualities that people aspire to, Martin's fantasy world is full of muck, gore and filth, to show a more realistic view about the world. The fact that magic is diminishing and thinning is

---

<sup>195</sup> Although in the books it is not stated whether Syrio actually died or not, as Arya flees and does not see Forel's death – readers can still suppose that as Syrio was left with a broken wooden sword, he could not have escaped his tragic but noble fate.

<sup>196</sup> Danny Loughlin, “Game of Thrones Book Stats – A Song of Ice and Fire Series – WordsRated,” *Wordsrated*, November 20, 2023, accessed: 15 August, 2024, <https://wordsrated.com/game-of-thrones-stats/>.

an integral part of this universe might prove that as humanity in *A Song of Ice and Fire* lost their connection to the supernatural, their world started to crumble.

Since Martin's epic fantasy series is still not finished, as the fifth volume came out in 2011 and the author is still working on the sixth volume, titled *The Winds of Winter*, one can only wonder whether this narrative will have a comic ending in the sense that the main problem (the power struggles between the ruling houses and the looming threat of the Others) will be solved or not. As the television adaptation showed, the wheel was broken: the Others were destroyed by Arya Stark, while Daenerys Targaryen was killed so that history would not repeat itself, and the rightful king was chosen by the representatives of the ruling houses. Bran the Broken was the ideal candidate for a king, since him being the Three Eyed Raven ensured that he will rule the Six Kingdoms in a fair way, without his own personal needs coming to the fore. However, the question of whether Martin will end the story in the same way, is still left unanswered.

### **3.3. Speculative Fiction: The Ultimate Transmedia Genre?**

Fantasy and science fiction universes had a great impact on popular culture in the last couple of decades. This phenomenon could be traced back to the early 20th-century, when comic books started to become more and more successful; however, just as in the case of fantasy fiction, their success had only started to flourish among a wider audience in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21st-centuries – which was greatly influenced by the numerous comic book film adaptations that started to thrive in the early 2000s.

If we look at the nature of modern transmedia storytelling, where a narrative universe is usually depicted in the form of books, films, television shows, video games and merchandise, we can see how a great number of these stories belong to the category of speculative fiction. Two of the most influential comic publishers, Marvel and DC have dominated the last 20 years of cinematic history, as not only do they keep coming up with new adaptations every year, but they have also started to create multiverses in order to attract an even bigger audience.<sup>197</sup> The *Star Wars* franchise also keeps creating new films and both animated and live-action series to cater to the needs of younger and older fans as well. The adaptations of fantasy stories like *Harry Potter*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Witcher* or *The Wheel of Time* also helped the evolution of transmedia franchises, but this phenomenon can be observed in the

---

<sup>197</sup> A. A. Dowd, "Flash in the Pan: Why Multiplex Multiverses Are Destined to Fail," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2023, sec. Film, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/jun/15/the-flash-movie-multiverse-failure-marvel-dc>.

case of science fiction too (*Star Trek*, *The Matrix*, *The Expanse* etc.). In this section, I am going to propose that the reason why a vast number of transmedia stories belong to the category of speculative fiction (mostly fantasy and science fiction) is because this genre has all the qualities that a transmedia story can successfully exploit – thus, speculative fiction can be understood as the ultimate transmedia genre.

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, Henry Jenkins emphasizes the encyclopedic nature of transmedia narratives, and how “[m]ost often, transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories.”<sup>198</sup> If we think about fantasy and science fiction, one of the core elements of both genres is the application of several characters and the detailed world-building. Once an author decides to create a speculative universe, they have to describe it in a way that the reader is able to distinguish it from the real world: the landscape, the way society works, the different rules all have to be introduced so that the reader can create a detailed mental image about the fictional world. Another core element of speculative stories is the creation of myths and/or a detailed lore, without which the narrative would not make as much sense: in the case of both fantasy and science fiction, the examples could include the origin story of certain species, races or characters, the history of a peculiar place (a continent, a country, a colony or a strange city) and the rules and laws of society, magic or the fictional world. This detailed worldbuilding allows creators to expand these speculative universes to infinity and beyond, as the deeper we dig into the different elements of the lore, the more gaps we find that need to be explored.<sup>199</sup> In the case of *Game of Thrones*, for example, once readers and the audience of the show started to become interested in the world of Westeros, George R. R. Martin, Elio M. García Jr. and Linda Antonsson started to work on *The World of Ice & Fire: The Untold History of Westeros and the Game of Thrones* (2014), the companion book for *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Although *A Song of Ice and Fire* was written only by Martin without any co-authors, even the author started to get lost in the history of Westeros. On his blog, Martin states that

[...] several years ago, when we were working on the gorgeous illustrated worldbook/concordance that was eventually published as THE WORLD OF ICE & FIRE, I wrote a number of ‘sidebar’s about Westerosi history. Actually, I got rather carried away, until I found I had

---

<sup>198</sup> Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling 101.”

<sup>199</sup> This is also the reason why fanfiction is thriving in the case of speculative universes: the detailed worldbuilding of these stories inspire fans to think about certain characters and background stories creatively, or even create alternative storylines.

written 350,000 words of sidebars for a book that was supposed to have only 50,000 words of text (it ended up having a lot more than that, actually). Since I had only reached the regency of Aegon III the Dragonbane, and had largely skipped over Jaehaerys I the Conciliator, however, it became apparent that my sidebars were going to burst the book.

So we pulled them all out, including only severely abridged versions of the main events in THE WORLD OF ICE AND FIRE. The full versions, much longer and unabridged, will eventually be published in a fake history tome to be called FIRE & BLOOD (and sometimes just the GRRMarillion), but since that one is years away, I included excerpts (again abridged, though not as severely) in DANGEROUS WOMEN and ROGUES. That's where “The Princess and the Queen” and “The Rogue Prince” came from.<sup>200</sup>

This is how the history of House Targaryen, *Fire & Blood* (2018) was born, part of which was later adapted into the famous HBO prequel of *Game of Thrones*, titled *House of the Dragon* (2022– ). The origin story is a perfect example of what happens when a speculative narrative universe outgrows itself: by creating a completely fictional world with its own rules and history, authors can set the self-expansion of these universes into motion.

Although in this example both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Fire & Blood* are texts that only became adapted once they were written by the author, the gaps in these stories could be explored on different types of media channels as well. According to Jenkins, another feature of transmedia stories is that “each medium does what it does best.”<sup>201</sup> thus, the different elements of these stories could be adapted or written on the platform where they work most efficiently. In the case of speculative fiction, novels help readers to immerse in the fictional world while they also let us take a glimpse into the minds of the main characters, while the films and series (with the help of CGI and modern technology) allow audiences to escape into fantastic visual landscapes. One of the main reasons why fantasy and science fiction only started to become popular genres on screens is because before the availability of computer technology, it was much harder to visualize *nonexistent* things: props could be used, of course, but computer-generated imagery made it easier to show magical creatures, landscapes, or battles in space. This is also true for video games, which – alongside the visual experience – provide a different type of immersion, in which players are able to make their own characters and try themselves out in the fictional world. While in the case of films and series audiences are usually interested in the visual representation of fantastic worlds, video games

---

<sup>200</sup> George R. R. Martin, “A Bit More (Fake) History,” *Not A Blog*, January 2017, accessed: 21 July, 2023, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/519773.html>.

<sup>201</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 98.

that are set in speculative universes encourage players to explore their fantastic settings – and the encyclopedic nature of these narrative universes allow each media platform to find their own pieces of the puzzle that they can introduce to their target audiences. Furthermore, the world of these speculative narratives is interesting from a production point-of-view, since if the film- or showrunners are able to create a fascinating visual depiction of a text that only existed on the page, they can attract a wider audience. Lastly, we should also take into consideration that both fantasy and science fiction started to become more and more popular in literature: while in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, they have mainly been considered niche genres, popular literary adaptations like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* contributed a lot to the growing popularity of the genre in literature as well, which also boosted the production of speculative adaptations.

With this subchapter, I wanted to argue that speculative narratives, especially fantasy and science fiction can serve as fruitful materials for transmedia narratives, since they can be extended almost indefinitely – however, it does not mean that transmedia narratives necessarily *have to* belong to any of these genres. There are several examples of transmedia narratives that belong to other genres, like *Sherlock Holmes*, *Dexter*, or even *Yellowstone* – however, I would argue that the majority of transmedia narratives still belong to fantasy and science fiction.

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, we cannot think about transmedia storytelling and media convergence without taking the industry into consideration. Today's media landscape is motivated by consumption, just like in the past: the more the audience is interested in a certain media product, the more money that product will make. Fantasy and science fiction universes are not only beneficial for media conglomerates because they are more popular than ever (just think of the successes of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *Game of Thrones*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* or *Black Mirror*), but also because by building on already existing fan interest, these media conglomerates can create an almost infinite number of prequels, sequels, spin-offs and adaptations based on the encyclopedic richness of these fantastic, speculative works. Once audiences get attached to a certain story or a world, they will likely be eager to consume more of the same kind of material. Although this approach could be seemingly true for other genres as well, stories that are set in an imaginary place and are different from the real world have more *unknown* elements that have to be discovered than those that are more similar to the world that we live in. The history of the *Game of Thrones* franchise is a perfect example for this phenomenon: its origins lie in the publication of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which was later adapted into HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019). Based on the success of

the novels and the television show, several games were introduced,<sup>202</sup> and fans became so interested in the history of Westeros, that HBO decided to create several prequels, sequels and spin-offs that are set in Martin's fictional world.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> Dave Trumbore, "10 'Game of Thrones' Games That Best Adapted George R.R. Martin's 'A Song of Ice and Fire,'" *Collider*, May 15, 2021, accessed: 22 July, 2023, <https://collider.com/best-game-of-thrones-games/>.

<sup>203</sup> Federica Bocco, "Every Game of Thrones Spinoff in Development HBO, Ranked by Hype," *Winter Is Coming*, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://winteriscoming.net/2023/04/08/every-game-thrones-spin-off-coming-hbo-ranked-hype-level/>.

## 4. Prequels, Sequels, and Everything Else: the Proliferation of the *Game of Thrones* Universe

The transmedial world of *Game of Thrones* is a typical example for the snowball effect, when a certain content starts spreading over different types of media. The history of the fantastic narrative universe started in 1996, when George R. R. Martin published the first volume of his epic fantasy saga, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, titled *A Game of Thrones*. Since then, four other books were published as parts of the series, but the author also wrote several further short stories and novels that are set in the fantastic world of Westeros. Although the books soon became popular in the fantasy community<sup>204</sup>, the series turned out to be an international sensation only after a serialized screen adaptation debuted on HBO on April 17, 2011. However, thanks to the immense success of these stories amongst fans all over the world, the *Game of Thrones* universe was soon expanded with other incarnations as well, including spin-off series, and video and tabletop games. In this chapter, I am going to discuss the different elements of the narrative universe of *Game of Thrones* and how they are related to each other, while also taking a look at the other parts of the franchise that do not contribute to the stories, but can still serve as entry points to this fantastic universe, including merchandise, tabletop games or HBO's media campaign, *The Maester's Path*.

### 4.1. The Books

Before the success of *Game of Thrones*, George R. R. Martin had previously established a writing career in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that extended over different fields.<sup>205</sup> He had already written several science fiction and horror short stories, published his stand-alone science fiction novel, titled *Dying of the Light* (1977), worked as a writer and a producer in the television industry, and contributed a lot to the famous *Wild Cards* series as an editor, compiler and concept-originator.<sup>206</sup> One of his most prominent stories, 'Sandkings' won the Nebula and Hugo awards in 1980, in the year when he became the first author ever to receive two Hugo Awards in the same year for publishing 'The Way of Cross and Dragon'.<sup>207</sup> Martin also wrote

---

<sup>204</sup> The first volume won the 1997 Locus award after a year of its publication, and was nominated for the Nebula Award in the same year. ["1997 Award Winners & Nominees," *Worlds Without End*, accessed August 19, 2024, [https://www.worldswithoutend.com/books\\_year\\_index.asp?Year=1997.](https://www.worldswithoutend.com/books_year_index.asp?Year=1997.)]

<sup>205</sup> cf. Chapter 5: Screen and Text: The Relationship between George R. R. Martin's Works and the Screen Industries

<sup>206</sup> Gardner Dozois, "George R. R. Martin," in *Dreamsongs I*, by George R. R. Martin (London: Gollancz, 2006), 1–2.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

two influential horror novels in the Great Horror Boom period of the 1980s: the vampire novel *Fevre Dream* (1982) and the cult classic *Armageddon Rag* (1983), which is known as a “rock’n’roll horror apocalypse”.<sup>208</sup> After spending the majority of the ‘80s in the television industry (by becoming a story editor on *Twilight Zone* and a producer of the CBS television series *Beauty and the Beast*), Martin took his first steps towards international fame when he coined the idea of a fantasy trilogy in the early 1990s. One of the reasons why he decided to give up working as a scriptwriter is because the ideas he coined were deemed to be too long and expensive to make, while fiction writing gave him freedom to create “gigantic” stories, not caring about whether they can be translated to the screen or not.<sup>209</sup>

The origin of the *Game of Thrones* universe dates back to the summer of 1991, when Martin suddenly had an idea for a scene, written from a young boy’s point of view: the child, surrounded by other men, sees a beheading, and then they find some direwolf pups in the snow.<sup>210</sup> After writing the story – which became the first chapter of *A Game of Thrones* – Martin realised that there is more to it than a single short story, so he continued writing and came up with the idea of creating a longer fantasy narrative: as a result, in 1996, the first volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, *A Game of Thrones* was published.<sup>211</sup> Before the publication, however, although Martin sold the idea to his agent in 1994, the publisher wanted a trilogy. But as Martin kept writing and came up with 1300 pages of the first book, he realized that the series should include four books, which later grew to six, and, eventually, the author settled on the number seven: “[s]even books is good. Seven kingdoms, seven gods, seven books. It has a certain elegance to it. So that’s my story now and I’m sticking to it.”<sup>212</sup> The author chose the series title *A Song of Ice and Fire* because he saw two main struggles beyond the game of thrones in the narrative: the looming approach of the Others and Daenerys Targaryen’s dragons (although according to Martin, it is not the only possible

---

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>209</sup> T. L. Stanley, “George R.R. Martin’s Reaction to Bad TV Experience: Writing ‘Game of Thrones,’” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2010, accessed: 12 March, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/show-tracker/story/2010-05-03/george-r-r-martins-reaction-to-bad-tv-experience-writing-game-of-thrones>.

<sup>210</sup> Mikal Gilmore, “George R.R. Martin: The Rolling Stone Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, April 23, 2014, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/george-r-r-martin-the-rolling-stone-interview-242487/>.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Dave Itzkoff, “His Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy: George R. R. Martin Talks ‘Game of Thrones,’” *The New York Times*, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://archive.nytimes.com/artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/his-beautiful-dark-twisted-fantasy-george-r-r-martin-talks-game-of-thrones/>.



meaning); and as he has been obsessed with songs as well, he decided to title the saga *A Song of Ice and Fire*.<sup>213</sup>

The origin story of the epic fantasy series points to the idea that transmediality may have already been encoded into the narrative to a certain extent, as just like the media franchise that was born after Benioff and Weiss decided to adapt the books, the plot of *A Song of Ice and Fire* also unfolded in a similar way, following the snowball effect logic. The concept was originated in a single scene, however, as Martin started to think about the narrative world, the different characters came to life and they started to complicate and widen the story even further. One of the most emblematic examples for this phenomenon may be the famous Meereenese knot, which refers to the converging plotlines in Meereen in the fifth volume, *A Dance with Dragons*. When Martin was working on these chapters, he needed some time to sort out how the different storylines will interact with each other, since there were too many characters in one place, which complicated the narrative. As Martin observed:

Now I can explain things. It was a confluence of many, many factors: let's start with the offer from Xaro to give Dany ships, the refusal of which then leads to Qarth's declaration of war. Then there's the marriage of Daenerys to pacify the city. Then there's the arrival of the Yunkish army at the gates of Meereen, there's the order of arrival of various people going her way (Tyrion, Quentyn, Victarion, Aegon, Marwyn, etc.), and then there's Daario, this dangerous sellsword and the question of whether Dany really wants him or not, there's the plague, there's Drogon's return to Meereen...

All of these things were balls I had thrown up into the air, and they're all linked and chronologically entwined. The return of Drogon to the city was something I explored as happening at different times. For example, I wrote three different versions of Quentyn's arrival at Meereen: one where he arrived long before Dany's marriage, one where he arrived much later, and one where he arrived just the day before the marriage (which is how it ended up being in the novel). And I had to write all three versions to be able to compare and see how these different arrival points affected the stories of the other characters. Including the story of a character who actually hasn't arrived yet.<sup>214</sup>

From this quote we can see that Martin's authorial technique is built on causality: he sets certain actions into motion, which latter converge to create the narrative. However, since

---

<sup>213</sup> Eric Cogan, "George R.R Martin Interview," *Fantasy Online Network*, August 18, 2004, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040818173139/http://www.fantasyonline.net/cgi-bin/newspro/101242423282166.shtml>.

<sup>214</sup> "The Citadel: So Spake Martin - July 2012," *Westeros. The "A Song of Ice and Fire" Domain*, July 31, 2012, accessed: 16 August, 2024, <https://www.westeros.org/Citadel/SSM/Month/2012/07/>.

Martin utilizes numerous characters and places at the same time, the plot became overly complicated, and brought the possibility of transmediality with itself as well. *A Song of Ice and Fire* mainly concentrates on the events in the Seven Kingdoms and the North in Westeros, and parts of the continent of Essos, following Daenerys Targaryen – however, Essos only consists of nine different regions, each of them having their own history and mythology (the Free Cities, the Kingdom of Sarnor, the Dothraki Sea, the Shivering Sea, the Valyrian Peninsula, Slaver’s Bay and Ghiscar, Lhazar, Qarth, and the Eastern part of Essos). The reason why transmediality is encoded in the book series is that it employs many characters and places, and thus contains such a vast amount of narrative potential that it may seem almost natural that it became a transmedia storyworld. The rich and detailed worldbuilding of *A Song of Ice and Fire* allows the narrative to be adapted and expanded to different platforms as well, while its serial nature also means that transmediality is encoded in the narrative. The book series is not only *serial* in the sense that it consists of five volumes, but also in the way that it mixes several major storylines together, which allows the text to be a great source material for a quality television series – a feature that contributed to the serial’s success on HBO. As Dan Hassler-Forest highlights, *Game of Thrones* “combines the cinematic visual spectacle of pseudo-medieval high fantasy with the tonal register of adult-orientated quality TV”,<sup>215</sup> thus contributing to HBO’s brand of quality television.

Although Martin’s saga is now famous all over the world, it did not have a huge success at the time of its first publication, because the market for an epic fantasy series was limited, since the genre only had a niche readership.<sup>216</sup> In the 1990s, medievalist fantasy started to rule to fantasy market, and the three most successful authors of this period (Robert Jordan, Terry Goodkind, and George R. R. Martin) were commercially persuaded to write indefinite series, as from the late 1970s, fantasy books started to become longer and longer.<sup>217</sup> However, fans of speculative fiction<sup>218</sup> started to spread the word, and the series (which was still intended to be a trilogy) published by HarperCollins became more and more popular.<sup>219</sup> Robert Jordan, the author of *The Wheel of Time* also supported Martin’s novel by writing an endorsement for

---

<sup>215</sup> Dan Hassler-Forest, “Game of Thrones: Quality Television and the Cultural Logic of Gentrification,” *TV/Series* 6 (2014): 165, doi:10.4000/tvseries.323.

<sup>216</sup> Alison Flood, “Game of Thrones: An Epic Publishing Story,” *The Guardian*, August 5, 2016, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/05/game-of-thrones-an-epic-publishing-story-george-rr-martin>.

<sup>217</sup> Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, Revised and updated edition (Faringdon, Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2012), chap. 9, para. 15.3.

<sup>218</sup> Before *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Martin was an accomplished science fiction writer, thus many of the first readers of his fantasy series have been fans of his science fiction and horror stories.

<sup>219</sup> Flood, “Game of Thrones.”

the cover of the volume, which turned lots of readers towards *A Game of Thrones*.<sup>220</sup> The year of the publication may also have helped the growing success of *A Game of Thrones*, since there were four other important fantasy novels that were published in 1996 as well: Diana Gabaldon's fourth volume of the Outlander series, *Drums of Autumn*; Robin Hobb's *Royal Assassin*; the seventh *The Wheel of Time* book, *A Crown of Swords*; and Terry Goodkind's *Blood of the Fold*.<sup>221</sup> All of the aforementioned books were already popular in the fantasy community, which created a saturated market for the readership; however, it also shows that the popularity of fantasy has been on the rise.

The second volume, *A Clash of Kings* (1999) became a *New York Times Bestseller* in 1999,<sup>222</sup> which was also the year when producers and filmmakers started to become interested in creating a feature film about the epic fantasy saga.<sup>223</sup> The third volume, *A Storm of Swords* (2000) also ended up on the *New York Times Bestseller* list,<sup>224</sup> and the fourth one, *A Feast for Crows* (2005) was published four years later. Martin's original plan was that the fourth volume would have been *A Dance with Dragons*, which would have been set five years after the events of the third book, so that the young characters can mature and the dragons can become larger; however, during the process of writing he realized that writing so many flashbacks (as he cannot pretend that nothing happened in five years) would not be a good solution.<sup>225</sup> As the author was slowly surpassing the length of the third volume with the fourth one with 1500 pages of manuscript, his publishers suggested to split the novel into Part One and Two, but Martin objected, saying that

Part One would have had no resolution whatsoever for 18 viewpoint characters and their 18 stories. Of course this is all part of a huge megaseries so there is not a complete resolution yet in any of the volumes, but I try to give a certain sense of completion at the end of each volume – that a movement of the symphony has wrapped up, so to speak.<sup>226</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> Gregory Kirschling, "George R.R. Martin Answers Your Questions," *Entertainment Weekly*, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://ew.com/article/2007/11/27/george-rr-martin-answers-your-questions/>.

<sup>221</sup> David Barnett, "How Game of Thrones Achieved World Domination... Long before the TV Show Even Aired," *The Independent*, April 16, 2019, accessed: 17 May, 2025, [https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long\\_reads/game-of-thrones-season-8-books-novels-publishing-final-series-a8855126.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/game-of-thrones-season-8-books-novels-publishing-final-series-a8855126.html).

<sup>222</sup> "BEST SELLERS: February 21, 1999," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1999, sec. Books, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/21/books/best-sellers-february-21-1999.html>.

<sup>223</sup> Itzkoff, "His Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy."

<sup>224</sup> "BEST SELLERS: November 19, 2000," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2000, sec. Books, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/19/books/best-sellers-november-19-2000.html>.

<sup>225</sup> "Locus Online: George R.R. Martin Interview Excerpts," accessed July 22, 2023, <http://www.locusmag.com/2005/Issues/11Martin.html>.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

However, as the manuscript became longer and longer, and Martin had to think about the physical limits, he took a friend's suggestion and divided the story into two volumes based on geography,<sup>227</sup> thus, *A Feast for Crows* does not cover the events of Essos and the North. The fourth volume became a *New York Times* bestseller almost instantly,<sup>228</sup> and Lev Grossmann referred to Martin as "the American Tolkien",<sup>229</sup> which may have contributed to his growing success as a catchy marketing slogan. However, after the publication of the fourth volume, many fans and critics were disappointed by the fact that many of the cliffhangers that were left in the third volume were not resolved in *A Feast for Crows*<sup>230</sup> – and readers had to wait another 6 years to find out what happened to their favorite characters. In the meantime, HBO announced that they are going to adapt *A Song of Ice and Fire* into a television series, and the first season (which had 10 episodes) premiered on April 17, 2011.

*A Dance with Dragons* was published in July 2011, and became the longest book of the series – and the last one that Martin has written up until the time of writing this thesis. According to James Poniewozik, one of the reasons why the fifth book took so many years to write is that Martin was trying to untangle "'the Meerreenese knot'—that is, if I understand him correctly, making the chronology and characters mesh up as various threads converged on Dany".<sup>231</sup> Although the book managed to go further in the timeline than its predecessor, there is at least one battle that the author could not include because of time constraints, and he also ended several characters' storylines with cliff-hangers.<sup>232</sup>

The sixth volume, *Winds of Winter* has been in the working since 2011, and left many fans of the epic fantasy saga disappointed as although Martin has delayed the publication date several times, it still has not been published. In November 2023, Martin stated that "I have like 1,100 pages written but I still have hundreds more pages to go. It's a big mother of a book for whatever reason. Maybe I should've started writing smaller books when I began this

---

<sup>227</sup> Dinitia Smith, "A Fantasy Realm Too Vile for Hobbits," *The New York Times*, December 12, 2005, sec. Books, accessed: 22 July, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/12/books/a-fantasy-realm-too-vile-for-hobbits.html>.

<sup>228</sup> "BEST SELLERS: November 27, 2005," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2005, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/27/books/arts/best-sellers-november-27-2005.html>.

<sup>229</sup> See the previous chapter.

<sup>230</sup> Laura Miller, "Just Write It!," *The New Yorker*, April 4, 2011, accessed: 4 January, 2024, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/04/11/just-write-it>.

<sup>231</sup> James Poniewozik, "The Problems of Power: George R.R. Martin's *A Dance With Dragons*," *Time*, July 12, 2011, accessed: 4 January, 2024, <https://entertainment.time.com/2011/07/12/the-problems-of-power-george-r-r-martins-a-dance-with-dragons/>.

<sup>232</sup> James Hibberd, "The Fantasy King," *Entertainment Weekly*, July 22, 2011, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://ew.com/article/2011/07/22/fantasy-king/>.

but it's tough".<sup>233</sup> While the sixth volume is currently in the making, the last one (which is currently titled *A Dream of Spring*) is still in the planning phase. The author shared several chapters from his manuscript (which I am going to detail later on), however, in 2017, answering a fan's comment on his blog he stated that he is not going to share any more chapters because he feels that he shared too much of the book.<sup>234</sup>

As I have previously discussed, the length of this epic fantasy series holds a lot of potential, since the vastness of the narrative supports the creation of different media incarnations that are building on certain elements of the story (characters, origin stories, a special event or a myth). The length of epic fantasy series explains a lot about the specificity of fantasy, since it requires a special approach by the readership. First of all, readers of fantasy have to be dedicated in order to commit to a certain narrative, since it takes a lot of time and effort to read a series of novels that is thousands of pages long and employs an incredible number of characters. However, as most of these narratives are highly immersive, once the audience becomes invested in the story, it is very easy to continue their journey of discovering the following volumes and other contents that are connected to the narrative. This, in turn, creates high audience engagement, and thus the recipe for a successful transmedia franchise is born. The intense dedication and perseverance that these fantasy texts require is in direct opposition to the trend that we can see happening around us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where, in the age of social media, people are more used to short-form content than longer ones. Consequently, the length of these fantastic works could be a major drawback, since the consumption of epic fantasy series can be too demanding and tiresome for the younger audience who is more used to shorter content – however, once readers decide to give the text a try and fall in love with the story, the immersive nature of the genre will likely keep them hooked. However, it should also be noted that with the growing popularity of reading on different social platforms and the emergence of reading-communities like *booktok* (on TikTok), *bookstagram* (on Instagram) or *booktube* (on YouTube), even the younger generation of readers tend to turn to longer forms of literature, as lots of book series are promoted on these platforms (especially when it comes to fantasy, like Sarah J. Maas's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* or *Throne of Glass*, or Rebecca Yarros's *The Empyrean* series).

Moreover, as epic fantasy series grow out to be massive franchises (just as it happened with one of the first speculative franchises, *Star Wars*), it becomes much harder to invest

---

<sup>233</sup> Ryan Dinsdale, "George R.R. Martin Has Written 1,100 Pages of The Winds of Winter, the Same Number as Last Year," *IGN*, November 20, 2023, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.ign.com/articles/george-rr-martin-has-written-1100-pages-of-the-winds-of-winter-the-same-number-as-last-year>.

<sup>234</sup> Martin, "A Bit More (Fake) History."

enough time and energy to get to know the whole narrative universe after the audience finds an entry point that they find enjoyable enough. Transmediality, in this case, can also be a beneficial factor, since if people become invested in a certain visual or interactive material, they may be more likely to turn to the textual examples of the narrative universe. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, many fans became avid readers of the books after they cultivated a deep interest in the television adaptation (although in the case of transmedia universes, this process can happen in any direction).

Because of the massive success of the television show, *Game of Thrones* became synonymous with *A Song of Ice and Fire*; however, during the years the epic fantasy saga grew into a whole textual universe by including prequels and several companion books. The first prequels of the story of *A Game of Thrones* were published between 1998 and 2010, and were later released together in a collection titled *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* (2015). The novellas describe the adventures of Dunk and Egg, the future Lord Commander of the Kingsguard and the future king Aegon Targaryen; *The Hedge Knight* (1998), *The Sworn Sword* (2003) and *The Mystery Knight* (2010) are set 90 years before the events of the first volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The fate of the Dunk and Egg stories were similar to that of the epic fantasy series, as they grew to be larger than Martin originally intended. According to the author,

[m]y original intent was to publish all the Dunk & Egg stories in a series of anthologies, and then collect them all together in one big book. But by the time of “The Mystery Knight,” it became plain that the stories were just too long, and there were going to be too many of them. So instead of one big book, the plan now is for a series of Dunk & Egg collections, each comprised of three novellas.<sup>235</sup>

Martin also wrote several stories about the history of the House Targaryen; *The Princess and the Queen, or, the Blacks and the Greens* (2013) and its prequel, *The Rogue Prince, or, the King’s Brother* (2014) are set hundreds of years before the events of *A Game of Thrones*, and they chronicle the story of the rivalry and its origin between Targaryen Princess Rhaenyra and her stepmother, Queen Alicent. The last Targaryen story is called *The Sons of the Dragon* (2017), and it describes the death of Aegon the Conqueror. The plot of these novellas was later expanded in *Fire & Blood* (2018), the latest Westeros novel by Martin, which tells the detailed history of House Targaryen. The book is written in the style of a fake treatise: the

---

<sup>235</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Dunk and Egg,” *Not A Blog*, April 2014, accessed: 16 August, 2024, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/365715.html>.

unreliable narrator is Archmaester Gyldayn, who sometimes provides conflicting accounts on different events, and cites several different fictional primary sources for his work. The origins of *Fire & Blood* can be traced back to the writing process of the first companion book of the world of Westeros, which was co-written by Martin with Elio M. García Jr. and Linda Antonsson: *The World of Ice & Fire* (2014) is a “(...) comprehensive history of the Seven Kingdoms, featuring the epic battles, bitter rivalries, and daring rebellions that lead up to the events in his bestselling *A Song of Ice and Fire* series.”<sup>236</sup> Similarly to the Targaryen history, *The World of Ice & Fire* is mostly written from the perspective of Master Yandel (and also contains some parts written by Archmaester Gyldayn). Originally, Martin only wanted to write a companion book, but as he was working on the text, he wrote much more than intended about Targaryen history, spanning from Aegon’s Conquest to the end of the Regency of Aegon III. In 2017, the author revealed on his blog that he has written so much

that it’s been decided to publish the book in two volumes. The first of those will cover the history of Westeros from Aegon’s Conquest up to and through the regency of the boy king Aegon III (the Dragonbane). That one is largely written, and will include (for the first time) a complete detailed history of the Targaryen civil war, the Dance of the Dragons.<sup>237</sup>

*Fire & Blood* was finally published on November 20, 2018, and on March 9, 2022 the author revealed on his blog that he was considering calling the planned second volume *Blood & Fire*.<sup>238</sup> In 2022, Martin published another companion book with co-authors Elio M. García Jr. and Linda Antonsson: *The Rise of the Dragon* also describes the history of house Targaryen, but in a more encyclopaedic way. While all of the aforementioned books contribute to the narrative of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* universe, there are two exceptions that although fit the fantastic world, they do not add new information to the narrative. *The Lands of Ice and Fire* (2012) is a boxed collection of twelve maps that were illustrated by cartographer Jonathan Roberts, while *The Wit & Wisdom of Tyrion Lannister* (2013) only includes quotes that were taken from *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The first two volumes of the series were also adapted in the comics medium: *A Game of Thrones* was published between 21 September 2011 and 30 July 2014, while *A Clash of Kings* was released between June 7 2017 and November 24, 2021. The Dunk and Egg novellas were also adapted to graphic

---

<sup>236</sup> George R. R. Martin, Elio M. García, and Linda Antonsson, *The World of Ice & Fire. The Untold History of Westeros and the Game of Thrones* (London: Harper Voyager, 2014).

<sup>237</sup> George R. R. Martin, “The Swords Are Drawn,” *Not A Blog*, July 2017, accessed: 4 January, 2024, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/544709.html>.

<sup>238</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Random Updates and Bits o’ News,” *Not A Blog*, March 9, 2022, accessed: 5 January, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/03/09/random-updates-and-bits-o-news/>.

novels by Benjamin Avery, and the art was created by Mike S. Miller. *The Hedge Knight* (Image Comics, Devil's Due Publishing, 2003–2004), *The Hedge Knight II: Sworn Sword* (Marvel Comics, 2007–2008) and *The Mystery Knight: A Graphic Novel* (Bantam, 2017) all cover the narrative of their source material of the same name. Plotwise, the comic books are not different from their source material, as they are focusing on the same plot – thus the dissimilarities arise from the differences between the two media.

Although fans are still waiting for the sixth volume of the series, titled *The Winds of Winter*, at the time of writing this thesis, Martin has already shared eleven excerpts from his upcoming volume. The first chapter that was published was written from Theon's perspective, and it appeared on Martin's official website in December 2011.<sup>239</sup> The text was followed by portions of a chapter written from Victarion Greyjoy's perspective, which were read out by the author in March 2012 at Tiff Bell Lightbox.<sup>240</sup> In April 2012, Martin read another chapter at Eastercon which focuses on Theon,<sup>241</sup> and published an Arianne Martell excerpt a few months later, on January 27, 2013 on his website.<sup>242</sup> In the same year, three other chapters were published by the author officially, two of them written from Barristan Selmy's perspective: the first one was released as a teaser at the end of the 2013 US paperback edition of the fifth volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire*,<sup>243</sup> while the second one was read at Boskone 50 by the author himself in February.<sup>244</sup> Martin read out a second Tyrion chapter in August 2013, that was later published in the official iOS app on March 20, 2014.<sup>245</sup> Later on, Martin published the chapter titled *Mercy* on his website (written from Arya Stark's perspective),<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>239</sup> Ethan Sacks, "George R.R. Martin Surprises 'Song of Ice and Fire' Fans with Free Chapter of next Book | New York Daily News," *NYDailyNews*, 30 December, 2011, accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120307221835/http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/pageviews/2011/12/george-rr-martin-surprises-song-of-ice-and-fire-fans-with-free-chapter-of-next-boo>.

<sup>240</sup> *In Conversation With... George R.R. Martin on Game of Thrones Part 3 | TIFF Bell Lightbox*, 2012, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIJblxV3QHQ>.

<sup>241</sup> "EasterCon – Eat, Drink and Talk SFF! | Harper Voyager Books," *Harper Voyager*, April 10, 2012, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120416072042/http://harpervoyagerbooks.com/2012/04/10/eastercon-eat-drink-and-talk-sff/>.

<sup>242</sup> George R. R. Martin, "Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin," *George R. R. Martin*, January 27, 2013, accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130329220944/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.

<sup>243</sup> George R. R. Martin, "The Dragons Are Here," *Not A Blog*, October 2013, accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://grm.livejournal.com/344674.html>.

<sup>244</sup> Stubby the Rocket, "How Much of George R. R. Martin's The Winds of Winter Is Out So Far?," *Reactor*, March 27, 2014, accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://reactormag.com/how-much-winds-of-winter-is-out/>.

<sup>245</sup> Stubby the Rocket, "New Winds of Winter Chapter Coming Out Today," *Reactor*, March 20, 2014, accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://reactormag.com/new-winds-of-winter-chapter-coming-out-today/>.

<sup>246</sup> George R. R. Martin, "Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin," *George R. R. Martin*, March 27, 2014, accessed: 17 August, 2024,



and in the following years, it was followed by two other chapters reflectively: “Alayne I” was shared on April 2, 2015,<sup>247</sup> while “Arianne II” appeared on May 10, 2016.<sup>248</sup> The last chapter, titled “The Forsaken”, written from Aeron Greyjoy’s perspective was read by the author in Balticon – since then, no other chapters from *The Winds of Winter* were published by Martin.<sup>249</sup>

From the books listed above, we can see that the literary aspect of the *Game of Thrones* universe unfolded naturally as the author was adding new characters and storylines to the major plot. After working on the story of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, new texts were written that were exploring the history of the House Targaryen, and the short stories and novels were followed by the comic book adaptations. With the creation of the HBO show, Martin’s storyworld became a transmedia universe; however, *Game of Thrones* cannot be described as a simple adaptation, as although the creators of the televisual adaptation started working on the series before Martin published the fifth volume of his saga, and he had eight years to finish the two final books, the television show preceded its source material by creating an alternative ending as the show creators did not have the final two books to work from. Consequently, the plot of *Game of Thrones* is currently finished in the adaptation, but is still waiting to be concluded in the original books. I argue that the importance of the issue of transmediality in the case of *Game of Thrones* lies in the fact that the series created an ending *before* the book series was concluded – thus, in case the author succeeds in finishing his story, the (from a temporal perspective) secondary work (the adaptation) will precede the “original” source material in terms of storytelling. Thus, the question of whether the reception of the ending of the adaptation may have had an impact on Martin’s ending may also arise, further complicating the interconnectedness of these two narratives.

---

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140327041507/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.

<sup>247</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin,” *George R. R. Martin*, April 2, 2015, accessed: 17 August, 2024,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150402163112/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.

<sup>248</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin,” *George R. R. Martin*, May 10, 2016, accessed: 17 August, 2024,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160511182726/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.

<sup>249</sup> Nate Jones, “6 Things We Learned From the New Winds of Winter Chapter,” *Vulture*, May 31, 2016, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.vulture.com/2016/05/winds-of-winter-new-chapter-what-we-learned.html>.

## 4.2. The Show(s)

### 4.2.1. *The Immense Success of Game of Thrones*

*A Song of Ice and Fire* is not an easy saga to adapt, since while it is characterized by features that make it a good source material, these qualities can also be hard to translate to the television screens. The novels are made up of chapters that are written from the perspective of different point of view characters, and they mostly end with a cliffhanger that keeps the readers on edge, and initiates binge-reading. This technique is also heavily utilized by television series, since it encourages the audience to keep waiting for the new episode, or continue binging if it is possible. Nevertheless, the novels are organized differently than the adaptation, since the different episodes of a season always cover several storylines, instead of only focusing on a main character, like in the case of the books. Furthermore, the sheer number of focalizers creates deep characters whose motivations are well-known by the readers, since by reading the internal monologues, the feelings and the different sensations of the characters, readers get a more detailed image of the focalizers. This experience is harder to translate to the series since the audience cannot hear the internal monologues of the different characters (although, in this case, they can be shown through the facial expressions of the actors) and by employing an ensemble cast, all the characters are mostly seen through the same filter by the audience. While all of these qualities can also be understood as advantages, since the writers, directors and actors had an immense source material to work from, the biggest obstacle against adapting the books might have been monetary in nature, thanks to the grandiose elements that it introduced: the feasts, battles, castles, dragons, or even the Iron Throne that was over forty feet in height.

Despite the fact that Martin's epic series was thought to be unadaptable by the author himself, after the second volume, *A Clash of Kings* was published and hit the bestseller lists, many producers and filmmakers wanted to create an adaptation of Martin's series, as they were inspired by the success of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* adaptation. However, the author believed that making feature films from such a vast source material would fail. Martin claimed that

[t]elevision was the only way to go, I realized. Not a network series; that would never fly. Network budgets were simply not high enough, and their censors would choke on all the sex and violence in the novels. At best you'd get bowdlerized versions, weak tea instead of strong mead. A long miniseries might work, something on the order of *Roots* or *Shogun*, but the networks weren't making those kinds of epic minis anymore.

It would have to be HBO, I decided. The people who'd made *The Sopranos*, *Deadwood*, *Rome*. No one else even came close when it came to producing quality, adult television. But it couldn't be as a movie-for-television or even a miniseries. It would have to be a full-on series, with an entire season devoted to each novel. The only problem was, HBO had never done fantasy nor shown any interest in the genre. It would never happen.<sup>250</sup>

Despite the fact that the author gave up on adapting his epic fantasy saga, two fans of the books, David Benioff and D. B. Weiss decided to attempt to ask Martin for the rights and create their own version of the story. After correctly answering the question “who is Jon Snow’s mother?” (which is subtly hinted by clues but not yet revealed in the first five volumes), they got the right to adapt the books into a television series.<sup>251</sup> The rest is history: the first episode of the series premiered on HBO in the United States on April 17, 2011 and ended on May 19, 2019 with the final episode of season 8. *Game of Thrones* became the most popular television series in the world counting more than 25 million viewers per episode and the most pirated television show.<sup>252</sup> The series was also critically acclaimed, counting 59 Emmy Awards (out of 159 nominations), 3 Hugo Awards and 9 Screen Actors Guilds Awards.<sup>253</sup>

By the time the showrunners arrived at the end of season 5, the author still has not finished his epic fantasy saga, thus, as the adaptation had to be concluded because its immense success, the television series outpaced the books. The first three seasons were based on the first three novels of the fantasy series respectively, while the fourth one used *A Storm of Swords* (the longest of the currently available volumes) as its source material. The fifth season covers the events of *A Feast for Crows* and *A Dance with Dragons*, and also includes some original content, while seasons seven and eight were created based on an outline from *The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*, supplemented by original content as well. There are also several differences between the books and the adaptation: while some of them are minor (regarding the looks or the ages of characters), others affect the storyline more. The most obvious changes relate to the casting, as some characters are much younger in the books

---

<sup>250</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Preface: From Page to Screen,” in *Inside HBO’s Game of Thrones: Seasons 1 & 2.*, by Bryan Cogman et al. (California: Chronicle Books LLC, 2012), 5.

<sup>251</sup> Debra Birnbaum, “‘Game of Thrones’ Creators: We Know How It’s Going to End,” *Variety*, April 15, 2015, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://variety.com/2015/tv/news/game-of-thrones-ending-season-5-producers-interview-1201469516/>.

<sup>252</sup> Sarah Hughes, “Game of Thrones: How It Dominated the Decade – Then Lost Its Way,” *The Guardian*, December 30, 2019, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/dec/30/game-of-thrones-best-tv-2010s>.

<sup>253</sup> “Game Of Thrones,” *Television Academy*, accessed January 5, 2024, <https://www.emmys.com/shows/game-thrones>; “Game of Thrones (TV Series 2011–2019) - Awards,” *IMDb*, accessed January 5, 2024, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0944947/awards/>.

than their televisual counterparts: in *A Game of Thrones*, Daenerys Targaryen is thirteen, Arya Stark is nine, Sansa is eleven, while Bran is seven years old, while in the series Dany is seventeen, Arya is eleven, Sansa is thirteen, while Bran is ten years old. This subtle change makes most of the problematic scenes easier to digest for the audience, like the sexual intercourse between the young Daenerys and his much older Dothraki husband, Khal Drogo. Furthermore, making the child actors older also helped in future seasons, where they had to act out certain scenes that may have been potentially harmful for them at such a young age, like in the case of Arya, where she is learning how to be an assassin after she arrives to Braavos.

However, there are plotlines that are completely absent from the show, while they may become an integral part of the main storyline of the last two upcoming volumes of the book series. One of these is the storyline of Lady Stoneheart: in the books, after the infamous Red Wedding the Brotherhood Without Banners resurrects Catelyn Stark's dead body, who later wants to revenge what the Lannisters did to her family. The adaptation also did not include the story of Young Griff, a boy who claims to be the son of Rhaegar Targaryen, and thus wants to challenge Daenerys Targaryen's succession – although it is suggested that the showcreators simply combined Jon Snow's and Young Griff's character into one, so that they can avoid the complication of the story and the introduction of a new character.

The showrunners also decided to mix up other already existing storylines in order to complicate the fate of different characters: in Martin's books, Ramsay Bolton marries Jeyne Poole, Sansa Stark's former friend, who has to play the role of Arya Stark in order to help the Boltons to secure lordship over the North, while Sansa Stark is in the Eyrie with Petyr Baelish. In the HBO adaptation, the fake Arya is replaced by the real Sansa Stark, who has to suffer sexual and emotional abuse from Ramsay. According to the showrunners, the reason why they chose to replace the character is because they wanted to use a character that the audience was already invested in, instead of introducing a new one and giving Sansa less screen time.<sup>254</sup> Fans were also disappointed by the show's decision concerning the fate of Shireen Baratheon: in the adaptation, Stannis Baratheon burnt his heir at the stake as part of a blood sacrifice, because the Red Priestess Melisandre claimed that if they sacrifice King's blood, they will have better chances of escaping the snowstorms and thus winning the war.

---

<sup>254</sup> James Hibberd, "'Game of Thrones' Team Explains Changing Sansa's Story from the Books," *Entertainment Weekly*, April 26, 2015, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://ew.com/article/2015/04/26/game-thrones-sansa-ramsay-interview/>.

However, in the books, Stannis is a more pragmatic man who would never allow such a tragic fate happening to his only heir.

Although the show turned out to be a success, as the adaptation had to move away from the books because of the lack of source material, many fans and critics agreed that the quality of the series started to decline. Fans blamed the showrunners for focusing on style and visual expression instead of character development. Certain characters acted like their development had been erased (Jaime Lannister going back to his sister, Cersei or Jon Snow being an inactive character), while certain plotlines had been rushed, like Bran Stark's ascension to the throne or Daenerys Targaryen's final act of burning King's Landing. The last season was also deemed problematic for the lack of proper lighting, but probably the most infamous mistake that resulted from the rushed ending is the Starbucks coffee cup that appears in one of the scenes of Season 8. Fans also criticized Benioff and Weiss for abandoning storylines that audiences were invested in: Jon Snow turned out to be a Targaryen, but it did not have any impact on the storyline; audiences did not get to know anything about the motivations of the Others, the importance of the Night King or his recurring symbol which appeared in the first episode in Season 1, and many prophecies were left hanging in the air.<sup>255</sup> However, *Game of Thrones* still had an impact on modern television, opening the way for the creation of other epic fantasy adaptations.

#### 4.2.2. *The Prequel Made of Fire & Blood: House of the Dragon*

Based on the success of the HBO adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, a *Game of Thrones* prequel titled *House of the Dragon* was officially greenlit by HBO in 2019 for a full season of ten episodes.<sup>256</sup> The series is based on George R. R. Martin's imaginary chronicle of *Fire & Blood*, which tells the history of House Targaryen, and is created by Ryan Condal and Miguel Sapochnik. According to the author, *House of the Dragon* was the first idea that he mentioned to HBO when they were talking about potential successor shows – and it was the first one that appeared on screens after the last season of *Game of Thrones*. Eventually, the first episode of *House of the Dragon* premiered on August 21, 2022 and was already renewed for a second

---

<sup>255</sup> Colin McCormick and Craig Elvy, "Game Of Thrones: What Went Wrong With Season 8," *ScreenRant*, February 29, 2020, accessed: 12 march, 2024, <https://screenrant.com/game-thrones-hbo-season-8-bad-reason/>.

<sup>256</sup> George R. R. Martin, "The Dragons Take Wing," *Not A Blog*, October 30, 2019, accessed: 24 January, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2019/10/30/the-dragons-take-wing/>.

season five days after the first episode was watched by 10 million viewers overnight, and gained another 10 million viewers in the United States only in five days.<sup>257</sup>

The history of *House of the Dragon* can be traced back to 2017, as long before the last seasons of *Game of Thrones* came out, HBO was already looking for ways to prolong the life of the fantasy franchise. In May 2017, the network decided to hire several writers in order to come up with ideas that are based on Martin's fantasy fiction, so that they could make potential successor shows.<sup>258</sup> Since Martin wanted to create an adaptation of the history of the Dance of the Dragons, he reached out to screenwriter and producer Ryan J. Condall in 2018, after he was unsatisfied with the version that was created by Bryan Cogman.

The process of the adaptation was much different from *Game of Thrones*, since *Fire & Blood* is not fully narrativized: as the events are told from the perspective of a master who is working on the history of House Targaryen, several gaps had to be filled in order to create a fully enjoyable television adaptation. As Martin stated, "[i]t's not like we had to invent a lot, because the source material was there. There was already a road map we could work from, so it was taking a road map and building the road, hitting all the important stops".<sup>259</sup> After the main events were defined by the author himself, Condall had to write an outline of the pilot before the script stage. Although the task seemed daunting at first, he remembered what George R. R. Martin told him while they were working together:

[h]e said this really interesting thing that stuck with me: 'The author will always forgive the adapter for the big changes that he makes or she makes, but not necessarily the small.' I took that to mean, 'Make the big changes that you need to make it work on the screen, but don't change a bunch of little things because you think you know better.'<sup>260</sup>

This idea from the author clearly represents his own take on adaptation: as I am going to elaborate on this idea in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, Martin believes that while integrity and authenticity are important, the adaptation and the source material should be treated as two separate entities because of the differences between the media. This concept was further substantiated by Martin later on: after he looked at the first draft of Cogman's work, he was really satisfied with the results.

---

<sup>257</sup> James Hibberd, "'House of the Dragon' Renewed for Season 2 at HBO After Premiere Ratings Blowout," *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 26, 2022, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/house-of-the-dragon-season-2-1235199922/>.

<sup>258</sup> Gina McIntyre, *House of the Dragon: Inside the Creation of a Targaryen Dynasty*, Insight Editions (San Rafael, 2023), sec. 8.4.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8.22.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 8.34.

“I thought it was a very strong draft to begin with,” Martin says. “I was very heartened. It was recognizably my story. When you’re looking at an adaptation of your own work, there’s always a little trepidation. You’re going to go through and see, has anything been changed? Did they eliminate anything that should be left in? Have they put in other things that were maybe not meant to be there? Ryan made all the right choices.”<sup>261</sup>

When it comes to the adaptation of literary works from a written medium to a visual one, changing certain things in order to create a new iteration of the narrative that works on the new platform is inevitable. Since *House of the Dragon* did not introduce major changes to the source text, they created an adaptation that both the fans of Martin’s works and the author himself was pleased with – however, there were some aspects that were treated differently.

One of the ways the show differed from the books is that the creators decided to focus a lot more on Queen Alicent and her relationship with Rhaenyra, and thus, made her character much deeper and sympathetic, and she also seems to play a more important role in the story. In the meantime, the showrunners decided to leave one of the most influential characters of the source material out. In the book, the narrator Archmaester Gyladyn uses the court jester Mushroom’s firsthand accounts several times. Mushroom is a dwarf who pretends to be an imbecile in order to fool the court and collect private information. However, although Mushroom’s character has not appeared in the adaptation, it does not necessarily mean that he will not appear in the later seasons, as *House of the Dragon* will have two other seasons as well.<sup>262</sup>

The first season of the series ended successfully, as the first-night, all-platform audience was around 9 million people. After the end of production, Miguel Sapochnik left the project and Ryan Condal continued working on the series alone.<sup>263</sup> Season 2 of the series premiered on June 16, 2024, and the Sunday finale was watched by 8.9 million multiplatform viewers.<sup>264</sup>

---

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., sec. 8.38.

<sup>262</sup> Jennifer Maas, “‘House of the Dragon’ to End With Season 4, Season 3 to Begin Production in Early 2025,” *Variety*, August 5, 2024, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://variety.com/2024/tv/news/house-of-the-dragon-end-season-4-1236095543/>.

<sup>263</sup> Rick Porter, “TV Ratings: ‘House of the Dragon’ Finale Scores Big,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 24, 2022, accessed: 18 August, 2024, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/house-of-the-dragon-finale-tv-ratings-sunday-oct-23-2022-1235247566/>.

<sup>264</sup> Jennifer Maas, “‘House of the Dragon’ Finale Hits Season 2 Viewership High With Nearly 9 Million Viewers, But Down From Season 1 Ender,” *Variety*, August 5, 2024, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://variety.com/2024/tv/news/house-of-the-dragon-season-2-finale-ratings-1236096169/>.

#### 4.2.3. The Spin-offs

Although at the time of writing this thesis, only two series adaptations have been created of the history of Westeros, there are altogether nine spin-offs that were already pitched by HBO: while six of them are currently in the making, three others have already been cancelled. The first spin-off, *House of the Dragon* was followed by the idea of an untitled Jon Snow sequel series under the working title *Snow*, which was pitched by actor Kit Harington, who played the titular character of the project in *Game of Thrones*.<sup>265</sup> The series would have followed Jon through his adventures after the ending of its prequel: after being exiled from Westeros, he embarks on a journey North of the Wall with the Wildlings to start a new life. In April 2024, however, it became official that the Jon Snow spinoff series was no longer in the development phase, as the network decided to shelve it indefinitely.<sup>266</sup>

*The Sea Snake* (formerly titled *Nine Voyages*) is a planned spin-off of *House of the Dragon*, and it would focus on the younger years of Corlys Velaryon (the husband of Princess Rhaenys Targaryen, the Queen Who Never Was), and tell the tales of his nine voyages on the ship Sea Snake. Originally, the series was planned to be a live action production, however, due to budgetary reasons, it has been decided to make it into an animation series.<sup>267</sup> *Ten Thousand Ships* (or, as the author sometimes refers to it, “the Nymeria show”) is the working title of the *Game of Thrones* prequel which is set 1000 years before the events of the show, and focuses on Princess Nymeria, the founder of Dorne.<sup>268</sup>

Apart from *House of the Dragon*, one of the currently greenlit Westeros adaptations is *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms: The Hedge Knight*, which is based on Martin’s collection of short stories of the same name, and follows the adventures of “Dunk” (Ser Duncan the Tall, the future Lord Commander of the Kingsguard) and “Egg” (the future King Aegon V Targaryen). According to George R. R. Martin, the series is greenlit for a full season and is probably going to feature six episodes, which are going to be based on the first novella in the series, *The Hedge Knight*.<sup>269</sup> Another spin-off currently in the making is titled *The Golden*

---

<sup>265</sup> George R. R. Martin, “SNOW... and Other Stuff,” *Not A Blog*, June 23, 2022, accessed: 24 January, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/06/23/snow-and-other-stuff/>.

<sup>266</sup> Adam Bentz and Tom Russell, “Game Of Thrones Jon Snow Spinoff Series No Longer In Development At HBO,” *ScreenRant*, April 9, 2024, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://screenrant.com/game-thrones-jon-snow-spinoff-cancelled-why-kit-harington-response/>.

<sup>267</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Amazing Animation,” *Not A Blog*, December 31, 2023, accessed: 29 October, 2023, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2023/12/31/amazing-animation/>.

<sup>268</sup> James Hibberd, “All the ‘Game of Thrones’ Spinoffs in the Works at HBO,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 19, 2021, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/all-the-game-of-thrones-spinoffs-in-the-works-at-hbo-4153435/>.

<sup>269</sup> George R. R. Martin, “A Knight and a Squire,” *Not A Blog*, April 14, 2023, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2023/04/14/a-knight-and-a-squire/>.



*Empire*, an animation series that is set in Yi Ti, a region in Essos that resembles Imperial China.<sup>270</sup>

In April 2023, another prequel was announced under the title *Aegon's Conquest*. The prequel to *Game of Thrones* would focus on the story of Aegon the Conqueror, who united the Seven Kingdoms with his two wives, Rhaenys and Visenya.<sup>271</sup> The remaining two spin-offs have already been cancelled: the untitled Flea Bottom series would have told the tales of the down-trodden area of King's Landing, while *Bloodmoon* would have been set 8000 years before *Game of Thrones*, and intended to depict the events of the Long Night.<sup>272</sup> According to Martin,

[s]et thousands of years before either GAME OF THRONES or HOUSE OF THE DRAGON, and centered on the Starks and the White Walkers, the untitled pilot was written by Jane Goldman, directed by S.J. Clarkson, and starred Naomi Watts, Miranda Richardson, and a splendid cast. It goes without saying that I was saddened to hear the show would not be going to series. Jane Goldman is a terrific screenwriter, and I enjoyed brainstorming with her. I do not know why HBO decided not to go to series on this one, but I do not think it had to do with HOUSE OF THE DRAGON. This was never an either/or situation. If television has room enough for multiple CSIs and CHICAGO shows... well, Westeros and Essos are a lot bigger, with thousands of years of history and enough tales and legends and characters for a dozen shows.<sup>273</sup>

At the time of writing this thesis, six out of the nine proposed spin-offs are in the making: however, based on the huge success of each adaptation, other examples might follow as well. Nevertheless, the narrative universe of *A Song of Ice and Fire* does not stop here: Martin's fantastic world has other media incarnations as well, some of which also contributes to the narrative complexity of the world.

#### 4.3. Other Media

In spite of the fact that most people, when talking about *Game of Thrones*, think of the epic fantasy book series or the HBO adaptation, the narrative universe includes examples from

---

<sup>270</sup> Martin, "Random Updates and Bits o' News."

<sup>271</sup> Dalton Norman, "Aegon's Conquest: Confirmation & Everything We Know About The Game Of Thrones Prequel," *ScreenRant*, February 15, 2024, accessed: 19 August, 2024, <https://screenrant.com/aegons-conquest-confirmation-updates/>.

<sup>272</sup> Liam Gaughan, "Every 'Game of Thrones' Spinoff Series in Development or Cancelled," *Collider*, August 23, 2022, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://collider.com/game-of-thrones-every-spinoff-in-development-or-cancelled/>.

<sup>273</sup> Martin, "The Dragons Take Wing."

other media as well, which (although they do not necessarily add anything new to the world), can widen the audience's perspective about the world, and contribute to the Game of Thrones experience. One of the most influential examples may be *The Maester's Path* project, which was created in 2011. When creators of the series, David Benioff and D. B. Weiss wanted to bring awareness to their upcoming adaptation, HBO started a cryptic online game to hype the upcoming television series. The first episodes of the show aired from April to June 2011, and the alternate reality game (which worked as a viral marketing campaign), *The Maester's Path* was originally launched on February 28 2011.<sup>274</sup> According to Klastrop and Tosca, "[t]he campaign itself sought to reach out to both existing fans of the books and to a potential new audience of TV viewers mainly through an episodic puzzle game [...], which included both on-line and off-line components [...]"<sup>275</sup> The players were encouraged to reach out to their friends on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, in the hope of raising the number of possible viewers. As Zoë Shacklock describes,

[t]he game had five sections, each corresponding to a particular human sense. The sight component involved traversing an online version of the Wall; the sound section required players to identify the houses of Westeros by listening to stories in an online "tavern"; and touch introduced a "winter is coming" iPad app. In the smell section, a collection of "influencers" were sent packages containing small scent vials from regions of Westeros. The journalists shared their information and experiences online, and the fan community worked together to identify the scents and solve the accompanying puzzle. The final section of the game was by far the most publicized and innovative. In order to approximate the taste of Westeros, food trucks travelled around Los Angeles and New York, serving up cuisine inspired by the series. The menu varied according to which particular region of Westeros was featured, including dishes such as roast squab, trout, and the ever-popular lemon cakes. While each section of the game could be played in isolation, all five had to be completed to win, and thus to experience a complete sensory immersion into the world of Westeros.<sup>276</sup>

*The Maester's Path* contributed to the success of the series by making people aware of the upcoming adaptation, while also gave fans an opportunity to participate in a sensuous experience, by allowing them to visit the fictional world of Westeros in the real world.

---

<sup>274</sup> "The Maester's Path Begins," *Westeros. The "A Song of Ice and Fire" Domain*, February 28, 2011, accessed: 9 April, 2024, [https://www.westeros.org/News/Entry/The\\_Maesters\\_Path\\_Begins](https://www.westeros.org/News/Entry/The_Maesters_Path_Begins).

<sup>275</sup> Klastrop and Tosca, "Game of Thrones. Transmedial Worlds, Fandom, and Social Gaming," 296.

<sup>276</sup> Zoë Shacklock, "'A Reader Lives a Thousand Lives before He Dies': Transmedia Textuality and the Flows of Adaptation," in *Mastering the Game of Thrones. Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, ed. Jes Battis and Susan Johnston (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015), 266.

Since the birth of Martin's epic fantasy series, several games were created for the fans who would like to see what it would be like to be a character in the world of Westeros. The first game was created in 2007 by Elio M. García and Linda Antonsson: according to their website, "Blood of Dragons is the only author-approved MUSH<sup>277</sup> based on George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*".<sup>278</sup> The game is completely canonical in the fandom, and is based on the first five volumes of Martin's series, *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms*, *The World of Ice and Fire* and *Fire and Blood*. According to the description of the game,

[w]hen the game opened the IC year was 158 after Aegon's Landing (Aegon the Conqueror was the first Targaryen king and the one who established the Seven Kingdoms) and King Daeron I—called the Young Dragon—had just conquered Dorne and made this previously independent realm a part of the Seven Kingdoms. Our aim is to stay as canon as possible, both in terms of theme and in terms of storyline. This means that since the opening King Daeron I has died in Dorne (as the Dornish rebelled and became independent once again) and been succeeded by his brother, King Baelor. It also means that House Targaryen cannot be overthrown by, for example, House Lannister. But there is a lot we do not know about this period, so the fates of most individuals is not pre-determined.<sup>279</sup>

The first video game that was created as a tie-in to Martin's universe was *A Game of Thrones: Genesis*, which came out in 2011 and was created by Cyanide. The author also supported the creation of the strategic game, in which players can fight for the Iron Throne after choosing one of the major houses of Westeros. The storyline starts with Queen Nymeria arriving in Dorne from Essos, and covers the rise of the White Walkers and Robert Baratheon's usurpation of the throne as well, spanning over 1,000 years.<sup>280</sup> One year later, Cyanide also debuted with an action RPG titled *Game of Thrones* (2012), which is based on the HBO television series, and is available for PC, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360. In the game, players control two characters (who do not appear in the novels), Mors Westword and Alester Sarwyck, and the gameplay roughly covers the events of the first volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The game is also connected to the series as well, as James Cosmo and Conleth Hill became the voice actors of Jeor Mormont and Varys, just like in the HBO adaptation.

---

<sup>277</sup> "MUSH" is the abbreviation of 'Multi-User Shared Hallucination', which is a text-based online platform where multiple users can play a role-playing game at the same time.

<sup>278</sup> Elio M. García and Linda Antonsson, "Blood of Dragons: The 'A Song of Ice and Fire' MUSH," *Blood of Dragons: The "A Song of Ice and Fire" MUSH*, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.westeros.org/BoD/>.

<sup>279</sup> Elio M. García and Linda Antonsson, "Blood of Dragons: FAQ - 1. About the Game," *Blood of Dragons: The "A Song of Ice and Fire" MUSH*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.westeros.org/BoD/FAQ/Category/C146/>.

<sup>280</sup> "Game of Thrones the Video Game Hits This Summer," *PCMag*, July 13, 2011, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.pcmag.com/archive/game-of-thrones-the-video-game-hits-this-summer-266826>.

In 2013, Disruptor Beam published a free point-and-click strategy game titled *Game of Thrones Ascent* for iOS, Facebook, Kongregate and Android, which allows players to become characters in Westeros, controlling the head of a minor house and swearing allegiance to House of Westeros. The choices made throughout the game play influence the character's fate and also have an effect on future quests, thus copying the world of *Game of Thrones*.<sup>281</sup>

Probably the most famous game adaptation was created by Telltale Games in 2014, titled *Game of Thrones: A Telltale Game Series*. This episodic graphic adventure game was developed for several platforms, and is based on the television series – however, according to Laura Parker, “Telltale had to make the case that its game would pay as much attention to narrative and characterization as the show, and that it wouldn’t be a cheap knockoff involving the kings and queens of Westeros running around collecting coins or hacking off one another’s heads.”<sup>282</sup> Ty Corey Franck, the personal assistant to George R. R. Martin became the story consultant of the games, in which players follow the storyline of the fourth season of the show. Players are allowed to control five members of House Forrester (a family that appears in *A Dance with Dragons* but is not present in the television show), and their goal is to save their family after losing the War of the Five Kings. Several actors appeared as voices of their original *Game of Thrones* characters, such as Emilia Clarke, Iwan Rheon, Kit Harington, Lena Headey, Natalie Dormer and Peter Dinklage, however, the series was cancelled in 2018, when the studio closed down.<sup>283</sup>

The free massively multiplayer mobile strategy game *Game of Thrones: Conquest* was released in 2017 under license from HBO. The game is very similar to the ones that were previously mentioned as players are fighting for the Iron Throne by forging alliances and raising armies.<sup>284</sup> In 2018, it was followed by *Reigns: Game of Thrones*, a strategy game developed by Nerial in which players have to face problems by choosing one of the two possible solutions, swiping either left or right, until the consequences end the rule of the main

---

<sup>281</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Social Gaming,” *Not A Blog*, May 22, 2012, accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://grmm.livejournal.com/280977.html>.

<sup>282</sup> Laura Parker, “A Gaming Company Devoted to Narrative Tackles ‘Thrones,’” *The New York Times*, April 27, 2014, sec. Arts, accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/arts/video-games/a-gaming-company-devoted-to-narrative-tackles-thrones.html>.

<sup>283</sup> Max Borman, “Telltale Games Needs to Return to Westeros,” *Game Rant*, May 20, 2022, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://gamerant.com/game-thrones-telltale-game-series-cancel-return-westeros/>.

<sup>284</sup> Todd Spangler, “‘Game of Thrones: Conquest’ Multiplayer Strategy Mobile Game Launch Date Set,” *Variety*, October 3, 2017, accessed: 16 July, 2024, <https://variety.com/2017/digital/news/game-of-thrones-conquest-game-launch-date-1202578765/>.

character who is sitting on the Iron Throne.<sup>285</sup> In 2019, *Game of Thrones: Winter is Coming*, the massively multiplayer online real-time strategy game was published by Yoozoo Games, just before the 8<sup>th</sup> season of the television show came out, in which players controlled a lord or a lady and were able to form alliances with other players.<sup>286</sup> In 2020, three other smartphone games were created titled *Game of Thrones Slots* and *Game of Thrones: Beyond the Wall*, and *A Game of Thrones: The Board Game*. As of 2024, two smartphone games are in the making: *Game of Thrones* is currently being developed by Netmarble Neo, while *Game of Thrones: Legends* is developed by Zynga.<sup>287</sup> The franchise also contains four boardgames (*A Game of Thrones* [2003], *Battles of Westeros* [2010], *Game of Thrones Risk* [2015], and *A Song of Ice and Fire: Tabletop Miniatures Game* [2018]) and two role-playing games (*A Game of Thrones* [Guardians of Order, 2005] and *A Song of Ice and Fire Roleplaying* [Green Robin Publishing, 2009]).

#### 4.4. The Transmediality of the *Game of Thrones* Universe

As it has been discussed previously, *Game of Thrones* became a case of transmedia storytelling in the moment when the HBO series outpaced the books – although this term in the Jenkinsean sense may still be problematic, since in the case of this franchise, we cannot talk about a systematic transmedial planning, like in the case of the *Matrix* universe. I argue that the *Game of Thrones* universe is still a classic example of a transmedia narrative, since the evolution of the franchise followed the logic of the snowball effect, where one particular media entry inspired the birth of others in the same universe, just like in the case of *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings* – however, one important way in which it differs from these examples is that *Game of Thrones* is a serial transmedia narrative. According to Alexander Sergeant, one of the reasons why high fantasy has been more prominent in cinematic adaptations is due to monetary reasons, namely

---

<sup>285</sup> Jordan Ramée, “New Game Of Thrones Mobile Title Lets You Explore Alternate Futures With The Series’ Characters,” *GameSpot*, accessed March 16, 2024, <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/new-game-of-thrones-mobile-title-lets-you-explore-/1100-6461346/>.

<sup>286</sup> “Game of Thrones Winter Is Coming Game Now Available for PC, Mobile App to Follow,” *Firstpost*, March 27, 2019, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.firstpost.com/tech/gaming/game-of-thrones-winter-is-coming-game-now-available-for-pc-mobile-app-to-follow-6335821.html>; Kelly Jiang, “Game of Thrones Winter Is Coming™ Launches Worldwide,” *Business Wire*, March 26, 2019, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20190325005827/en/Game-of-Thrones-Winter-is-Coming%E2%84%A2-Launches-Worldwide>.

<sup>287</sup> Ule Lopez, “Game of Thrones UE5 Mobile MMORPG Announced by Netmarble Neo,” *Wccftech*, January 27, 2022, accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://wccftech.com/game-of-thrones-mmorpg-for-mobile-devices/>; “Game of Thrones: Legends | Puzzle RPG Battle Strategy Mobile Game | Zynga Game of Thrones Official Site,” accessed March 16, 2024, <https://www.gameofthroneslegends.com/>.

the heavy investment in set design, costuming and special effects required to create alternative worlds on-screen. Beyond the simple issue of costing, however, the kind of storytelling demanded by fantasy fiction worked against the often episodic nature of television drama that prevailed prior to the shift towards seriality in prime-time programming in the early 1990s.<sup>288</sup>

In the case of *Game of Thrones*, although the ending of the adaptation was based on the outlines of Martin's ending that he shared with the creators, David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, the missing cracks had to be filled by the showrunners. We could also speculate that Martin's ending (if readers are lucky enough to get one) may also be different from the show – the author has been writing about how as he is working on this volume,

What I have noticed more and more of late, however, is my gardening is taking me further and further and further away from the television series. Yes, some of the things you saw on HBO in GAME OF THRONES you will also see in THE WINDS OF WINTER (though maybe not in quite the same ways)... but much of the rest will be quite different.

And really, when you think about it, this was inevitable. The novels are much bigger and much much more complex than the series. Certain things that happened on HBO will not happen in the books. And vice versa. [...] And the ending? You will need to wait until I get there. Some things will be the same. A lot will not.<sup>289</sup>

In order to truly understand the way that the elements of the *Game of Thrones* universe interact, firstly, I would like to make a distinction between adaptation and transmedia storytelling. According to Linda Hutcheon,

[f]irst, seen as a formal entity or product, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. [...] Second, as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective. [...] Third, seen from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.<sup>290</sup>

---

<sup>288</sup> Alexander Sergeant, "Across the Narrow Screen: Televisual World-Building in *Game of Thrones*," *Screen* 62, no. 2 (August 26, 2021): 195, doi:10.1093/screen/hjab020.

<sup>289</sup> George R. R. Martin, "A Winter Garden," *Not A Blog*, July 8, 2022, accessed: 29 October, 2023, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/07/08/>.

<sup>290</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 7–8.

What is so problematic with the distinction of these two terms is that based on their nature, adaptations are almost always transmedial, as when we are talking about adapting a certain narrative, there is usually a switch of medium (book to screen, film to theatrical performance, poem to song, etc.). According to Jenkins, the difference between transmedia storytelling and adaptations is that each media entry will add something new to the already existing material, and does not tell the same story, as in the case of the adaptation. However, adaptations can also differ from their adapted texts to a certain extent. According to Michael Graves,

[a]lthough transmedia storytelling and adaptation incorporate multiple platforms, the crucial difference between the storytelling forms centres on the qualities of narrative transposition and narrative extension utilized in the telling of a story. Whereas adaptation involves the reinterpretation of an existing story on a different platform, transmedia storytelling entails the distribution of different portions of an expansive story on separate media platforms. As such, transmedia storytelling and adaptation are traditionally conceptualized as binaries, with notions of narrative extension and newness differentiating the narrative approaches.<sup>291</sup>

However, Graves also argues that “the dividing line between transmedia storytelling and adaption is porous, with texts moving back and forth depending on the degree of coordination between producers”.<sup>292</sup> This modern phenomenon can also be seen in the case of *Game of Thrones* (HBO) and *A Song of Ice and Fire*: the series began as an adaptation of the epic fantasy narrative, building on the idea that by the time writers are going to work on the seasons that would be based on the last two volumes, these books will already exist; however, as fans are still waiting for the penultimate volume, the franchise became a case of transmedia storytelling, as the series added new narrative material to its source text by finishing the story that was started in the books. Although the fact that the still-open narrative of the books was finished in the adaptation means that *Game of Thrones* became a transmedia story, of course the books and the series can still exist independently from each other. Thus, depending on how the audience is consuming the already existing material, their experience will be different. As the author states:

[h]ow many children did Scarlett O’Hara have? Three, in the novel. One, in the movie. None, in real life: she was a fictional character, she never existed. The show is the show, the books are the books; two different tellings of the same story.

---

<sup>291</sup> Michael Graves, “Transmedia Storytelling, Adaptation, and the Reversing of Justified,” *Adaptation* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 2, doi:10.1093/adaptation/apw039.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

There have been differences between the novels and the television show since the first episode of season one. And for just as long, I have been talking about the butterfly effect. Small changes lead to larger changes lead to huge changes.<sup>293</sup>

Furthermore, the adaptation of the book series is not necessarily seen as an adaptation by many viewers who did not have any experience with Martin's fantasy saga or any of its other incarnations, thus they can easily serve as entry points to the mega-narration; in order to experience *Game of Thrones* as an adaptation, viewers have to be familiar with the source material, or at least have to know that the books exist.

Whether the readers are aware of the adaptation, or the audiences of the show know about the original works, the different media entries of the *Game of Thrones* storyworld supplement each other, being distinct products that move independently towards each other.<sup>294</sup> The different incarnations are integrated horizontally, none of them being above the other – and with the publication of the different novels of Westeros, and the new adaptation of *House of the Dragon* (and the possible spin-offs that are in the making), *Game of Thrones* became a rhizomatic storyworld that does not have a central root anymore. Additionally, the franchise is not a top-down coordinated project, but one which evolves almost naturally, based on the success of the narrative, following the logic of Ryan's snowball effect.

Although the *Game of Thrones* franchise was not created the same way as *The Matrix* universe, in which the media entries were planned by the Wachowskis in a way that each storyline will be put on the platform that it is most suitable for, Jenkins's definition that "[a] transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole"<sup>295</sup> describes the *Game of Thrones* universe succinctly – irrespective of the fact that the last three seasons outpaced the books. The items are also self-contained: one does not have to be familiar with the book series if they want to enjoy the series, and vice versa. The games that are set in the world of Westeros can also be played independently: in the case of the Telltale adaptation, for example, although the game can be enjoyed to a greater degree if the players know about the basic power relations of *Game of Thrones*, they do not have to be familiar with Martin's world or its adaptation(s) to have an immersive experience. Despite the fact that the first few seasons of the adaptation were mostly faithful to their adapted source, reading across the different media entries of the

---

<sup>293</sup> George R.R. Martin, "The Show, the Books," *Not A Blog*, May 2015, accessed: 10 April, 2021, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/427713.html>.

<sup>294</sup> cf. Lanier, "Shakespearean Rhizomatics."

<sup>295</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 97–98.



*Game of Thrones* franchise proposes a depth of experience as fans who became familiar with the world of Westeros through the television series can get to know a lot more about characters from Martin's series than from the television show, while in the video games they can make their own decisions and test whether they would survive the game of thrones – although these experiences can also be conflicting, when it comes to the differences between the original books and their adaptation. Thus, Jenkins's idea about how in the case of transmedia stories, "[t]he whole is worth more than the sum of the parts"<sup>296</sup> is also true for this speculative universe, because all the different media incarnations contribute to the audience's experience, which creates a variety of interpretations, depending on what a certain fan consumed.

Horizontal integration is also a key aspect of the *Game of Thrones* franchise when it comes to the adaptation of Martin's books on the fantastic world – HBO is currently working on several projects that are set in either Westeros or Essos. The most famous example for this (and the first already existing prequel of *Game of Thrones*) is *House of the Dragon*, based on Martin's history of the Targaryen dynasty, titled *Fire & Blood*. The case of this show is quite different from the history of the adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as the show creators decided to leave out the first half of the novel: although the book describes the history of the Targaryen family from Aegon the Conqueror, the series only starts 101 years after Aegon's Conquest, when Prince Viserys is chosen to be an heir by King Jaeherys I. However, as *Fire & Blood* is written in the style of a history book, writers had to fill in several gaps in order to create a detailed story with fully developed characters.

As we can see from the previously mentioned examples, the *Game of Thrones* universe has many different elements that correlate to each other differently. So how can we describe the relationship between the entries of this transmedia world? According to Ryan's theory, both external and internal interactivity play an important role in this transmedial storyworld.<sup>297</sup> External interactivity is present in the sense that the user has the ability to decide which media entry they are going to interact with – reading across the different incarnations will give a depth of experience, but none of the media incarnations require knowing the others. On the other hand, when readers, audiences or players want to interact with their chosen narrative, their interactivity is scripted by the medium. However, when it comes to which parts of the master-narrative certain media entries cover, the issue gets more complicated.

---

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>297</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, "Transmedia Storytelling."

As discussed previously, HBO's *Game of Thrones* adapted George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* to the screen, however, it also deviated from the source material in two ways. First of all, there were changes that appeared differently in the adaptation than in the source material, like the exclusion of Lady Stoneheart, the introduction of the Night King's character, Sansa Stark's marriage to Ramsay Bolton, or how Jojen Reed and Shireen Baratheon dies in the adaptation, but are still alive in the books. Secondly, the series created an alternative ending that had not existed before, but was based on Martin's rough outline that he gave the showrunners to help them finish the series. If we only concentrate on the first category, the show can clearly be understood as an adaptation, as each adaptation has the right to digress from the original source material, or even create a loose interpretation of it – this is the reason why Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as “repetition, but repetition without replication”<sup>298</sup>. However, with the introduction of the alternative ending, *Game of Thrones* became a transmedia story, as an added layer of narrative appeared on a platform that was different from the original. Nevertheless, the process of adaptation did not make the HBO series secondary to the book series, just as the introduction of an ending does not mean that the series' ending became the origin of George R. R. Martin's upcoming last two *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels – even though some fans like making value judgments based on their personal experiences with the books and the last few seasons of the HBO adaptation. The two media entries are on the same level, both of them can serve as entry points to the universe, and both of them can be consumed independently, and while it is a common practice of consumers to make comparisons between the two, from an academic point of view, it is much more interesting to think about how these two relate to each other and how the *Game of Thrones* franchise evolved as a transmedia narrative. Lothar Mikos' term of *mega-narration* (which is defined as “an industrial practice to engage audiences with a story universe as a global brand”<sup>299</sup>) is fitting for the *Game of Thrones* franchise, as the appearance of the narrative on different platforms was not systematically planned, like in the case of *The Matrix* or *The Blair Witch Project*. As it has been discussed in the theoretical background in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the problem with the term of transmedia storytelling is that it can be understood in two different ways: if we start off with Jenkins' definition, we will describe transmedia storytelling as a systematically planned execution of a certain narrative; but if we focus on the *transmedial* nature of stories, adaptations can also be understood as acts of

---

<sup>298</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 7.

<sup>299</sup> Mikos, “Transmedia Storytelling and Mega-Narration: Audiovisual Production in Converged Media Environments,” 160.

transmedia storytelling, if new information is added to the already existing material – even if it was not planned originally. Thus, Mikos’ mega-narration solves the problem of definition as it focuses on the significance of the franchise (which plays a crucial part in the creation of new media incarnations, because of the importance of economic benefits), while also allowing the transmedial nature to shine through, without necessarily emphasizing the systematic planning of the whole.

In terms of the official elements of the *Game of Thrones* franchise, it is really important to mention that one way of how HBO managed to spread the narrative across different media forms was to “create recognizable features that would anchor the different media products and platforms within the same storyworld”.<sup>300</sup> Julie Escurignan makes a distinction between three main types of merchandizing associated with the franchise: HBO official merchandizing, HBO-*Game of Thrones* licensed artefacts, and unofficial merchandizing, that are “products not made by HBO and sold on other platforms, and fans’ own creations”, including “various official and fan-made websites, forums and social media pages.”<sup>301</sup> Although Escurignan’s essay focuses on the different types of merchandize that is out of the scope of this thesis, since it only concentrates on those incarnations that add something to the narrative universe, it is important to highlight that in *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon* (and, possibly, in the upcoming spin-offs as well), HBO concentrates a lot on using recognizable features that link these incarnations together, be it a font, a title sequence, the soundtrack, the recurring sets, or the visual atmosphere of the series.

While the transmediality of this narrative universe allows audiences to move between the different media entries, it does not mean that the audience engagement will be the same for everyone. Thus, I believe it is really important to make a distinction between the consuming practices of the fandom and the audience. While members of the fandom tend to participate in the creation of meaning collectively, and they keep searching for new information about their favorite narrative, and may also collect merchandise and create new texts in the form of fanfiction, the audience can be described as a group of people who also consume the narrative, but do not have such a deep relationship with it, and their interaction with the text boils down to the simple act of consumption. When it comes to the *Game of Thrones* fandom, Martin Baker makes a distinction between five categories

---

<sup>300</sup> Julie Escurignan, “Branding Game of Thrones Across Media: HBO’s Visual Creation of a Brand Identity,” in *Present Scenarios of Media Production and Engagement*, ed. Simone Tosoni et al. (Bremen: edition Lumière, 2017), 27.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 28.

ranging from ‘classic fans’ (story centred), ‘fan watchers’ (those who like looking at other fan’s comments), ‘visitors’ (those who like to collect merchandise and visit locations), ‘series only’ (those who watch the series but nothing more) and ‘series plus’ (those who like to debate the series with friends).<sup>302</sup>

While Baker’s categories can definitely help us in understanding the approaches of the different types of fans in terms of *Game of Thrones*, I believe that extending his theory with further categories would be beneficial if we want to understand the fandom of *Game of Thrones*, since there are several fans who are also a fan of the books or other media incarnations as well, interacting with the franchise more deeply.

#### 4.4.1. *Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken*.<sup>303</sup> *the Impact of House of the Dragon on the Game of Thrones Universe*

When it comes to HBO’s adaptation of *Fire & Blood* (2018), the relationship between the original book and the series is much clearer. While Martin’s book starts with the Targaryen Conquest and Aegon I’s reign and ends with the first few years of the reign of Rhaenyra’s son, Aegon III, the adaptation decided to start its plot with the antecedents of the Dance of the Dragons, which is only described from roughly the second half of the book. As the book was written by the fictional narrator Archmaester Gyldayn, who uses different sources for his book as the events that he describes happened long before his life (Septon Eustace, Grand Maester Munkun, and Mushroom, the court fool), the events that he describes are usually contrary to each other. Because of this, the creators of the series selected the parts that they wanted to adapt. According to showrunner Ryan J Condal,

[w]hat we’re fascinated with, on a meta narrative level with this story, is showing how messy and unreliable history is. I mean, this is a book written by one author with an agenda trying to filter through the accounts of three other authors, all with their own agendas. And were [sic] expected to take the one true history out of this book? No. The thing that George is laughing at on the side is how anybody can read “Fire & Blood” and think that this is the one true official account of anything. It’s an expression of this story. There are things that happen in it that are

---

<sup>302</sup> Gill Jamieson, “Conference Report: Game of Thrones, an International Conference, University of Hertfordshire, 6-7 September, 2017 by Gill Jamieson,” *CST Online*, October 20, 2017, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://cstonline.net/conference-report-game-of-thrones-an-international-conference-university-of-hertfordshire-6-7-september-2017-by-lyndsay-duthie/>.

<sup>303</sup> “Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken” is the motto of House Martell, who spent decades rebelling against before they joined the Seven Kingdoms, hence Dorne is the only kingdom that was never successfully conquered by outsiders.

very well documented and are real, and there are other things where there are huge gaps and we don't know quite why this happened or who quite who [sic] this character was.<sup>304</sup>

Some changes that were introduced to the adaptation are Princess Rhaenyra's and Alicent Hightower's friendship, which does not exist in the book, as Alicent is nine years older than Rhaenyra. In the book, their conflict only starts after Alicent gives birth to her sons, and Viserys refuses to choose a new heir instead of Rhaenyra. The show also introduced two other completely new elements: Aegon's Prophecy about a future threat from the North and the Catspaw dagger, which is later used in *Game of Thrones* to kill the Night King. Although there were other changes as well (introducing the Velaryon House as Black characters; Daemon killing his wife, Lady Rhea Royce or making Laenor Velaryon survive, even though he dies in the book), the HBO show can still be understood as a traditional adaptation of Martin's *Fire & Blood*, as it does not add anything new to the already existing material. However, *House of the Dragon* strengthened the transmedial nature of the universe as it made several nods to the *Game of Thrones* adaptation, thus strengthening the relationship between the two.

Although both series can be watched independently from the other (or even without knowing anything about the source material), being familiar with the previous HBO series allows the audience to have a much deeper experience. For example, in Season 1 and 2, there are several scenes where the Valyrian dagger appears, that was used when an assassin tried to kill Bran Stark, and with which Arya killed the Night King with, making a thematic connection between the two examples. Additionally, one of the most influential nods to the predecessor of *House of the Dragon* happened in the last episode of season 8, when Daemon Targaryen touches a weirwood tree and has visions of the future.

Weirwood trees have a special significance in the *Game of Thrones* universe, since they are a species of tree that have faces carved on their barks, which have supposedly been done by the Children of the Forest, the original non-human inhabitants of Westeros. If the trees are placed in the center of a godswood (a wooded sanctuary for the Old Gods inside a castle's walls), they are also called heart trees. These sacred plants are rumoured to allow people who have green sight to connect with them, and see and hear the past, present or the future. In his vision, Daemon sees a man intertwined with a weirwood tree, who might be the Targaryen

---

<sup>304</sup> Adam B. Vary, "'House of the Dragon' Showrunner Talks [SPOILER] in the Finale, Changes From George R.R. Martin's Book, and What to Expect for Season 2," *Variety*, October 24, 2022, accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/house-of-the-dragon-finale-explained-aemond-luke-rhaenrya-daemon-season-2-1235412136/>.

bastard and later three-eyed raven Brynden Rivers, who is also known as Bloodraven. The next part of the vision is the approach of the Others, which highlights the biggest threat that is coming, and refers to Aegon's Dream that was previously shared by Viserys with his daughter Rhaenyra.<sup>305</sup> This is in direct correlation with the red comet, the dragon eggs in the fire, and the picture of the naked Daenerys with her three small dragons, which refers to the events of the first book, when Daenerys was reborn as the Unburnt and the Mother of Dragons. With this scene, *House of the Dragon* confirmed that the "prince that was promised" (the prophesied savior of Westeros) might have been Daenerys Targaryen.

After these scenes, Daemon saw the future: first, he had a vision about his dragon Caraxes dead, which was followed by his drowning in water, and Rhaenyra on the Iron Throne. After these three images, Daemon saw Helaena who told him that it is a story, and thus the vision ended. These last three images play a very important role in Daemon's decision to bend the knee to Rhaenyra, since he realizes that a greater threat is coming, and if they want to defeat the army of the dead, he has to support Rhaenyra's claim to the throne, since that is the only way of prevailing over the darkness.

All of these elements connect *House of the Dragon* to the narrative unity of *Game of Thrones*, and thus we can see that HBO may be trying to create a grand narrative that spans over several centuries of Westerosi history. The very fact that the network is currently working on several spin-off ideas means that there is an impressive vision in sight, and the end of the *Game of Thrones* universe is nowhere near in the future. *House of the Dragon* also strengthens the popularity of the franchise, since it is separate enough to attract a new audience who is not familiar with the story of *Game of Thrones*, but uses similar thematic and visual elements that connect it to its predecessor, thus serving the loyal fans of the series. This idea is very well represented by the title sequence, which shares the same song that was used by *Game of Thrones*, and also uses a similar camera movement: however, in this case, it is not the places of Westeros that are shown, but the events of the Dance of Dragons on an embroidery. The soundtrack was also created by the same composer, Ramin Djawadi, and introduces similar thematic melodies as well (for example, when we see Daenerys Targaryen in Daemon's vision, we can hear Daenerys' theme). Although it is a somewhat obvious connection, we should not forget about the shared places and settings (King's Landing or the Red Keep, for example) that appear in both shows.

---

<sup>305</sup> Aegon's Dream refers to the vision that Aegon the Conqueror had, which was about the end of the world of men. He saw the approach of a terrible winter and of absolute darkness, and believed that in order to save the world, the Iron Throne should be occupied by a Targaryen.

In conclusion, the success of *House of the Dragon* was a great experiment for HBO to see whether fans are still interested in the narrative world of Westeros, and as it can be seen from the other incarnations that are in the making, the future of Martin's epic narrative holds several other components in store.

#### 4.4.2. "When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die"<sup>306</sup>

When it comes to the other media incarnations in the *Game of Thrones* universe, they all add something new to the audience experience. While the video games that were listed in the previous subchapter do not contribute to the narrative as they are creating their own versions of Westerosi reality, and work with characters, events and settings that have already existed in the world, they still contribute to the transmedia experience as fans of the narrative are able to experiment with what it would be like to become a character in this fantastic world, and they also prolong the pleasure of the transmedia experience for those who would like to continue interacting with the storyworld.<sup>307</sup> Furthermore, the immersive nature of these games should not be disregarded, since this feature adds a lot to the fan experience. However, when it comes to the alternate reality game *The Maester's Path*, according to Zoë Shacklock, even though the game does not have a narrative structure, it can still be understood as a contributor to transmedia storytelling. *The Maester's Path* is an interesting part of this universe as it is based on Martin's source text but uses the aesthetics of the television program as well. According to Shacklock, "[t]his transmedia text can be touched, smelled and tasted, incorporated into our physiological constitutions. Therefore, it finds its life through the many bodies of the audience—a life that is, of course, open to a thousand different incarnations."<sup>308</sup>

When it comes to the video games, it is clear how because they appear on a different platform than the original books, they do contribute to the transmedial nature of the *Game of Thrones* universe. However, when we focus on the narratives that they create, we can see how they do not add anything new to the already existing, canonized or official storyworld. The role-playing games help players to create their own stories in this fantastic universe, based on the already existing information that the books or the television series shared with the audience; however, they do not extend the canon like the HBO shows or Martin's other books on Westeros did. Again, Lothar Mikos' term of mega-narration describes this phenomenon

---

<sup>306</sup> Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 471.

<sup>307</sup> Olivier Servais and Sarah Sepulchre, "Towards an Ordinary Transmedia Use: A French Speaker's Transmedia Use of Worlds in Game of Thrones MMORPG and Series," *M/C Journal* 21, no. 1 (March 14, 2018): 6, doi:10.5204/mcj.1367.

<sup>308</sup> Shacklock, "'A Reader Lives a Thousand Lives before He Dies': Transmedia Textuality and the Flows of Adaptation," 266.

very accurately: as *Game of Thrones* was born as a global brand after the introduction of its television adaptation, creators decided to piggyback on its success and make their own contributions to the franchise, using the narrative building blocks of the storyworld. Despite the fact that these examples can be enjoyed without knowing the original source material(s), they are mostly used as marketing equipment to attract new audiences into a certain franchise, or to sell new products to fans who are invested enough to seek new ways of interacting with their beloved narrative universe.

Although the Seven Kingdoms originally started out as a story about a young boy who has found some direwolf pups in the snow,<sup>309</sup> it had become one of the most influential fantasy franchises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, since not only did it create a huge international fanbase, but also left its mark on television history, which I am going to uncover in Chapter 6 of this thesis. As each new media entry gave its own contribution to the whole, there is no ur-text from which the story should be discovered: it does not matter whether the audiences who would like to get to know Martin's world would like to start with the comic books, video games or one of the HBO adaptations: all of the media entries serve as entry-points to the world of the Seven Kingdoms. Thus, the transmedial world of *Game of Thrones* is also horizontally integrated: none of the media incarnations are more valuable than the others. The two upcoming volumes of the original book series, *The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring* will further complicate the theoretical relationship between the epic fantasy saga and its adaptation, however, even if fans' speculations about how the author is never going to finish the series are going to be true, one can be sure that the huge transmedia universe of *Game of Thrones* is not going to stop expanding for a while, if audiences will continue to be interested in the storyworld.

In conclusion, the reason why the *Game of Thrones* franchise is an interesting case of transmedia storytelling, is because first of all, the show created an ending that might be surpassed by the source material later on. Secondly, *Game of Thrones* is also one of the first examples of fantasy transmedia storytelling in which the transmedial world unfolded in a serial form, instead of a filmic one, thus opening the way of new serial fantasy adaptations like *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, *The Witcher*, or *The Wheel of Time*. I would argue that one of the reasons behind the serial adaptation behind *Game of Thrones* is that not only does he work with several main characters and numerous main storylines, but he also builds an incredibly rich and detailed storyworld that can be best translated in a serial format.

---

<sup>309</sup> Gilmore, "George R.R. Martin."



Lastly, Martin's narrative holds several features that make it a great source material for a transmedia narrative, that is also true for his *Thousand Worlds* storyworld: thus, the next chapter of this thesis is going to focus on the author's other literary writings, in order to show that seeds of transmediality can be found at their core.

## 5. Screen and Text: The Relationship between George R. R. Martin's Works and the Screen Industries

“My career is littered with the corpses of dead series.”<sup>310</sup>

*George R. R. Martin*

George R. R. Martin gained his worldwide fame with *A Song of Ice and Fire*, but he already had a flourishing career prior to the publication of *A Game of Thrones* (1996). Before writing an epic fantasy series, he was an established author of science fiction and horror stories, and also worked as a screenwriter, which had a lasting impact on the way he approached his texts as a literary writer. As I have discussed in previous chapters, after the publication of the first few volumes, Martin was not certain that his epic fantasy series will ever be adapted – however, showcreators David Benioff and D. B. Weiss proved that the author's detailed and complicated story of the fight between the ruling houses of Westeros can be successfully adapted to television screens. In this chapter, I am going to introduce Martin's literary and televisual background, since both of them are important in regards to the writing of *A Song of Ice and Fire*: as this chapter is going to show, there are several thematic and poetic resemblances in Martin's writings which also echo in his epic fantasy saga. I argue that the fact that Martin was also working as a screenwriter in Hollywood left a deep impact on his literary career, since after he faced the difficulties of not being able to translate all of his grand visions to the screen due to technical (mostly monetary) reasons, he turned towards writing an epic fantasy series in an almost limitless medium. Furthermore, I am going to elaborate on why his fantasy series served as a good source material for a television show, and discuss the ways it may deemed to be problematic. Lastly, this chapter is going to analyze the adaptation process of *Fire & Blood*, and touch upon Martin's standpoint on adaptations.

### 5.1. The Authorial Portrait of George R. R. Martin<sup>311</sup>

Before *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Martin was already a successful science fiction and horror writer, who was also employed as a screenwriter and producer for television, working on popular series like *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1985–1989) and *Beauty and the Beast* (CBS,

---

<sup>310</sup> George R. R. Martin, *Dreamsongs II* (London: Gollancz, 2008), 3.

<sup>311</sup> This subchapter is based on the authorial comments of George R. R. Martin's two collections of short stories, *Dreamsongs I* and *II*. [George R. R. Martin, *Dreamsongs I* (London: Gollancz, 2006); Martin, *Dreamsongs II*. ]

1987–1990). He was also famous for being one of the originators of the *Wild Cards* science fiction series (1987– ), that includes several anthologies, mosaic novels, and solo novels.

George R. R. Martin was born on September 20, 1948, in Bayonne, New Jersey, where he spent the rest of his childhood. Bayonne had a great impact on his writings, since he felt that the world that he knew was quite limited: dreaming about traveling and exploring the world, he became a reader, and also started to create his own fictional universes to his own entertainment. The first narratives that he wrote were monster stories, and he quickly realized that they could be sold for pennies to his friends and children in his neighbourhood, including a dramatization of the tale by the author himself. Unfortunately, after one of his customers complained to his mother about having nightmares from the tales, Martin had to stop selling his writings. He also crafted fiction about the mythical adventures of his pet turtles in their toy castle, but these texts were never completed, since he felt like they were not as great written down as he imagined them in his mind. Later on, Martin became an avid comic-book reader, and also joined the comic fandom of the 1960s, and started to write fiction for several different fanzines (some of which had a short lifespan). His first professional sale happened in February 1971 to *Galaxy* magazine: the short story titled “The Hero” is a military science fiction story about the tragic fate of a retired soldier who is forced to enlist in the army by his superior officer.

The stories that Martin crafted in his early childhood have several features that appear in his later writings as well. First of all, the feelings of fear and dread that appeared in his early monster stories play an essential part in his horror stories and science fiction horror hybrids, and monstrosity as a general concept is also an important trope in his writings. The only traditional monsters one may find in *A Song of Ice and Fire* are the Others; however, Martin introduces several characters who turn out to be monstrous as well, the two most famous examples being Joffrey Baratheon and Ramsay Bolton. Monstrosity as a human feature also plays an integral part in his short stories as well, since one of the author’s favorite topics is the discovery of the darkness of the human soul. The turtle tales can also be understood as precursors to *A Song of Ice and Fire*, given that they are characterized by intricate storytelling, complex worldbuilding, and a complicated web of relationships between the main characters. Furthermore, the turtle tales have a thematic resemblance to *A Song of Ice and Fire* in terms of knighthood and castle narratives, which demonstrates his early interest in the topic.

Due to the fact that in his early adulthood writing was not profitable enough for Martin to earn his living, he could only dream about being a full-time writer, and decided to look for a

day-job which could support his living and let him continue writing. Before starting working for television, Martin was directing chess tournaments, did alternative service with VISTA at the Cook County Legal Assistance Foundation, taught journalism at Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa, and was crafting and publishing science fiction and horror stories in the meantime. His career was established while he was writing for science fiction magazine *Analog* (1930– ), where he published some of his most famous short stories and novelettes: “With Morning Comes Mistfall,” “And Seven Times Never Kill Man,” “The Second Kind of Loneliness,” “The Storms of Windhaven,” and “Override”. He won his first Hugo Award in 1975 with ‘A Song for Lya,’ but his ultimate success as a science fiction writer was achieved with his most famous sci-fi novelette “Sandkings”, which won the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, and the Balrog Award for Best Novelette in 1980, and remains the only one of Martin’s stories to this date that won both the Nebula and the Hugo Award.

In many ways, “Sandkings” is very similar to *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since they share several leading motifs, thus, it also shows the strong connections between Martin’s literary works. The story is set in Martin’s famous “Thousand Worlds” universe, where Earth has already settled on several planets and formed the Federal Empire. The main character of the story, Simon Kress lives on the planet Baldur, and loves collecting exotic, dangerous animals that he tends to show off to his friends as a way of proving himself. After he comes home from a long business trip, he realizes that most of his pets died since he did not care about them at all, and thus decides to look for replacements. He stumbles upon a mysterious shop called Wo & Shade, where he becomes interested in sandkings. These creatures form colonies that consist of a maw (a large female) that controls the insect-like mobiles through telepathy. The mobiles work for sustaining the maw by bringing her food and building a castle around her, and they fight coordinated battles with each other, which can serve as entertainment to their owners. Sandkings can also grow small or huge depending on the size of their tank – and if the owner beams a hologram of his face into their terrarium, they will decorate their castles with his likeness. After Wo ensures Kress that the sandkings are easy to take care of, and they will eat anything, Kress happily leaves with his newfound exotic pets.

After the installation, Kress becomes disappointed, since the four colonies (white, black, red, and orange) only work on their castles and they barely fight, so he decides to starve them, which results in the sandkings’ constant battle for food. After he beams his hologram into the tank, they also start decorating their castles in his likeness. Kress keeps organizing parties where his guests bring strange creatures that the sandkings have to fight, and he ignores Wo’s warning about how they should not be starved – she claims that if they are fed properly, they

are going to make more intriguing wars instead of fighting over food. Meanwhile, his face on the sandkings' castles becomes more and more distorted, as the pets illustrate his true personality. After his ex-girlfriend Cath reports to the animal control authorities about how Kress is mistreating his sandkings, he films himself feeding a puppy to the creatures and sends the video to her. Cath, enraged, arrives the next day to destroy the terrarium of the sandkings, but Kress stabs her to death with a sword by trying to stop her. Kress flees in panic, and when he returns, he sees that the reds, whites and the blacks took over his house, and the oranges disappeared. He feeds the chopped up body of Cath to the sandkings, and then tries to exterminate the creatures unsuccessfully. He also hires assassins to help him, but they are eaten by the sandkings. After he realizes the hopelessness of the situation, he invites his friends and locks them in the basement, where the whites eat them up, since the hunger of the queen must be satisfied. Not knowing what else to do, Kress decides to contact Wo, who assures the man that she is going to help him, but Simon has to flee because the white maw is unstable. As Kress is walking in the desert and thinks about how he is going to hire an assassin to kill Wo & Shade after everything is resolved, he stumbles upon some children playing outside a house, and realizes that the building itself is the castle of the mature orange sandkings, who all have his face.

Thematically, "Sandkings" possesses several aspects that resemble *A Song of Ice and Fire* and that describe Martin's poetics. The story focuses on human greed for power, and the terrible things that people are capable of if they want to achieve a certain goal. The main character of the story, Simon Kress is a dark, evil person who is only interested in his exotic creatures until they make his friends impressed – he did not care about any of his living beings at all. What makes the *Sandkings* an incredibly unsettling and uncanny story is that the animals can actually see the rotten nature of their master, and as Simon Kress has to face his real persona in the decorations of the castles, he becomes even angrier – thus, he cannot face his own brutality. The reason why the sandkings take over everything at the end of the story is that he was focusing on his own selfish needs and goals only, without taking the needs of others into consideration. This theme also appears heavily in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where the ruling families of Westeros will do anything that helps them get to the throne or achieve what they want. The first and most emblematic example might be how the conflict of *A Game of Thrones* starts with Jamie Lannister pushing a seven-year-old boy out of the window, so that he can keep his sexual relationship with his twin sister a secret, and thus hide the fact that the king's "rightful heirs" are not his, but Jamie's children – thus, their claim to the throne is illegitimate. However, after this event, readers will soon see that many of the main characters

would do anything in order to attain their objectives: Lysa Arryn kills his husband, Jon Arryn (who was also the Hand of the King), so that he does not send their son Robert to Dragonstone to be fostered by Stannis Baratheon, while Petyr Baelish (Littlefinger) starts a war between the Starks and the Lannisters in order to benefit from the resulting chaos.

One of the most influential themes of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is war and politics, which also play a crucial role in the life of the sandkings. Just like conflicts and intrigue are intrinsic in the lives of these creatures, they also serve as a driving force behind what is happening in Westeros. The only difference here is that in the case of the sandkings, their constant warfare does not have a moral message to it, as it is simply part of their nature. If the sandkings were treated well, they would keep their skirmish to themselves, and may also evolve further, which is revealed at the end of the story when it turns out that the other shop owner, the mysterious Shade is a sandking. The brutality of the sandkings emerges from the way Kress is treating them – if they were properly cared for, they would not have killed the assassins or (possibly, since the ending is ambiguous) their owner. Although this can also be said about humans in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, their constant fight over who should rule gets a definitely sour tone, as while the great houses are focusing on their power struggles and revenge, they lose sight of the real enemy: the Others.

The protagonist of the story, Simon Kress can be described as a greedy, power-hungry, violent man, who only cares about himself. The plot of the novelette is driven by his brutality: if he were to listen to Wo's instructions and warning, he would not end up in a situation where the oranges presumably destroy him. There are two main "voices of reason" in the story, and both of them are women: Wo, one of the owners of the mysterious shop, and Cath, Simon's ex-girlfriend. Not even their caution can prevent Kress treating the sandkings miserably, which leads to his eventual downfall. The brutality of people is also an important motif in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which, just like "Sandkings," is full of explicit and realistic descriptions of violence, gore and cruelty. However, Martin's characters are not *just* bad: after all, he became famous for his portrayal of morally grey characters. Even the most cruel villains of his tend to have glimpses of doubt when they are not sure about whether what they are doing is the best step to take.

Although in science fiction circles Martin is mostly famous for his short stories and novelettes, in 1977 he published his first novel titled *Dying of the Light*, which is also set in his "Thousand Worlds" universe. The story tells the tale of Dirk t'Larien, who is called to the dying planet of Worlorn by a whisperjewel (a memory storage from his former lover Gwen Delvano). The novel touches upon themes of dying love, the question of identity, tradition

and a dying culture, and it also shares several similar features with *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Firstly, one of the leading motifs of the novel is knighthood and the quest for something that is long gone. In the beginning of the story, the main character thinks back of his previous relationship with Gwen, whom she used to think of as his “Guinevere” (resembling King Arthur’s wife). One of the reasons why their relationship did not work out is that Dirk did not see his lover as she was: he rather created an idealistic picture in his mind, and thus imagined an alternate identity for her. The novel also contains other allusions to the Arthurian legend, which makes it heavily intertextual: in terms of the characters, Jaan Vikary, Gwens current partner can be understood as King Arthur, while Dirk plays the role of Lancelot. The place where Gwen and Dirk fell in love is called Avalon, which is also the name of the place where Excalibur was forged. Secondly, in the story, readers get to know the patriarchal society of High Kavalaan, which is founded on the principle that women are shared between their husbands and their teyns<sup>312</sup>. Men are bonded to other men (usually for life) in a very close relationship, which is similar to Dothraki culture, where khals are strongly connected to their bloodriders (however, their relationship is not as equal as in Kavalan culture).

*Dying of the Light* was followed by *Windhaven* (1981), a science fiction fix-up novel<sup>313</sup> that was co-written with Lisa Tuttle, and *Fevre Dream* (1982), which is set on the Mississippi River in 1857, and blends the genres of horror and vampire novel quite effectively – which shows another characteristics of Martin’s poetics: most of his works are generic hybrids. It was closely followed by Martin’s third novel, *The Armageddon Rag* (1983), a murder mystery that contains fantastic elements and can be read as a meditation on the rock music era of the 1960s. Although Martin, his publisher, Poseidon Press, his agent and his editor all felt hopeful about the book, it was far from becoming successful:

[t]he *Rag* received some wonderful reviews. It was nominated for the World Fantasy Award, losing out to John M. Ford’s superb *The Dragon Waiting*. And it died the death. It had all the hallmarks of a big bestseller save one. No one bought it. Far from building on the success of *Fevre Dream*, it sold badly in hardcover and miserably in paperback. The full extent of the disaster was not brought home to me until 1985, when Kirby tried to sell my unfinished fifth

---

<sup>312</sup> The author defines teyn as “Kavalan term for a man bonded to another man, usually for life, in a co-equal relationship; the closest possible relationship between Kavalans; literally, *my-bond* or *close-blond* or *holdclose*.” [George R. R. Martin, *Dying of the Light*, Gollancz (Great Britain, 2000), 363.]

<sup>313</sup> A fix-up novel is made up of short stories that were originally written separately, but later on are edited into a novel to form one story.

novel, *Black and White and Red All Over*, and found that neither Poseidon nor any other publisher was willing to make an offer.<sup>314</sup>

The novel almost ended Martin's literary career, however, it was welcomed positively by Phil DeGuere, the creator and executive producer of *Simon & Simon* (CBS, 1981–1989), who optioned the movie rights. Despite the fact that the movie was never made, DeGuere asked Martin to help him write for the revival of *The Twilight Zone* in 1985, and thus Martin ended up working in television as a screenwriter. Overall, we can assume that although *The Armageddon Rag* was a commercial failure, it had a huge impact on Martin's career since it was the book that directed him towards television, which had a great impact on his life and authorial style later on.

In 1986, however, *The Armageddon Rag* was followed by yet another (fix-up) novel titled *Tuf Voyaging*, which deemed to be one of Martin's most successful novels apart from *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The main character of these stories is Haviland Tuf, ecological engineer, master of the Ark, who starts his journey as a simple trader but ends up being a godlike figure who (almost) gains limitless power over full ecosystems. Tuf is a strange character, whose most important features are that he is a vegetarian, he loves animals (and is especially fond of cats), and always follows his own strict ethical codex. By getting his hands on the old warship, he will be able to produce exotic plants and animals by using the genetic codes found on the Ark, and thus becomes an ecological engineer who helps citizens of planets in need. The novel is made up of seven interconnected stories [“The Plague Star” (1985); “Loaves and Fishes” (1985); “Guardians (1981); “Second Helpings” (1985); “A Best for Norn” (1976); “Call Him Moses” (1978), “Manna from Heaven” (1985)], that describe the events that shaped the life of Tuf and made him an ecological engineer. The novel did really well, and Martin was asked to write a sequel, but it never happened – even though in *Dreamsongs*, Martin elaborates on how he still receives letters from fans in which they ask him to put away all of his projects and write Haviland Tuf stories. Although Martin touched on some contemporary topics in this novel (the results of overpopulation and how an overpopulated planet may welcome the possible solutions for their issue, environmentalism, and the question of absolute power), it has an overall comic tone which makes it very different from his other writings. Additionally, while in the case of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, power tends to corrupt the main characters, it has a different effect on Haviland Tuf. Biblical motifs play a very important role in these short stories, which strengthens the novel's intertextuality: by the end

---

<sup>314</sup> Martin, *Dreamsongs II*, 81.



of the novel, Haviland Tuf gains absolute power which makes him very similar to God, since he has the means of building and destroying full ecosystems, and creating new kinds of species. However, he has an incredibly strict ethical code that leads him the way – and as most readers tend to agree with his decisions (since Tuf is a strong supporter of the value of life, which also appears in the fact that he is a vegetarian), him constantly playing God is not seen *as* problematic as it could if he had a different personality. Furthermore, he never initiates changes in the planets that he visits: whenever he is helping a certain community, it always starts out as a commission – thus, instead of identifying as a god, he stays a trader. Thus, the only similarity between Martin’s epic fantasy saga and *Tuf Voyaging* might be that both of these stories are set in a vast narrative universe, and talk about the corruption of humankind – however, the perspective through which we see humanity is much different, since in terms of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, we see what is happening in Westeros and Essos through the eyes of the very people who struggle with each other, while in the case of *Tuf Voyaging*, we get to watch the events unfolding through Tuf’s perspective, who is rather a cold outsider, helping people in need, but always in ways that *he* believes to be right.

A year after *Tuf Voyaging*, Martin published his short story collection titled *Portraits of His Children* (1987), which consisted of eleven stories – and then, nine years later, *A Game of Thrones* was finally published. In the meantime, the author was working for television, since it was financially more rewarding than writing science fiction and horror stories. However, *A Song of Ice and Fire* was not the only huge project that Martin took up as a writer, since he is one of the masterminds behind *Wild Cards*, the famous science fiction shared universe anthologies that were started in 1987. After his divorce, Martin moved to Santa Fe and started to have monthly meetings with Roger Zelazny, Tony Hillerman, Norm Zollinger, Fred Saberhagen and other New Mexico writers, and began playing *Dungeons & Dragons* with some of them, which resulted in Martin starting his own game campaigns. He began playing as a gamemaster in *SuperWorld* sessions, and the idea behind *Wild Cards* was born.

Shared worlds were all the rage in the early ‘80s, thanks to the tremendous success of the *Thieves World* anthologies edited by Bob Asprin and Lynn Abbey. The format was perfect for what we wanted to do with our *SuperWorld* characters, so I pitched the idea to my fellow gamers, filled out our ranks by recruiting Roger Zelazny, Howard Waldrop, Lew Shiner, Stephen Leigh, and half a dozen other writers from all across the country, and drew up a formal

proposal for a three volume anthology series called *Wild Cards*. Shawna McCarthy bought it, her first day on the job as an editor at Bantam Books.<sup>315</sup>

The series was a huge success, but as the books became darker and some writers left the project, it started to lose its popularity. The authors decided to continue working with a new publisher, which resulted in Bantam discontinuing the printing of the first twelve books, and after the fifteenth volume, they did not have a publisher anymore. In 2002, however, after a seven year hiatus, *Wild Cards* started to be published with iBooks (2002–2006), then Tor Books (2006–2022) and finally with Bantam Books again (2023– ).

Martin's bibliography shows that he has a multifaceted career of writing in the genres of science fiction, horror, fantasy, and even television shows. However, even though his literary texts are somewhat different from each other, all of his works share some features. First of all, his texts are characterized by a very detailed and immersive worldbuilding. The first fictional universe that he created is called the "Thousand Worlds", which consists of several planets that were colonized by Earth and formed the Federal Empire. After humanity started to expand all over the universe, they discovered new species like the Hrangans or the Fyndii, and entered into a very long conflict with them, which is known as the Double War. After the Federal Empire was destroyed in the war, the galaxy fell into chaos – most of Martin's short stories are set after this event. After the Thousand Worlds universe, as Martin started to work on his idea of a young boy finding direwolf pups in the snow, the world of *Game of Thrones* was born, which later expanded into different continents, mythologies, and an incredibly detailed history. Although the *Wild Cards* series has multiple authors, Martin being only one of them, its universe can also be listed here, since it is just as rich and immersive as Martin's two other fictional storyworlds. All of these universes are characterized by a complex narrative web, in which politics and power games play an important role. Furthermore, Martin's universes are filled with morally gray characters who all possess a psychological depth, which adds another layer to the immersive nature of his texts. Thematically, both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the stories of the Thousand Worlds universe are originated from the same concept, which is a huge conflict that results in chaos. I would argue that Martin's science fiction stories also hold the potential of being a great source material for upcoming adaptations, since the Thousand Worlds universe has very similar qualities to the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*; after all, both of these creations are ever-expanding fantastic worlds without borders.

---

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 232.

## 5.2. Martin's Poetics

In order to fully understand the nature of the author's writings, it is worth diving deep into the way he is thinking about storytelling. Although traditionally literary criticism does not take the author's views and opinions on his own works into consideration, because the author's interpretation is equal to the readers', and thus, it should not have an impact on the reader's understanding, I argue that including Martin's commentary is essential if we want to understand his literary oeuvre in a contemporary setting. Thanks to Martin's heavy online media presence on several social media websites, especially *Facebook* and his official blog, titled *notablog*, the author's commentary on his work tends to reappear in fan discussions regarding his books and adaptations, sparking sometimes even heated debates. This phenomenon can also be seen in the case of other contemporary popular authors, who are fond of talking about their writings online, which later on may have an impact on the readers' interpretation. Thus, although I agree with the fact that the what the author thinks about their work should not be important in the case of a literary analysis, I argue that we cannot think about the contemporary literary and media environment without taking the authors' commentary into consideration.

One of the most outstanding features of Martin's writings is that many of his stories (the short stories and the novels as well) can be seen as generic hybrids: *A Song of Ice and Fire* contains elements of fantasy, historical fiction, politics and romance, while many of his shorter texts combine the elements of science fiction and horror – however, the central concept seems to be the same topic over and over again: the conflicts of the human heart.

In his commentary to the last writings of the second volume of *Dreamsongs*, Martin elaborates on what might be considered to be his *ars poetica*, thus, offering a key to readers who want to understand his writings better. When talking about why defining the genres of different literary works does not matter, he highlights William Faulkner's acceptance speech of the Nobel Prize of Literature,

when he spoke of 'the old verities and truths of the heart, the universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.' The 'human heart in conflict with itself,' Faulkner said, 'alone can make good writing, because only that is worth writing about.'<sup>316</sup>

---

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 354.

Martin argues that no matter which genre they belong to, literary works always keep on focusing on “the human heart in conflict with itself” – and tagging something as science fiction, horror or fantasy does not add anything to the meaning of the narrative. It is also true for Martin’s stories, the majority of which can be understood as tales about characters who go through conflicting feelings and have to decide which path to take. This may explain why Martin is so fond of morally grey characters, since their decisions between good and evil can serve as a fascinating driving force behind their journeys. In the prologue of the first volume of *Dreamsongs*, Gardner Dozois argues that these emotional conflicts make Martin a *romantic* writer, since his prose is far away from the “[d]ry minimalism or the coolly ironic games of postmodernism”.<sup>317</sup> Martin’s stories are full of interesting characters with complex personalities who keep facing moral questions – and their decisions always have a huge impact on their fate. This characterization is combined with an incredibly rich prose, which is full of lengthy descriptions about the setting, be it a landscape, a battle scene, or a glamorous feast. Martin’s biggest problem as a screenwriter was that he always had to limit his visions because of monetary reasons, since his ideas about certain scenes were always full of grand ideas. While as an author, Martin had the opportunity to write *anything* that he wanted to, since his only restriction was the limits of his imagination, television was (and still is) a more constrained medium, where money and the technological background dictates what can and cannot be presented on screens. In *Dreamsongs II*, Martin describes the beginning of his career as a screenwriter as “[c]asting, budgets, pre-production meetings, working with a director; all of it was new to me. My script was too long and too expensive. That would prove to be a hallmark of my career in film and television. *All* of my scripts would be too long and too expensive.”<sup>318</sup> Thus, *A Song of Ice and Fire* seems like a logical turn in his career, since this fantasy narrative was the first epic series that Martin started to experiment with. The Westerosi narrative enabled Martin to let his imagination free and write about incredible landscapes, peculiar castles, huge dragons and frightening ice creatures without being constricted by the limits of television. Moreover, the lengthy descriptions also add to the immersive nature of his writings: while television is a naturally immersive medium, since the visual depiction of the story enables audiences to feel like they are part of the story that they are reading about, almost helping them create a cinematic experience in their mind. I argue that one of the ways in which Martin’s background in Hollywood impacted his writings is that as television is a naturally constrained medium, it did not allow him to translate all of his

---

<sup>317</sup> Martin, *Dreamsongs I*, 4.

<sup>318</sup> Martin, *Dreamsongs II*, 85.

grand ideas to the television screens – thus, it seems almost natural that instead of continuing his career as a short story writer, he turned towards an immersive epic fantasy series, where worldbuilding is essential, but the medium still allows him to create grand visions that are not restricted by budgets and other creators. For instance, describing giant castles, fighting dragons, strange ice creatures, and an ice wall that is about 700 feet tall is much *easier* in literature than in film, let alone television, where the creators do not necessarily have the same budget for a television drama as filmmakers for a cinematic blockbuster.

The fact that Martin uses exceptionally long and flowery paragraphs to describe certain events allows readers to fully become active observers in this fantastic narrative world. One of the quotes that fully encapsulate this feature of Martin's writings and is also used a lot by fans on social media to criticize Martin's realism is the scene from *A Dance with Dragons*, where Daenerys Targaryen is struggling with a disease:

An hour later, her stomach began to cramp so badly that she could not go on. She spent the rest of that day retching up green slime. *If I stay here, I will die. I may be dying now.* Would the horse god of the Dothraki part the grass and claim her for his starry *khalasar*, so she might ride the nightlands with Khal Drogo? In Westeros the dead of House Targaryen were given to the flames, but who would light her pyre here? *My flesh will feed the wolves and carrion crows*, she thought sadly, *and worms will burrow through my womb.* Her eyes went back to Dragonstone. It looked smaller. She could see smoke rising from its wind-carved summit, miles away. *Drogon has returned from hunting.*

Sunset found her squatting in the grass, groaning. Every stool was looser than the one before, and smelled fouler. By the time the moon came up she was shitting brown water. The more she drank, the more she shat, but the more she shat, the thirstier she grew, and her thirst sent her crawling to the stream to suck up more water. When she closed her eyes at last, Dany did not know whether she would be strong enough to open them again.<sup>319</sup>

Although this quote could seem troubling for some readers, it truly encapsulates Martin's approach to realism in fantasy. By creating a believable and sometimes even hideous picture of this pseudo-medieval world, he highlights how fantasy is not always as fine and noble as people imagine: thus, he critiques the idealistic view of this age, and describes how unjust the world is. In Martin's epic fantasy, sometimes even the most noble characters have to face reality, while the use of dirt can be used to underline their (sometimes falsely) proud and

---

<sup>319</sup> George R. R. Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* (London: Harper Voyager, 2011), 1092–93.

“positive” self-image that they created of themselves. As a result, even the seemingly noble characters are painted in grey, instead of offering an overly idealized picture about them.

Besides the rich characterization and descriptions, however, the author’s poetics has another essential feature, which is the mixing of genres. In the first volume of *Dreamsongs*, in the commentary to “Hybrids and Horrors,” he mentions how even before he got to know the writings of H. P. Lovecraft, he received a chemistry set for Christmas as a child that inspired him to mix certain genres together, in order to see what happens – although sometimes the experiments can have a messy outcome, “once in a while, if we do it right, we may stumble on a combination that *explodes*!”<sup>320</sup>

Although Martin’s short stories and novelettes are mostly famous for the mixing of the genres of science fiction and horror, there are other texts in his oeuvre that can also be understood as mixed. For example, his 1982 novel *Fevre Dream* is a vampire novel that can be read as a horror or a steamboat novel; while *The Armageddon Rag*, which was published a year later, “is even more difficult to classify; fantasy, horror, murder mystery, rock ‘n’ roll novel, political novel, ‘60s novel. It’s got Froggy the Gremlin too.”<sup>321</sup> Martin goes on saying that “[e]ven my fantasy series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is a hybrid of sorts, inspired as much by the historical fiction of Thomas B. Costain and Nigel Tranter as the fantasy of Tolkien, Howard, and Fritz Leiber.”<sup>322</sup> I would argue that part of the reason why Martin’s writings became so successful is that he is a master of combining elements of different genres, thus catering to the needs of different types of readers. *A Song of Ice and Fire*, for instance, can be of course read as an epic fantasy series; however, there is a strong emphasis on politics and power struggles, love, romance, and sometimes even horror. It is not only fantasy readers who will become hooked on this series, but those who may not be familiar with fantasy but are interested in the aforementioned themes as well.

In “The Heart in Conflict” (the last commentary in the second volume of *Dreamsongs*), Martin goes on that if we treat Faulkner’s point about the aim of literature as the starting point of writing, the categorization of genres does not matter at all. He then elaborates on “The Furniture Rule”, saying:

We can make up all the definitions of science fiction and fantasy and horror that we want. We can draw our boundaries and make our labels, but in the end it’s still the same old story, the one about the human heart in conflict with itself.

---

<sup>320</sup> Martin, *Dreamsongs I*, 415.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 415–16.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

The rest, my friends, is furniture.

The House of Fantasy is built of stone and wood and furnished in High Medieval. Its people travel by horse and galley, fight with sword and spell and battleaxe, communicate by Palantir or raven, and break bread with elves and dragons.

The House of Science Fiction is built of duralloy and plastic and furnished in Faux Future. Its people travel by starship and aircar, fight with nukes and tailored gems, communicate by ansible and laser, and break protein bars with aliens.

The House of Horror is built of bone and cobwebs and furnished in Ghastly Gothick. Its people travel only by night, fight with anything that will kill messily, communicate in screams and shrieks and gibbers, and sip blood with vampires and werewolves.

The Furniture Rule, I call it.

Forget the definitions. Furniture Rules.<sup>323</sup>

Thus, in Martin's understanding, the only thing that really matters in good fiction is the conflicts of the human heart: all the other aspects, like the setting, the age the story is set in, the creatures and the objects are just "furniture" that make the story a bit more colorful.

Lastly, it would be worth looking into the way Martin crafts his complex, intertwined stories. There have been speculations about why it takes Martin so long to finally complete his epic saga, however, one of the most probable reasons behind this might be the way that he is writing stories. When asked about his writing technique in several interviews, Martin always claimed that there are two types of writers: the architect and the gardener. While architects usually plan the whole narrative in advance, gardeners take a story seed and water it with their blood; they have a general idea about what the seed is going to grow into, but there are other factors as well that have an influence on the end result. On his official blog, Martin created a blogpost about his writing process and the future and possible ending of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The author claimed the following:

Another question that I get a lot, especially since the end of GAME OF THRONES on HBO, is whether A SONG OF ICE & FIRE, will end the same way. An architect would be able to give a short, concise, simple answer to that, but I am much more of a gardener. My stories grow and evolve and change as I write them. I generally know where I am going, sure... the final destinations, the big set pieces, they have been my head for years... for decades, in the case of A SONG OF ICE & FIRE. There are lots of devils in the details, though, and sometimes the ground change under my feet as the words pour forth.

---

<sup>323</sup> Martin, *Dreamsongs II*, 354.

[...] I have been at work in my winter garden. Things are growing... and changing, as does happen with us gardeners. Things twist, things change, new ideas come to me (thank you, muse), old ideas prove unworkable, I write, I rewrite, I restructure, I rip everything apart and rewrite again, I go through doors that lead nowhere, and doors that open on marvels.

Sounds mad, I know. But it's how I write. Always has been. Always will be. For good or ill.<sup>324</sup>

Not only does this approach explain a lot about why the sixth volume of the saga takes so long to write, but it also demonstrates why his works can serve as such great source materials for meganarration. Instead of carefully designing a narrative where each and every element has its own particular space, Martin creates storyworlds that are expanding into several directions all the time – which makes them very hard to finish, since after a while, characters start to live their own separate and complicated lives (which results in cases like the Meereenese knot). However, this flowering richness of his texts also allows other media to enter the picture, since this narrative freedom allows the organic evolution of the storyworld. Although after fans have been waiting for the sixth volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire* for thirteen years, one cannot be sure that *The Winds of Winter* will indeed ever be published, the fact that Martin created a lush narrative garden that is everexpanding cannot be denied.

### 5.3. Martin on Adaptations

It has been known that the author is fond of literature and television, but when it comes to adaptations, he is an advocate of fidelity to the source material. In 2022, Martin had a conversation with author Neil Gaiman at New York City's Symphony Space, where they talked about their careers and Martin's then-new book, *The Rise of the Dragon: An Illustrated History of the Targaryen Dynasty, Volume One* (2022). During the discussion, the controversial issue of fidelity to the source material came up, to which Martin responded:

[h]ow faithful do you have to be? Some people don't feel that they have to be faithful at all. There's this phrase that goes around: 'I'm going to make it my own.' I hate that phrase. [...] There are changes that you have to make – or that you're called upon to make – that I think are legitimate. And there are other ones that are not legitimate.<sup>325</sup>

---

<sup>324</sup> Martin, "A Winter Garden."

<sup>325</sup> Ethan Shanfeld, "George R.R. Martin and Neil Gaiman Hate When Hollywood Makes 'Illegitimate' Changes to Source Material: 'F—Ing Morons,'" *Variety*, October 28, 2022, accessed: 16 July, 2024, <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/george-rr-martin-neil-gaiman-hate-hollywood-changing-source-material-1235416651/>.



He also mentioned the example that was also shared in *Dreamsongs*: when he was working on Roger Zelazny's short story "The Last Defender of Camelot" for an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, he wanted to incorporate Stonehenge and horses to a battle scene; however, due to budgetary constraints, he had to decide between the two. Not being able to choose one over the other, Martin called Zelazny for advice, who voted for Stonehenge. However, he went on saying that sometimes changes to the source material are essential for practical reasons:

[w]hy is the Iron Throne in *Game of Thrones* not the Iron Throne as described in the books? Why is it not 15 feet high and made of 10,000 swords? Because the ceiling in our soundstage was not 15 feet high! We couldn't fit it in there, and they weren't willing to give us St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey to shoot our little show in.<sup>326</sup>

These two quotes by the author prove that Martin believes in the importance of fidelity to the source material, however, he agrees that certain changes have to be made if film- or showmakers want to adapt a certain narrative to the small or the big screen. This fidelity does not mean that all the tiny details of the text should be translated to the screen just as they were imagined by the author, but rather that the adaptation should be faithful to the source material in terms of storytelling and the important elements of the text. In 2024, Martin wrote a blogpost about the historical drama television series *Shōgun* (FX, 2024– ), and shared his ideas on the question of adaptation again, where he further elaborated on the idea of "good" and "bad" adaptations. The author claimed that since the talk with Gaiman, not a lot of things changed:

[i]f anything, things have gotten worse. Everywhere you look, there are more screenwriters and producers eager to take great stories and "make them their own." It does not seem to matter whether the source material was written by Stan Lee, Charles Dickens, Ian Fleming, Roald Dahl, Ursula K. Le Guin, J.R.R. Tolkien, Mark Twain, Raymond Chandler, Jane Austen, or... well, anyone. No matter how major a writer is, no matter how great the book, there always seems to be someone on hand who thinks he can do better, eager to take the story and "improve" on it. "The book is the book, the film is the film," they will tell you, as if they were saying something profound. Then they make the story their own.

They never make it better, though. Nine hundred ninety-nine times out of a thousand, they make it worse.

---

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

Once in a while, though, we do get a really good adaptation of a really good book, and when that happens, it deserves applause.<sup>327</sup>

Thus, we can conclude that Martin is not a believer of *strict* fidelity, however, he argues that an author's narrative should be treated as his own, and the changes that are made for practical or monetary reason should not try to be made in order to *improve* the source material, which was written like that for a reason. This approach has been shared by the majority of the show's fans, who were not satisfied with certain changes that David Benioff and D. B. Weiss did in the last seasons of *Game of Thrones*. The showcreators did not have the source material to work from, however, they made some decisions which seemed *illogical* to the book fans: they butchered character arcs and they wrapped up storylines too early. For example, one of the biggest themes throughout the series was the approach of the White Walkers, but their plot was resolved in a simple episode; while Jon Snow's true identity seemed pointless to the fans, since him being a Targaryen did not add anything profound to the storyline.

When it comes to the adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Fire & Blood*, Martin also wrote a long blogpost about how both *House of the Dragon* and the last few seasons of *Game of Thrones* made a mistake on the Targaryen banner. The Targaryen sigil shows a dragon with three heads (representing Aegon the Conqueror and his two sisters) and two legs. Martin argues that in real-life medieval heraldry, after it got standardized, dragons started to be presented as four-legged animals, and wyverns appeared with two legs, in order to differentiate between the two. However, no one actually saw dragons in real life; while in the world of Westeros, the Targaryen sigil should be based on the actual anatomy of the animal. In Martin's world, wyverns also exist (and have two legs and two wings, just like dragons, but they do not breathe fire) – however, there is no point in showing the dragons with four legs. Martin went on saying that

GAME OF THRONES gave us the correct two-legged sigils for the first four seasons and most of the fifth, but when Dany's fleet hove into view, all the sails showed four-legged dragons. Someone got sloppy, I guess, Or someone opened a book on heraldry, and read just enough of it to muck it all up. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. A couple years on, HOUSE OF THE DRAGON decided the heraldry should be consistent with GAME OF THRONES... but they went with the bad sigil rather than the good one. That sound you heard was me screaming, "no, no, no." Those damned extra legs have even wormed their way onto the covers of my books, over my strenuous objections.[...]

---

<sup>327</sup> George R. R. Martin, "The Adaptation Tango," *Not A Blog*, May 24, 2024, accessed: 16 July, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2024/05/24/the-adaptation-tango/>.

Fantasy needs to be grounded. It is not simply a license to do anything you like. Smaug and Toothless may both be dragons, but they should never be confused. Ignore canon, and the world you've created comes apart like tissue paper.<sup>328</sup>

Although the adaptation of Martin's epic fantasy saga seemed as an almost impossible project to undertake, Benioff and Weiss helped the author to gain a worldwide fame outside of his speculative fiction circles. The question of fidelity also became an issue, since *A Song of Ice and Fire* employs several complex characters and an incredibly rich fantastic world, however, by mainly following the plot of the books up until the point that the showrunners could, Benioff and Weiss tried to be as faithful as possible.

#### **5.4. Was *A Song of Ice and Fire* Meant to Be Adapted, After All?**

As I have discussed in Chapter 4, after writing the first volumes of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Martin was not sure that his epic fantasy story could be adapted to the television screens. The Westerosi narrative contained too many point-of-view characters, was set in different exotic locations which would have been very expensive to visualize, included three dragons and undead ice creatures, and was much too violent for the standards of the 1990s and early 2000s. As the author stated in one of his blogposts, “[a]t the time [of writing *A Game of Thrones*] I figured I was writing something that could never be filmed. It was just too big for television, too long for a movie, too much sex, too much violence, too many characters, battles, and castles.”<sup>329</sup> Although some producers and filmmakers were interested in creating a feature film after the immense success of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Martin knew that this would oversimplify the story and would not result in a faithful adaptation – thus, the only possible solution was HBO. If HBO was able to make series like *The Sopranos* or *The Wire* successful, it was more than capable of adapting a violent and gory fantasy series that was set in a much more realistic pseudo-medieval setting than previous fantasy works. *A Song of Ice and Fire* did not romanticize the life of kings, nobles, knights and smallfolk at all: as discussed previously, even the bowel movements of characters played an essential part in their characterization, not to mention the scenes about their sexual behavior, the descriptions of sickness, death, and the lack of hygiene. Nevertheless, Martin was fully aware that HBO was not interested in fantasy at all, since it was not something that

---

<sup>328</sup> George R. R. Martin, “Here There Be Dragons,” *Not A Blog*, July 11, 2024, accessed: 17 July, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2024/07/11/here-there-be-dragons-2/>.

<sup>329</sup> George R. R. Martin, “A Blast From My Past,” *Not A Blog*, 0 13, 2023, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2023/12/13/a-blast-from-my-past/>.

they cared about: the network was mainly focusing on quality television dramas with a much more realistic setting. In Chapter 6, I am going to argue that one of the reasons why HBO became fascinated with the idea of adapting *A Song of Ice and Fire* is that it meets the requirements of a quality television series, which may have been impacted by Martin's career as a screenwriter – however, in this subchapter, I am going to discuss the other features that make this epic fantasy narrative so suitable for adaptation, even if the author was not sure that it would work in practice.

One of the most evident features of *A Song of Ice and Fire* that makes it a great source material for adapting as a television show is its seriality. As I have discussed earlier, the books are written in a way that each chapter is told by a different point-of-view character which allows readers to follow several different storylines, instead of focusing on the journey of one main character, just like in a television show employing an ensemble cast. This solution adds a lot to the complexity of the narrative, and also supports the binging of the text, since if readers are immersed enough in the story, they will keep reading through chapters in order to find out what happened to their favorite character. Besides, each book has a prologue that sets the tone for the book and introduces a major plotline, while *A Storm of Swords* and *A Dance with Dragons* ends with an epilogue that talks about future complications to come. In the prologue of the first volume, for example, we get to know about the Night's Watch, where three rangers meet the mysterious Others, who will become the main otherworldly enemy in the series. In *A Clash of Kings*, the prologue tells the story about Maester Cressen, who is trying to poison Melisandre, the Red Priestess of R'hllor, who is unaffected by the poison, but she shares it with the Maester. As a result, Cressen dies – thus, R'hllor's power is proven, and Stannis Baratheon's claim to the throne is strengthened (thanks to the power of his priestess). In *A Storm of Swords*, the first chapter talks about the approach of the Others, while the epilogue introduces Lady Stoneheart, the already deceased Lady Catelyn, who was resurrected by the Red Priest Beric Dondarrion. The seriality of these books means that they have an episodic nature, just like contemporary television series – although in the case of the books, these episodes focus on the stories of different characters, instead of introducing several storylines in one episode, like in the case of television shows. The multiplicity of characters and different storylines, however, still support the act of adaptation, since it can create several plotlines that can make audiences become invested in the diversity of the story. After all, the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is incredibly colorful: from the scary and mythical world of North, where the Others threaten the free folk (and later all the citizens of the Seven Kingdoms), through the incredibly rotten and intricate world of King's Landing,

where the lives of the small folk could not be more different from the lives of people in the Red Keep, to the exotic cities of Essos, the largest of the three known continents of the world.

Other than the prologues and the epilogues, all the other chapters are told through the perspective of a main character, most of whom are unreliable, since their personality has a great impact on how they see the world and how they experience the events that happen to them. In the first volume, there are only nine point-of-view characters, while *A Dance with Dragons* already includes eighteen of them, Arya Stark being the only character who appears in all of the books, with Bran and Sansa Stark, Jon Snow, Daenerys Targaryen, and Tyrion Lannister appearing in four of them. The chapters are focalized through the point-of-view characters, thus, the readers get to know what they are thinking while they experience the events that are told through their respective chapters, which tend to end with cliffhangers. The usage of this technique encourages readers to keep reading in order to find out what is going to happen to their favorite characters, and is also heavily used in television to keep the audience hooked. Although being a long-form story, the chapters of the series are also episodic in nature, resembling the narrative structure of television shows.

While the incredible detail to which everything is described in Martin's epic saga makes it seemingly hard to adapt, showrunners were able to rely on the source material (up until the fifth volume) and leave out what they did not find important, instead of struggling with coming up with new ideas and filling in the narrative gaps, which are virtually non-existent in the book series. The point-of-view characters could serve as great starting points in finding out the main directions of the narrative, and the rich descriptions also helped Benioff and Weiss to visualize certain scenes on the screens. This immersion was received very differently by fans, since there are readers who find it enticing, while others have criticized Martin for his lengthy descriptions of seemingly "meaningless" aspects of the events. When the author was asked about what he thinks of critics who complain about how there are too many food descriptions in his novels, he stated that

[t]here is a lot of food in my novels. Everything from wedding feasts with seventy-seven courses to that horse's heart that Daenerys Targaryen wolfed down. *Too much* food, certain critics are wont to complain. The word they like to trot out is *gratuitous*. Uncalled for, unnecessary, unwarranted, just too damn much. My great big fat novels would not be nearly so big and fat if only I would cut out all the gratuitous feasting, the gratuitous violence, the gratuitous heraldry, and of course the gratuitous sex (that is usually the biggest complaint). To which I say, *pfui*. [...]

It's not the destination that matters to me, it's the journey. [...] Fiction is not about getting from point A to point B as fast as possible. It can educate, but it is not educational at heart. For that, nonfiction is infinitely superior. Fiction is about emotion. The heart, not the head. Fiction gives us *vicarious experience*. I takes us beyond ourselves and the world around us.

I love nothing more than opening a new book and falling through the pages. The tales that I love best are totally immersive. That's what I aspire to provide my own readers as well. I want them to see the colors of the knights' surcoats in the tournament. I want them to hear the clash of steel when swords cross, to hear the shrieks of dying men on the battlefield. If a song is sung, I want them to hear the words, get a sense of the rhythm. I want them to remember the sunsets, to glimpse fireflies in the dusk, to feel the heat of the dragon's fire. I want them to *live* my story, not just read it. When they sit down at my table, I want them to *taste the food*.

*Nothing* is gratuitous, as I see it. it is all part of the experience. If the plot is all that matters to you, well, there are Cliff's Notes you can read in a tenth time.

Me, I will stay with novels—the richer and more immersive the better.<sup>330</sup>

The use of this immersion also supports the rich portrayal of characters, since the tiny details they describe and the way they see the world gives readers several clues about their personalities – and the details that they capture also adds to the characterization of other figures as well. For example, in *A Clash of Kings*, it is through Sansa Stark's point-of-view that we see Tywin Lannister entering the throne room with his horse, in order to impress the court and to strengthen his militarized glory; however, Sansa describes how Tywin's horse “dropped a load of dung right at the base of the throne.”<sup>331</sup> Joseph Rex Young highlights how through this slightly hinted detail, Sansa undermines Tywin Lannister's dignity and thus gives us a more complex portrayal of his personality.<sup>332</sup>

In conclusion, *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a source material has everything a great quality television drama could wish for, which, as I have argued, may have been the result of Martin's background of working as a screenwriter. The characters of the narrative are complex, and their psychological depth adds to their moral greyness, which is a beloved element of quality television shows. It also breaks the rules of what has been seen previously, since the novels stopped glamorizing the fantasy setting that resembles the Middle Ages: instead of showing a romantic version of the era, where noble knights are fighting for the good and will get the hands of pure maidens in return, all the characters and the whole world

---

<sup>330</sup> Dan Selcke, “George R.R. Martin Responds to Critics Who Call His Song of Ice and Fire Books ‘Gratuitous,’” *Winter Is Coming*, May 7, 2024, accessed: 15 July, 2024, <https://winteriscoming.net/posts/george-r-r-martin-responds-to-critics-who-call-his-song-of-ice-and-fire-books-gratuitous-01hx7mc91z4g>.

<sup>331</sup> George R. R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (London: Harper Voyager, 2011), 818.

<sup>332</sup> Young, *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form*, 24–25.

of Westeros (and the other continents) are covered in darkness and dirt. The epic fantasy saga also introduces multiple plotlines through the numerous point-of-view characters, which serves as a great basis for a quality television show that employs an ensemble cast.

Martin's fantasy series also defies genre classifications (which I have already discussed in connection to the author's poetics), since *A Song of Ice and Fire* mixes together the features of historical fiction, fantasy and romance as well. The novels can also be read in connection to contemporary issues like climate change, xenophobia, and how in wars it is always the winner who writes history. *A Song of Ice and Fire* also includes controversial elements like brutality, expressive sexuality and the lengthy descriptions of bowel movements, while it also aspires towards realism through depicting the world of Westeros as it is, instead of sugarcoating it and only focusing on the glamorous side, in an almost Tolkien-like fashion. Just as in the other instances of Martin's prose, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is sometimes just *too* realistic, even if most of his writings belong to the category of speculative fiction.

### **5.5. Dealing with the Second Beast: Adapting *Fire & Blood***

Martin's other famous book on Westeros, *Fire and Blood* (2018) tells the history of House Targaryen through the fictional historiography of Archmaester Gyldayn, who used a variety of fictional primary sources to describe the events of the most famous house of Westeros. Notwithstanding, there are several differences between the narrative of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Fire & Blood*. First of all, the book is written in the detached style of a history book, where the "facts" are listed one after the other, lacking the usual fillers – thus, the style of the narrative is much dryer than Martin's other writings. Secondly, Archmaester Gyldayn is an unreliable narrator, since he does not have firsthand knowledge about how certain events happened, thus, there are several episodes in the book which are described differently. For example, when it comes to the budding relationship between the young Princess Rhaenyra and Daemon Targaryen, there are conflicting accounts on what happened between the two, and why Daemon was sent away by his brother, the king, from court:

[h]ere is where our sources diverge. Grand Maester Runciter says only that the brother quarrelled again, and Prince Daemon departed King's Landing to return to the Stepstones and his wars. Of the cause of the quarrel, he does not speak. Others assert that it was at Queen Alicent's urging

that Viserys sent Daemon away. But Septon Eustace and Mushroom tell another tale... or rather, two such tales, each different from the other.<sup>333</sup>

Ser Eustace tells the tale of how Prince Daemon seduced the young Rhaenyra, and when they were found in bed together, King Viserys reminded his daughter that Daemon has a wife, and sent his brother away. According to Mushroom the dwarf (the fool of the court), the Princess was in love with Ser Criston Cole, and since she wanted to seduce him but failed to succeed, Daemon taught her how to bring pleasure to a man, took her to brothels secretly, and helped her learn the “womanly arts”. Rhaenyra was such a bright student that she managed to seduce Ser Criston, and gave him her maidenhead. After the king heard about these events, Daemon asked for Rhaenyra’s hand by claiming that no one would take her anymore, but Viserys sent him to exile, and told him that if he returns to King’s Landing, he is going to be killed.

Thus, the narrative of *Fire & Blood* is different from that of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since it is more similar to a history book than to a fictional novel. Just like the epic Westerosi saga, this text also enumerates several different characters, but not only do their stories sometimes differ, depending on whose source the Archmaester is talking about, but there are several gaps in the storylines. This made the adaptation process of *Fire & Blood* much different from that of *Game of Thrones*, since instead of having to narrow down the events, the adaptors had to sometimes fill in the details that were left out in order to create an enjoyable show, and there were other changes as well.

First of all, *Fire & Blood* tells the history of House Targaryen from Aegon I Targaryen’s conquest of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros until the regency of Rhaenyra’s young son Aegon III, but *House of the Dragon* starts with the twelfth chapter, “Heirs of the Dragon—A Question of Succession”, since it only tells the tale of the “Dance of the Dragons”, which caused the decline of House Targaryen. When it came to conflicting sources, showrunners were able to choose the variant they most favored: in the case of the aforementioned episode, where Daemon decides to take Rhaenyra under his wings, they combined the two plotlines: Daemon indeed teaches the young Princess how a man can be seduced, and Rhaenyra wants to consummate their affair, but since Daemon is unable to do so, she gives her maidenhood to Ser Criston. After the king hears about how Rhaenyra was seen with Daemon in a brothel, the Prince proposes that he could marry the Princess, but the King exiles him. In the book, it is also stated that Daemon’s first wife died in a hunting accident, and while all the characters in the show believe the same, there is a scene where Daemon kills his wife in order to get rid of

---

<sup>333</sup> George R. R. Martin, *Fire & Blood* (London: Harper Voyager, 2018), 367.



her. The television show also makes Aemond Targaryen a more sympathetic character: just like in the book, Rhaenyra's son Luke is killed at Storm's End in a dragon duel with Aemond and Vhagar; however, in the show we can see that Aemond was unable to control his dragon, and is shocked after the accident. The show also took liberties in the portrayal of Rhaenyra and Alicent in the beginning of the first season: not only are they depicted older in the television version (where both of them are around the age of 15, while in the book Alicent is 18 years old when she marries Viserys, and Rhaenyra is only around 8-9-years-old), but they also have a close relationship (which is portrayed to suggest a romantic aspect as well) that turns into rivalry. In the book, however, their friendship is never mentioned.

Accordingly, the adaptation process of *Fire & Blood* was much different from that of *A Song of Ice and Fire*: not only was the former working with a less detailed source material, but the story that they wanted to cover was also finished – not like Martin's epic fantasy series. On his blog, Martin has stated that a second volume of *Fire & Blood* is going to be written, but only after he is finished with *The Winds of Winter*<sup>334</sup>, but it is not going to affect *House of the Dragon*.

## 5.6. The Issue of Authorship

As this chapter showed, Martin's works are very closely connected to each other thematically – although providing a deeper analysis would be beneficial if we want to understand his works better, because of limitations of length, this thesis could only scratch the surface. However, it is still really important to look into how authorship exists in the transmedial world of *Game of Thrones*, since although Martin's authorial role is definitely present in the making of the franchise, there are other authors as well who contribute to the creation of this meganarration.

As the storyworld originates from Martin's epic fantasy series, in terms of the books, the issue of authorship is quite simple. However, as the narrative was adapted to the television screens, and later on it was also expanded by the last few seasons, the authorship of the narrative became even more complicated, not to mention the other spin-offs that are in the making, especially *House of the Dragon*, which is, at the time of writing this thesis, the only

---

<sup>334</sup> George R. R. Martin, "FIRE & BLOOD Is Back!," *Not A Blog*, July 12, 2022, accessed: 15 July, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/07/12/re-release-of-fire-and-blood/>.

spin-off that currently exists (the next instalment, titled *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* will premier in 2026).<sup>335</sup>

I argue that in the case of contemporary transmedia narratives, these stories are very similar to myths, legends, and fairy tales, since they evolve almost naturally; and as they expand, the significance of the author becomes less and less important for the audience. However, in the case of these narratives, there is always an “original” author who came up with the first seeds of the narrative. In Jenkins’ classic example of *The Matrix*, it was the Wachowskis; in the case of *Star Wars*, it was George Lucas, while in the case of *Game of Thrones*, it is George R. R. Martin. However, as these transmedia narratives started to evolve (some of them following the logic of the snowball effect, while others following the logic of a strict transmedial planning process), most of them grew over their original authors. Audiences are still able to identify the author of this narratives, connecting, for example, George R. R. Martin’s name to *Game of Thrones*, however, from an academic and also practical point of view, it should be highlighted that these transmedial texts have more than one author – still, the significance of some of them is much larger than the others. So how should we describe the author function in the case of these narratives?

One of the most influential texts in literary theory that deals with the issue of authorship is Michel Foucault’s seminal essay, titled “What is an Author?”. When discussing the author-function, Foucault states that it has four very important features: “[f]irst, they are objects of appropriation; the form of property they have become is of a particular type whose legal codification was accomplished some years ago.”<sup>336</sup> However, while in terms of the series it is obvious that the author is Martin, in the case of the *Game of Thrones* franchise not only Martin himself, but the showrunners and even the writers should be included in this list, since all of them contributed to the creation of the show variant. Although the main control was in the hands of David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, who followed the main ideas of George R. R. Martin, the screenwriters who contributed to the birth of the episodes, and the directors who helped the materialization of the scripts can also be understood as individuals who have a certain authorial function.

---

<sup>335</sup> Erik Kain, “Disappointing News For ‘Game Of Thrones’ Spinoff ‘A Knight Of The Seven Kingdoms’ Release Date,” *Forbes*, May 14, 2025, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2025/05/14/disappointing-news-for-game-of-thrones-spinoff-a-knight-of-the-seven-kingdoms-release-date/>.

<sup>336</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, by Michel Foucault, Donald F. Bouchard, and Sherry Simon, 1. printing, Cornell paperbacks, [Nachdr.], Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 20), 124.

Secondly, Foucault argues, “the “author function” is not universal or constant in all discourse. [...] there was a time when those texts which we now call “literary” (stories, folk tales, epics and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author.”<sup>337</sup> I argue that the transmedial nature of contemporary narratives will further problematize the author-function, since as these franchises grow indefinitely, the concept of the author gets even more complicated. In contemporary cases of transmedial storyworlds, we can see that the “original” author is still closely connected to these works, however, as the storyworld expands exponentially, their significance is getting less and less powerful.

According to Foucault, “[t]he third point concerning this “author-function” is that it is not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author.”<sup>338</sup> This feature can also be seen in terms of transmedia narratives, where the texts that are born as transmedial extensions are also attached to the name of the author, in case they are canonized by those who have the rights over the transmedia franchise. This is why, for example, even though fan-fiction is always set in the particular storyworld it was inspired by, the name of the “original” author is not attached to these writings, since they do not become parts of the canon.

Lastly, Foucault argues that “it would be false to consider the function of the author as a pure and simple reconstruction after the fact of a text given as passive material, since a text always bears a number of signs that refer to the author.”<sup>339</sup> However, these signs do not actually refer to the author himself, but rather to

a “second self” whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book. It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the “author-function” arises out of their scission—in the division and distance of the two.<sup>340</sup>

In the case of transmedia franchises, however, it is further complicated by all the other authors who also participate in the creation process: naming the showrunners, the scriptwriters, the directors, and the “original” author himself – thus, without taking the film and television industry into consideration, we cannot get closer to understanding the author-function in

---

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

terms of transmedia narratives (which is even further complicated in the case of other media incarnations, like opera, theatrical performances, video games, etc. – however, while it would be definitely fruitful to problematize the author-function by focusing on all of these different fields, because of the limitations of length, I am only going to focus on the issues of authorship in terms of meganarrations like *Game of Thrones*, where most media incarnations are literary and televisual or filmic narratives).

In his book titled *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (2015), Jason Mittell also problematizes the question of authorship, by focusing on three important questions: how serial television is authored, the changing role of the showrunners, and how viewers use television authorship.<sup>341</sup> I believe that Mittell's approach towards authorship is beneficial if we want to understand the author-functions of meganarrations, since he not only looks at the question of the author from a production-point-of-view, but also includes the viewers in his analysis: again, I argue that if we want to understand how contemporary meganarrations work, we should take the audiences' views into consideration, since in the age of social media, they also contribute a lot to the creation of meaning.<sup>342</sup>

Mittell highlights that “[n]arrative television is a highly collaborative medium”<sup>343</sup>, since while in the case of literature, we can talk about *authorship by origination*, in the case of film and television, the director, “legions of performers, technical crew members, designers, and executives are involved in the process of creating and assembling the sounds and images in a film—not to mention the screenwriter whose script provides a blueprint for the film but rarely has much power in the production process.”<sup>344</sup> Thus, Mittell makes a distinction between *authorship by origination* and *authorship by responsibility*, the latter standing for the authority of the director in films, who is usually the person who makes the final decisions. In the case of television, however, since it is rather a producer's medium, we can talk about “*authorship by management*, evoking the leadership and oversight that managers take in businesses and sports teams.”<sup>345</sup> In the case of television shows, it is mostly the showrunner

---

<sup>341</sup> Jason Mittell, “Authorship,” in *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, by Jason Mittell (New York; London: NYU Press, 2015), 86–117.

<sup>342</sup> While it is true that meaning was always created by the audiences, in the age of social media, where audiences are able to share their ideas on different platforms with thousands or even millions of people in a few minutes, their importance in the creation of meaning is much more important than before. Fan discussions can alter the way one thinks about a certain narrative, and in a few cases, it can also have an impact on the evolution of the narrative itself; while in the past, interpretation was a much more solitary process. Thus, I argue that focusing on the reception and audiences is important if we want to understand how contemporary narratives work.

<sup>343</sup> Mittell, “Authorship,” 87.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

who makes all the decisions, directing the writers, and all the technical and creative personnel. Mittell argues that when it comes to scriptwriting, the process of creation is both a hierarchical and collective experience, since there are clear rankings of leadership, but the collaboration is still open: writers work together on mapping the main arcs, plots, and the structures of each episode, and then tend to work on different episodes independently. This process further complicates the question of authorship, although when it comes to television shows, the name of the writer who was working on that particular episode is the one that usually appears in the opening or end credits.

Mittell also argues that

[a]lthough television is clearly a creative medium, many people might bristle at the ascription of authorship to commercial television, which has typically been seen as something that is *produced* rather than *authored*. The lexical differences are significant—production evokes a corporate factory following formulas to mass manufacture a product, an image that has been associated with television dating back to the medium’s early critics Theodor Adorno and Dwight Macdonald. [...]

Authorship bears quite different connotations, linked both to the literary notion of the creative genius working in solitude to give birth to a finished work of art and to notions of authority that assure a work’s interpretive frame and cultural validation.<sup>346</sup>

I believe it is important to highlight that in terms of quality television series, both the process of *production* and *authoring* are really important, since while it is true that most quality television series do have artistic value, there are heavy economic motifs behind their creation (however, it is important to acknowledge that the same can be true for literature as well). Television series can definitely be seen as products, especially the ones that are consumed by a mass audience, just like *Game of Thrones* – however, it does not mean that the question of authorship should not be considered in terms of them. When it comes to contemporary television shows, Mittell argues that the rise of online television fandom enabled showrunners to form a more public relationship with their fans, which, in turn, makes the audience look at the showrunners as the authors of the texts. This is also true for *Game of Thrones*, where showrunners David Benioff and D. B. Weiss are consistently brought up in fan discussions, so much that fans of the show tend to blame *them* for the “bad execution and writing” of the last two seasons – thus, they are constructed as authorial figures. Mittell calls this the *inferred author function*:

---

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 95.

“Inferred” highlights that authorship is not (solely) being construed through textual implication but is constituted through the act of consumption itself; Foucault’s “function” retains the centrality of context and discursive circulation. To briefly define the term, *the inferred author function is a viewer’s production of authorial agency responsible for a text’s storytelling, drawing on textual cues and contextual discourses*. In more practical terms, when we watch a program and wonder “why did they do that?” the inferred author function is our notion of “they” as the agent(s) responsible for the storytelling.<sup>347</sup>

I believe that Mittell’s term is very much applicable to television series and even other forms of media – however, in the case of transmedia storytelling, this case is further complicated. If we talk about transmedia stories in the Jenkinsian sense, where the central concept is outlined by the same people, like in the case of *The Matrix*, the people who come up with the ideas are usually looked at as the authors of the text by the audiences. However, in the case of the snowball effect, this phenomenon is more complicated, and it is rather the inferred author of the particular media extension that we talk about that the audiences look at as the author of the text. If we look at meganarrations and narrative franchises as a whole, the concept of the inferred author keeps changing – thus, we should rather talk about inferred authors in the plural form. However, I would argue that when it comes meganarrations, it is important to make a distinction between the fandom and ordinary audiences, since just as Mittell argues, “viewers do not *need* to construct an authorial figure to comprehend a narrative—but per pervasive fan discourses and accounts of personal viewing practices, many often do.”<sup>348</sup>

In *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds* (2017), Matthew Freeman argues that “transmedia storytelling can be understood according to three characteristics: *character-building*, *world-building* and *authorship*.”<sup>349</sup> He states that in the case of transmedia storytelling, the importance of the author lies in the fact that they are the ones who control and hold a fictional world together, and they are the ones who control what gets incorporated into the canon, and what not. However, in the case of the snowball effect (which is still transmedial, but does not involve a necessary planning phase *before* the creation of the systematic transmedia universe), this author is usually not a person, but a company who holds the rights over a brand. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, the author of the series and its prequels and sequels is George R. R. Martin; however, once he sold the

---

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>349</sup> Matthew Freeman, “Characterising Transmedia Storytelling. Character-Building, World-Building, Authorship,” in *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds*, by Matthew Freeman, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies 99 (New York London: Routledge, 2017), 21, doi:10.4324/9781315439525.

rights to adapt his narrative to HBO, it is HBO itself that became the one who decides what is canonized, and what not.

In terms of transmedia storytelling, Freeman makes a distinction between the *market author-function*, which “can point audiences across multiple media to other media texts that constitute a story world”, and the *textual author-function*, which “epitomizes a strictly intertextual form of authorship, with the author dictating the purposeful references within a texts to other texts.”<sup>350</sup> However, I would argue that in the case of meganarrations, we should take the issue of the brand into consideration, since as these franchises grew, the role of the originating author becomes less and less significant. Thus, in storyworlds that are usually born by following the logic of the snowball effect, we should rather talk about *authorship by branding*, where the particular storyworld works as a brand, instead of a project or a narrative world; and as a brand, it is not controlled by one single author but rather a company, who decides which media entries are official, and which not. I believe that authorship by branding highlights the economic nature of these transmedia storyworlds, while it also allows the presence of several authors in the same storyworld, taking the role of the “original” author, the showrunners, the scriptwriters and all the creative personell into consideration. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, what constitutes as a canonized work was originally controlled by George R. R. Martin; however, once the rights were sold to HBO, it was the company that could control the storyworld, while still allowing Martin space to further extend his universe – however, instead of identifying this storyworld with Martin or HBO, audiences are rather thinking about *Game of Thrones* as a brand, which can be seen in the fact that no matter whether we talk about *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Game of Thrones*, *House of the Dragon* or any other planned spin-off, audiences tend to refer to these items as “*Game of Thrones*”. Thus, once a meganarration starts to evolve, the name of the brand itself will serve as the function of the author, highlighting that the work in question belongs to the canon of that particular storyworld.

I argue that the reason why the authorship by branding can serve us to understand contemporary storyworlds better is that in this contemporary media environment, large meganarrations like *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or *Game of Thrones* are used as brand names, selling products to audiences who are eager to consume more of a particular storyworld. While in the case of literary works, it is the name of the author that serves as form of branding for selling books of a particular author, in the case of these

---

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 37.

storyworlds, it is the brand that sells the products. Defining who the author exactly *is* is hard enough in each media incarnation, however, it is much harder in terms of the franchise, where several people work together to create a more or less coherent storyworld. Thus, talking about *brands* instead of authors or separate works helps us to contextualize these works, and understand their complexity, while also allowing the exclusion of works that are not canonized and thus do not belong to the official body of text. However, it must be noted that those who become fans of the narrative will be likely to connect the name of the “original” author to the storyworld, while still acknowledging the significance of other creators, especially focusing on showrunners. I believe that in the future it would be worth looking into how audiences think about authorship in terms of meganarrations, with a special focus on those which expanded the storyworld with spin-offs that are not necessarily connected to the originating author. While in the case of *Game of Thrones*, since Martin collaborated on all of the official narrative media entries of this storyworld, he is still looked at as the author of the franchise; however, as the storyworld expands in the future, it will be interesting to see whether audiences will still link his name to the *Game of Thrones* franchise.



## 6. Fantasy, Streaming Platforms, and Transmediality

In the last two decades, television and film adaptations seem to dominate screen culture. Although adapting classic literary works has been a common practice in the past as well, as the introduction of highly valued literary pieces to the screen created a critical recognition for broadcasting channels, and a way of attracting a sizeable audience who were already familiar with the original, working with an already existing source material (be it literature or even video games) almost became second nature to Hollywood and streaming platforms. In this chapter, I am going to focus on discussing the features of the adaptation industry in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup>-centuries, and describe why using a literary source material for creating films and television shows became a prominent practice. Secondly, I will highlight the impact of *Game of Thrones* on television and how it set an example for upcoming television series, while also inspiring the creation of several fantasy shows. Lastly, I am going to discuss why streaming platforms turned to the adaptation of epic fantasy series, in spite of the previously niche nature of the genre.

### 6.1. The Adaptation Industry

In Chapter 2 (“Adaptations, Transmediality and [Popular] Media Convergence”), I have already discussed Murray’s concept of the adaptation industry, and how when it comes to talking about adaptations, we should focus on production contexts and book dynamics as well, as, for example in the case of the book market, there is a complex literary economy that surrounds the adaptations.<sup>351</sup> However, it is not only books that are embedded in a complex economic system, but each and every media text that exists, since the creation of artistic pieces is always motivated by profit as well. It would probably be not too far-fetched to say that capitalism works as a driving force behind each and every adaptation, prequel, sequel, or transmedia project in general; nevertheless, it is definitely an important factor, since the repetition and replication of previously made productions will be more likely to be profitable than something that was not experimented with already (especially when it comes to writers, directors, or casts that audiences are not yet familiar with). Using a source material means that directors or showrunners can count on an already existing fanbase, thus starting from a more advanced position than those who build on their original concepts. This phenomenon is clearly present in 21<sup>st</sup>-century filmmaking, where directors keep referring back to the same

---

<sup>351</sup> Murray, “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry,” 7.

universes in order to profit from the interest of certain audiences, which results in the expansion of different franchises. The *Star Wars* universe is a perfect example for this phenomenon: the franchise started with George Lucas' 1977 film, that was later complemented by two other sequels, and a prequel trilogy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Encouraged by the success of the six films, the franchise grew bigger with a sequel trilogy (episodes VII–IX), two standalone films, and several other televisual productions and other media. Besides the seemingly obvious economic reasons, there are several other advantages of adapting or working with an already existing material: although these features are applicable to other forms of adaptations as well, I am mostly going to focus on television shows and series.

Firstly, when it comes to the creation of televisual content (be it a film, a mini-series or even a television show), from a production point of view, those directors who find it harder to come up with an original idea or are simply inspired by a certain artistic piece can work with a ready-made source material, which, in case of television shows, makes writers' job somewhat easier as the main elements of the storyline are given. Using an existing text as source material, however, can be a double-edged sword: although adaptation theory tends to claim that fidelity criticism should not be dealt with anymore, as comparing the "original" and the "secondary" work does not lead anywhere, the fandom generally tends to care a lot about how their favorite narratives are treated by the adaptors. Since in the age of social media, fans can share their opinion publicly, writers can also take inspiration from fan reviews when deciding which scenes to include in the adaptation. They can change certain parts of the original story that were not as successful in the fandom, while getting positive reviews from hardcore fans if they decide to adapt scenes that are favorable in the eyes of the core-audience. In the case of the Netflix adaptation of Sapkowski's *The Witcher* series, several changes were implemented: for instance, in Season 2, Yennefer of Vengerberg loses her magical powers, and makes a deal with the demon Voleth Meir to return her powers, which never happens in the books. The subplot ends with Yennefer betraying Geralt and Ciri, which is something that the book fans were not satisfied with, since it clashes with her original textual character, who would not do such a thing. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, fans were mostly disappointed in how the arc of certain characters were butchered: the most famous example for this may be Jamie Lannister, who completely abandons her twin sister Cersei in the fifth volume, but returns to her side in the adaptation. Even if scholars deem the "book

versus adaptation” question completely meaningless,<sup>352</sup> the adaptations’ reception on social media shows that fans cannot stop comparing the two, regardless of which narrative we are talking about. There are several Facebook groups and Reddit forums where fans can discuss their opinions on certain series, and in the case of the latter, subreddits make it possible to create so called “threads” depending on whether the fans have read the original book or not. In the case of HBO’s *House of the Dragon*, for example, the subreddit r/HouseOfTheDragon has a “No Book Spoilers” and “Book Spoilers” thread for each episode of the first season. In the case of the latter, fans tend to analyze the episodes in comparison with the original books (however, this is true for shows that were based on video games or any other source material as well). The “No Book Spoilers” and “Book Spoilers” episode discussion threads are quite popular on the platform, and make it easier for fans to discuss the works they are interested in without spoiling anything from the other media incarnations they are not familiar with. I would argue that fidelity criticism amongst fans is a natural response, since those who already feel a strong connection to a certain narrative will clearly want the adaptation in question to be at least authentic to the source material.<sup>353</sup>

Secondly, those people who are already familiar with the original of the adapted work and found it enjoyable to a certain extent, will be more likely to turn to the adaptation out of curiosity, which results in an already existing target audience that the creators can count on. This fact, however, can serve as a double-edged sword, since as I have already discussed previously, if the adaptation is not faithful or authentic enough in the eyes of the original fanbase, it can be deemed as a failure very early on (however, the opinion of the unknowing audience can still have a positive impact on the reception).

. Many fans believe that if the adaptation differs from the canon, then it is not a great adaptation. Nonetheless, an already existing fanbase can also have a positive effect on the early reception of an adaptation. *Game of Thrones* was able to rely on the close-knit *A Song of Ice and Fire* fanbase, and managed to use *The Maester’s Path* campaign to raise awareness of the show and pique the interest of the book readers. In the case of *The Witcher*, there were already two fanbases that the Netflix adaptation could count on: the fandom of the original books and the fandom of the videogames. The showrunners decided to exploit this feature, as by being based on the narrative of the books, and borrowing elements from the video games, the adaptation tried to cater to the needs of both groups, thus inviting a wider audience.

---

<sup>352</sup> Thomas M. Leitch, “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory,” *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (2003): 161–62, doi:10.1353/crt.2004.0001.

<sup>353</sup> cf. Chapter 2: Adaptations, Transmediality, and (Popular) Media Convergence

However, after the Netflix show deviated from its source material, it faced serious criticism by the fans – while people who were not familiar with the original Sapkowski novels blamed the series for poor writing and bad pacing.<sup>354</sup>

In the case of works which were introduced a few years or even decades before the adaptation, nostalgia can also play a crucial role, as fans who loved a certain narrative will be more likely to turn to its newer adaptations if they have positive feelings attached to the original version. At the time of writing this thesis, a new *Harry Potter* series is currently being made, based on J. K. Rowling's famous young adult series. Audiences who grew up by reading the books and watching the films may be more likely to turn to the adaptation, since they have fond memories of Rowling's narrative – however, surrounding the controversy that surrounds Rowling as a person, it can also negatively impact the previous fans. The new series is said to be faithful to the original books in terms of following the storyline of its source material, and is expected to be on air in 2026, 15 years after the release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows Part II* (2011), and 25 years after the first film (2001).<sup>355</sup>

If creators choose to link the adaptation to the original, cross-marketing can also lead to economic advantages. In case a film or a series that was adapted from a novel became a success, publishers are likely to create tie-in covers for the originals that use stills or promotional pictures from the adaptation, which is beneficial for both parties. For instance, those who see the original books in bookshops may turn to the film/series version while those who watch these stories on screen and like the narrative may turn to the original books in order to experience the story in a book format as well – which can also be seen in case of *The Witcher* books. This strategy can also be beneficial in the case of different paraphernalia, as collectable action figures, different objects or even clothing items can be used to raise people's awareness of a certain story. As discussed in Chapter 4, the *Game of Thrones* franchise is a perfect example for this, since, besides the books, there are several tabletop-, board- and videogames, clothing items and other types of merchandise as well.

Creating adaptations also means that the work in question will get an extensive media coverage online and offline, as audiences are more likely to talk about stories they are already familiar with. Even an official announcement can spark a huge online discussion: in the case of the new *Harry Potter* series-adaptation, social media sites were overblown by the amount

---

<sup>354</sup> Jeffrey Harris, "This Is Still the Worst Change Netflix's 'The Witcher' Made From the Books," *Collider*, August 5, 2023, Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://collider.com/witcher-netflix-worst-book-change/>.

<sup>355</sup> Tom Tapp, "'Harry Potter' TV Series Due To Hit Max In 2026: Everything We Know About The Cast, Who's Creating It, What J.K. Rowling Says & More – Update," *Deadline*, May 22, 2024, accessed: 18 July, 2024, <https://deadline.com/2024/05/harry-potter-tv-series-max-release-date-cast-1235323284/>.

of people who started to speculate about the upcoming show in comment sections and thematic threads.

Lastly, adaptations are also advantageous for film and television production companies since, according to Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer,

[t]he dialectic between “new” and “old” in film and media production answers the industry’s need for both regularity (the auditorium seats that must be filled and refilled in order for a studio to stay afloat, the ad dollars or subscription fees that must roll in for a television series to continue to run) and originality (viewers always desire the yet unseen, tire quickly of the “new,” are ever susceptible to the exciting promise of “coming attractions”).<sup>356</sup>

Thus, the 21<sup>st</sup> century success of adaptations and transmedia stories is not only linked to the profit-mongering nature of Hollywood, but to the needs of the audiences who are constantly searching for something new but are still likely to look for the already familiar. This contradiction is very much present in transmedia narratives like the Marvel Cinematic Universe, DC Comics, or even *Game of Thrones*. Fans of these stories keep looking for new iterations of the same narrative universe to have a double experience: getting to know something new, with the comfort of the already-known narrative world. Klein and Palmer also highlight how “[t]here is a generalized sense that commercial cinema is losing its ability to come up with new ideas and, in its drive for profits, is finally scraping the bottom of the story property barrel”<sup>357</sup>, which could also explain why Hollywood, television and streaming platforms keep turning to adaptations. Linda Hutcheon also elaborates on the commercial background of adaptations, claiming that

Hollywood films of the classical period relied on adaptations from popular novels, what Ellis calls the “tried and tested” (1982: 3), while British television has specialized in adapting the culturally accredited eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, or Ellis’ “tried and trusted.” However, it is not simply a matter of risk-avoidance; there is money to be made. A best-selling book may reach a million readers; a successful Broadway play will be seen by 1 to 8 million people; but a movie or a television adaptation will find an audience of many million more (Seger 1992: 5).<sup>358</sup>

---

<sup>356</sup> Klein, Amanda Ann and R. Barton Palmer, “Introduction,” in *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes, and Reboots: Multiplicities in Film and Television*, ed. Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer (University of Texas Press, 2016), 4, doi:10.7560/309001.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>358</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 5.

However, one should realize how although the “lack of originality” can be understood as a value loss, the creation of art itself (in case we are talking about “quality” shows in the most traditional, but highly subjective sense of the word) cannot be considered unoriginal. In the words of Klein and Palmer,

[i]t isn’t just the cinema that relies on multiplicities to generate sure profits. [...] the television industry also relies on the replication and repetition of successful formulas as a central part of its production strategies. And although this process of creative stealing is central to capitalism itself, it is, as in the case of cinema, a generally denigrated process, as if the entry of capitalism somehow contradicts the possibility of art. Unoriginal art, in critical parlance, is an oxymoron.<sup>359</sup>

Adaptations and transmedia narratives are more popular than ever, and streaming platforms keep creating new materials by building on already existing works quite successfully, not only in the field of speculative fiction, but elsewhere as well. However, it seems that there is a certain connection between speculative fiction and the creation of quality television series, which could explain why so many fantasy and science fiction narratives were created for the home screens in the last decade.

## 6.2. Conceptualizing Fantasy Television

Even though several fantasy television shows have been introduced in the last two decades, the study of “fantasy television” is quite underrepresented in academic circles. Instead of “fantasy television”, the word *telefantasy* is used in academia to denote programs in which magical elements are used to depict a world that differs from our everyday reality.<sup>360</sup> However, focusing on this larger umbrella term makes it harder to think about television series which belong to the fantasy genre, since in Johnson’s and Lynch’s understanding, telefantasy as such includes science fiction and horror as well. In this subchapter, I am going to argue that although telefantasy is a concept that helps us think about how the fantastic appears in television, academic research should also focus on the narrower category of fantasy television, which refers to a particular set of films and shows that are trending in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

---

<sup>359</sup> Klein, Amanda Ann and Palmer, “Introduction,” 9.

<sup>360</sup> Catherine Johnson, *Telefantasy* (London: BFI Publ, 2005); Andrew Lynch, *Quality Telefantasy: How US Quality TV Brought Zombies, Dragons and Androids into the Mainstream* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).

Catherine Johnson's seminal book, *Telefantasy* (2005) focuses on "a range of fantasy drama series to explore the links between them and to ask how television fantasy drama might be understood historically, by asking what these 'exceptional' programmes offered to producers when they were originally created."<sup>361</sup> Johnson brings together several fantastic series and serials in order to theorize *telefantasy* – however, she uses this expression as an umbrella term for every genre that includes any fantastic elements (including fantasy, science fiction, and horror as well). As I have already discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, just like in the case of literature, it would be quite useful to make a distinction between the *fantastic* as a mode and *fantasy* as a genre in academic scholarship in order to get a clearer understanding about texts that include fantastic elements. The term *telefantasy* would still be useful when talking about televisual texts that include unrealistic elements, however, it can be seen that one can make a clear distinction between the aforementioned three genres. In the introduction, even Johnson argues that the problem with the term is that it is used too broadly in the fan circles: she refers to how fantasy "refers in fan discourses to a very wide range of texts – from *Dr Who* to *The Avengers*, from *Robin of Sherwood* to *The X-Files* – texts that are disparate enough to pose problems for a clearly defined generic classification."<sup>362</sup> Although the term is used in fan discourses, it does not mean that *fantasy television* as such could not be used in a narrower context. Generic hybridity can pose problems when discussing certain fantasy texts (for example, one can argue whether the several Marvel and DC comic narratives and their adaptations can be understood as superhero narratives, fantasy or science fiction), however, a narrower category of fantasy television, where the focus is on *magic* and the *fantastic* (and it is not explained by science, like in the case of science fiction, and the focus is not on the feeling of fear and dread, as in the case of horror) can still be relevant in academic studies. When we think about shows like *Game of Thrones*, *The Witcher*, *His Dark Materials* or *The Wheel of Time*, we can see that these examples share several features that make them worthy of a separate academic discussion.

I would argue that fantasy television could be defined as a genre in which magic and the fantastic plays an essential role, but the focus is not on technological advancements, a possible future or the feeling of fear, but on the fantastic itself. Fantasy television series tend to be set in a place that is different from our real world: there can be a few alterations, like in the case of the historical fantasy-romance *Outlander*, or it can be far away from reality, like in the case of *The Witcher*, where magical creatures are looked at as ordinary. The magical

---

<sup>361</sup> Johnson, *Telefantasy*, 1.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

nature of these series means that there must be a detailed mythology or history of the world, that may or may not be elaborated on in the series or possible spin-offs, and they tend to focus on questions of ethics, morality, and human nature, that are more or less universal. *Game of Thrones*, for example, focuses on the power battles between noble families, and the question of good and evil, while introducing the theme of a looming threat that endangers humanity, who, instead of uniting their forces and fighting together against the common enemy, are too busy fighting for the Iron Throne.

Finally, Andrew Lynch, in his 2022 book *Quality Telefantasy: How US Quality TV Brought Zombies, Dragons and Androids in the Mainstream*, also focuses on the term telefantasy, in which he uses Catherine Johnson's understanding of the term, and focuses on texts like *Battlestar Galactica* (SyFy, 2003–2009), *True Blood* (HBO, 2008–2014), *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010–2022), *Game of Thrones*, *Daredevil* (Netflix, 2015–2019) or *Westworld* (HBO, 2016–2022). He argues that since 2010, US quality television has changed since it regularly includes fantastical elements.<sup>363</sup> he supports the notion that “[t]he concepts of cult TV and telefantasy are so closely linked that film and TV scholar Roberta Pearson suggests the term ‘cult TV’ could be replaced in scholarship with ‘genre TV’, which she describes as ‘the industry’s preferred term for science fiction and fantasy programmes’ (2010, 7)”.<sup>364</sup> Lynch goes on to suggest that “Quality Telefantasy defines Quality TV during the 2020s, just as comedies and procedurals defined Quality TV during the 1970s and 1980s (Feuer 1984), and anti-heroic dramas such as *The Sopranos* defined Quality TV during the 1990s–2000s”.<sup>365</sup> Although I agree with Lynch about how quality *telefantasy* seems to dominate the decade, it would be worth looking into how the narrower category of fantasy can be linked to quality television, since in the recent years (after the success of *Game of Thrones*), several new fantasy series have been introduced.

### 6.3. Quality, Streaming, Fantasy

Recently, there has been an upsurge in the creation of fantasy shows across the most popular media platforms, which, as this chapter will argue, is partly because of the massive success of *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019). Although fantasy film series like *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* have been successful throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (as both of them

---

<sup>363</sup> Lynch, *Quality Telefantasy: How US Quality TV Brought Zombies, Dragons and Androids into the Mainstream*, 2.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 21.



won several awards and became cultural artifacts), the introduction of epic fantasy shows only became a prominent practice on television and streaming platforms since 2019.

Before the 1990s, it was really hard to adapt realistic-looking fantastic narratives to the screen, since technology did not have the means to portray fantastic settings and creatures outside of animation. There were a few popular cases where these hardships did not hinder the filmmakers: in the case of *The NeverEnding Story* (1984), which had a \$25 million budget, according to producer Bernd Eichinger, the special effects included “300 bluescreen shots, numerous matte paintings, computer motion control, and many other effects that had never been used together in our industry in so great a number, and certainly to so great effect”.<sup>366</sup> Besides *The NeverEnding Story*, Jim Henson’s *The Dark Crystal* (1982) and *Labyrinth* (1986) mostly used puppets to depict the fantastic creatures of these narratives.

With the advent of CGI, several fantasy series have been introduced in the late 1980s and 1990s in the United States, including *Beauty and the Beast* (CBS, 1987–1990), *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (syndicated, 1995–1999), *Xena: Warrior Princess* (syndicated, 1995–2001) or *Charmed* (The WB, 1998–2006). It is important to note that one of the reasons why fantasy shows were not common before the early 2000s is because television networks did not have the necessary budget and technology that was required to depict fantastic settings and creatures. Not only did films have a much bigger budget to work from, but creating a cinematic fantasy production was still less expensive to make than a fantasy series, where each episode should focus on the depiction of the fantastic. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, for example, the final season cost \$15 million an episode.<sup>367</sup>

When it comes to television, there are two famous examples that dominated the early 21<sup>st</sup> century fantasy scene, that were both critically acclaimed and attracted a great audience: *Outlander* (Starz, 2014– ) mostly caters to adult female audiences, while *His Dark Materials* (BBC One, 2019–2022) focuses on the young adult audience. Apart from these television show examples, a great number of fantasy shows that were introduced after the global success of *Game of Thrones* were created by streaming platforms, which had the necessary budget to create such expensive works.

In 2019, Netflix created its first fantasy adaptation, *The Witcher* (2019– ), which was based on Andrzej Sapkowski’s fantasy saga of the same title – later on, it was followed by

---

<sup>366</sup> Jost Vacano, “Shooting The NeverEnding Story,” *The American Society of Cinematographers*, March 14, 2024, accessed: 18 August, 2024, <https://theasc.com/articles/the-neverending-story>.

<sup>367</sup> Travis Clark, “How Much Money ‘Game of Thrones’ Episodes Cost to Make in the Final Season, and throughout the Series,” *Business Insider*, April 15, 2019, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-much-game-of-thrones-episodes-cost-for-production-2019-4>.

*Sweet Tooth* (2021–2024), *Shadow and Bone* (2021–2023), and *Sandman* (2022– ). Amazon Prime quickly started to follow the footsteps of its competitor<sup>368</sup> by adapting Robert Jordan’s and Brandon Sanderson’s *The Wheel of Time* (2021– ) and creating a high-concept prequel to Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, titled *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (2022– ). Besides their genre, there is another feature that all of the previous examples share: all of them are adaptations of series of novels that are popular amongst contemporary readers of fantasy. By adapting these stories that were mainly popular in the niche audience of fantasy readers, streaming services had a huge impact on the growing success of the genre, by introducing these narratives to a wider audience. In his article titled “From Niche to Mainstream? Screen Culture’s Impact on Contemporary Perceptions of Fantasy”, David Levente Palatinus explores how “screen culture (that is, productions and distribution, aesthetics and narrative forms, as well as audience practices) has an impact on the cultural circulation of fantasy.”<sup>369</sup> When talking about the popularity of the form on streaming platforms, he highlights how creating fantasy programs is not only a part of establishing brand identity, but it also satisfies the popular demand of audiences. After the global success of the adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, “every platform that does fantasy actually aims at superseding somehow the success of *Game of Thrones*, which is commonly perceived (also by a significant proportion of audiences of televisual high fantasy) as the etalon against which everything else is measured”<sup>370</sup> – thus, creating their own equivalent of an epic fantasy narrative adaptation can attract new subscribers, who are already invested in the world of Westeros or fantasy in general.

In the following subchapters, I am going to argue that the reason why streaming platforms turned towards the fantasy genre is that they are trying to position themselves as harbingers of a peculiar set of qualities and affordances that can also be described in terms of a brand by adapting epic fantasy narratives. I propose that the reason behind this is that as there is a close fit between the features of the genre and those of quality television, epic fantasy narratives are great source materials for quality television series.

---

<sup>368</sup> Amazon Prime also introduced an original fantasy series (which is not an adaptation) titled *Carnival Row* (2019–2023).

<sup>369</sup> Palatinus, “From Niche to Mainstream? Screen Culture’s Impact on Contemporary Perceptions of Fantasy,” 162.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

#### 6.4. Conceptualizing Quality Television

Before diving deep into the theory of quality television and how streaming platforms (and especially Netflix) turned towards this direction, it is worth looking into a few issues that may arise from this particular topic. In academic studies, researchers still refer to the features of quality television in connection to linear programming; while originally, quality television programs were indeed only present in linear programming and later in DVD box sets. However, I would argue that the characteristics that set quality television apart from other forms of programs started to appear on streaming services as well, who are trying to position themselves as ‘quality’ brands. As Mareike Jenner argues in connection to Netflix,

[t]he organizational structure of insulated flow is also reflected in the textual politics of Netflix’ in-house productions. Narrative structures and aesthetics do not tend to differ much from the American ‘quality’ TV texts of TV III and Netflix also draws heavily on the cultural politics of this era of the ‘legitimation’ of television (see Newman and Levine 2012).<sup>371</sup>

Of course, there is still a difference between the programming of linear television and streaming, however, I argue that when it comes to programming, streamers draw on the legacy of quality television by producing contents that fulfill specific narrative and aesthetic criteria (that I am going to list below), and this, in turn, is used to establish the brand that these platforms wish to be – just like in the case of premium network television in the 2000s. The fact that HBO also created its streaming platform titled HBO Max in 2020 (called Max since 2023) and started to offer its own originals also means, however, the lines between linear and streaming television started to blur, since this move inspired many other television channels to create their own smaller streaming services for their own programming.

When it comes to the definitions of quality television, I would like to use Robert J. Thompson’s (1997) understanding of the term – although his approach might seem outdated at first, as his seminal book on quality television dramas was published more than 25 years ago, most of the features that he proposes are still relevant to quality television today. According to Thompson, quality television is not “regular” TV, as it tends to break rules and transform traditional genres. As in the case of these shows the degree of network influence is smaller, creators get greater freedom than in the case of commercial television, thus quality

---

<sup>371</sup> Mareike Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 139, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-94316-9.

television can acquire a “quality pedigree”.<sup>372</sup> It also attracts well-educated, young viewers, and usually tends to “struggle against profit-mongering networks and nonappreciative audiences.”<sup>373</sup> Quality television shows employ a large ensemble cast, which results in multiple plots – thus, these shows rely on character development and continuing storylines, and usually refer back to previous episodes in order to keep the audience up-to-date. Quality television also mixes genres, and relies on complex writing (while it can also be literary), and allusions to high and popular culture also play an important role. Thompson argues that “[t]he subject matter of quality TV tends toward the controversial. [...] The overall message almost always tends toward liberal humanism.”<sup>374</sup> These shows tend to aspire towards realism – and if they exhibit most of these characteristics, they “are usually enthusiastically showered with awards and critical acclaim.”<sup>375</sup> I would argue that even though quality television has gone through a lot of changes in the last fifteen years, as the ever-evolving technology started to play an important role in several quality television series (especially in the case of fantasy and science fiction shows, as the fantastic or futuristic elements are harder to portray on screens), the essence of them is still the same, as they still focus on renewal, complexity, ensemble casts, realism and (as Thompson suggests), a *quality pedigree*. The only feature that might not be as valid in the contemporary television era is the “blue chip” audience: while up until the early 2000s the regular enjoyment of quality television was linked to the existence of a disposable income, as fans could only enjoy their favorite shows over and over again if they were able to record, buy or rent them from video rental stores, consuming quality television series are more easily available today. First of all, streaming services offer a wide range of these television programs, which makes it easier for audiences to choose from programs that they are interested in. In spite of the fact that streaming and paying for special television channels still relies on a disposable income, with the widespread practice of piracy, quality television shows are more easily available than in the past, thus a wider range of people could access them than before – although the target audience might still be the same.

When it comes to understanding the concept of quality television, several problems may arise. First of all, when discussing the term, scholarly research tends to focus on a very specific type of American programming – however, thanks to the growing number of

---

<sup>372</sup> Robert J. Thompson, “From ‘The Golden Age of Television’ to ‘Quality TV,’” in *Television’s Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER: Hill Street Blues, Thirtysomething, St. Elsewhere, China Beach, Cagney & Lacey, Twin Peaks, Moonlighting, Northern Exposure, L.A. Law, Picket Fences, with Brief Reflections on Homicide, NYPD Blue & Chicago Hope, and Other Quality Dramas*, by Robert J. Thompson, 1st Syracuse University Press ed, The Television Series (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

transnational productions, the meaning of the concept is shifting, thus, it is very hard to come up with a homogeneous definition. Secondly, when it comes to quality, it is mostly associated with a personal evaluation, since audiences will not define something as a quality program if they are not satisfied with its *quality*. Consequently, there is a difference between the academic meaning of quality television and the audience response. Probably the most emblematic example for this particular issue might be *The Lord of the Rings: Rings of Power* (Amazon Prime, 2022– ), which fits the criteria given by quality television scholars, however, was doomed to be a failure by audiences. The series was mostly criticized for its unfaithfulness to the source material; however, the IMDb ratings suggest that those people who did not find the infidelity problematic, had a generally positive opinion about the show.<sup>376</sup>

When discussing the differences between ‘good television’ and ‘quality television’, Sarah Cardwell argues that the issue of quality is not a question of personal evaluation: while the “goodness” of a television series is based on the experience of the audience, the question of quality is connected to generic traits. Cardwell’s definition (regarding American quality television shows) is very similar to Thompson’s, but she also adds other features as well. In her definition, she highlights high production values, esteemed actors, careful and innovative visual style, original music, and a sense of stylistic integrity.<sup>377</sup> Of course these features are also likely to result in a positive audience experience, but the emphasis is mainly put on the *qualities* of these shows instead of an aesthetic evaluation. When it comes to the adaptation of fantasy narratives, all of these features can be successfully employed to authentically present the fictional world of these stories. High production values are a must, as the use of various special effects and costumes is needed in order to show something that does not exist in the real world – without the proper execution of these, fantasy shows would likely fail. This is closely connected to the original visual style, as most of these texts introduce their own peculiar world and characters that are far from being stereotypical. For example, the Netflix adaptation of Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* depicts magical creatures from the dreamworld, like the seven anthropomorphic personifications of universal concepts (following the visuality of the graphic novels): Dream, Death, Destiny, Desire, Destruction, Despair and Delirium. Besides these characters, dreams (Fiddler’s Green, Gregory and Goldy) and nightmares (the

---

<sup>376</sup> Blake Hawkins and Jordan Iacobucci, “Was The Rings of Power That Bad? - Because the Numbers Paint a Different Picture,” *CBR*, November 3, 2022, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.cbr.com/lotr-rings-of-power-response-positive/>.

<sup>377</sup> Sarah Cardwell, “Is Quality Television Any Good? Generic Distinctions, Evaluations and the Troubling Matter of Critical Judgment,” in *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, First edition (London [England]: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2019), 26.

Corinthian, who has two small extra mouths instead of eyes that he uses to eat the eyeballs of people he kills) are also visualized appear as humanized concepts. *The Witcher* became famous for its several monsters that Geralt of Rivia has to fight, while *The Wheel of Time* makes a deliberate use of the visual representation of Light and Darkness, whenever characters are channeling the One Power. In order to stay coherent, a stylistic integrity is a must – and the visual representation of these worlds is usually underscored with the underlying use of epic soundtracks.

Cardwell also claims that quality television “programmes are likely to explore ‘serious’ themes, [...] [and] to suggest that the viewer will be rewarded for seeking out greater symbolic or emotional resonance within the details of the programme.”<sup>378</sup> In the case of fantasy narratives, this feature may be the most evident, as these stories are usually set in a world that is different from ours, full of supernatural elements in order to highlight an issue or an idea of the real world, thus, symbolical reading plays an important role in them. The first season of *The Sandman* focuses on the importance of dreaming, and also highlights how, although nightmares play an essential part in people’s lives, their proliferation in the real world should be avoided; while it also gives a possible interpretation for why the dark atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century happened. In the world of *The Sandman*, the two world wars and the following Cold War were caused by the spread of nightmares, since the Dream Lord was captured and then imprisoned by a British occultist between 1916 and 1988. When it comes to *The Witcher*, the character of Geralt of Rivia could be understood as the personification of the fight against racism, since although the main task of the White Wolf is to kill monsters, he has several adventures where the real monsters are not the magical creatures that townspeople fear, but humans themselves. The story also focuses on the issue of uniting different nations and races of the world, and how it should be achieved (or whether it can be acquired at all). I would argue that one of the main reasons behind the successes of these fantasy adaptations is that they have two essential layers: while their symbolic readings could satisfy audiences who are interested in a deeper, intellectual reading of these programs, those who prefer light entertainment are free to only focus on the surface: the aesthetic, the conflicts between the characters and the magical atmosphere that is created by the soundtrack and the visual style. Apart from the symbolical reading, Cardwell also points out that these series tend to reflect on contemporary society: in the case of fantasy, even though these stories are set in a world that is different from ours, the main issues are the same: characters are caught between the

---

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

constant fight of good and evil. As I have already pointed out, *The Witcher* raises questions about identity and racism, while *The Wheel of Time* introduces how power can only be safely used by women, because it drives men mad – thus contemplating some issues and ideas of feminism. Some fantasy stories, however, give a direct reflection on our world: Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* and *American Gods* (Starz, 2017–2021) both introduce the darker side of contemporary society and the evil nature of humanity.

When it comes to the relationship between quality television and fantasy, Catherine Johnson argues that the reason why telefantasy programs became so popular in the 1990s (including fantasy, science fiction, and horror) is connected to market logic: from the 1970s onwards, television networks became interested in the different types of viewers as well, and decided to focus on niche marketing. Johnson argued that “[f]or US networks, whose profitability is based on audience numbers, programmes with messages which are open to divergent interpretations are favoured, as these are most likely to attract the largest audience.”<sup>379</sup> Since works that include fantastic elements are open to multiple readings, shows like *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993–2002) or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB, 1997–2001, UPN, 2001–3) invited different types of audiences. Since streaming platforms decided to create their own fantasy shows, the genre is not as niche as it used to be anymore – and with the constant creation of new programs, fantasy achieved a wider recognition than ever before. However, it should be also noted that the genre's popularity in literature has also contributed to its growing presence in television and streaming platforms, which is a natural consequence of successful narratives and their adaptations like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*.

Besides the technological developments that made it much easier to portray non-existent things realistically, one of the other reasons why fantasy might have become so prominent in the last few decades, is that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when people are bombarded every day about all of the negative events that shake our society (wars, global warming, the dangers of the rapid technological advancements), they are more likely to turn to unrealistic, fantastic stories where they can escape the problems of our modern day and age. Fantasy offers us a safe space to explore the issues of our lives in an escapist setting, just like tales offer children a similar experience, by teaching them how to cope with certain problems, and giving them guidance about the workings of the world. Fantasy allows us to think about current issues critically, but the existence of magic and the underlying idea that at the end, good will prevail, helps us to release the anxiety that is connected to our modern lives. Science fiction (which may be just

---

<sup>379</sup> Catherine Johnson, “Quality/Cult Television. The X-Files and Buffy the Vampire Slayer in US Television of the 1990s,” in *Telefantasy*, by Catherine Johnson (London: BFI Publ, 2005), 97.

as popular as fantasy) creates a similar experience; however, instead of taking universal issues and dressing them up in a fantastic fashion, it rather focuses on a certain technological issue or question that modern society faces, and imagines a present or a future where this problem has a (mostly negative) impact on society. Thus, in the case of science fiction, the focus is set on the moral problems related to technological advancement and societal issues.

### **6.5. *Game of Thrones* as Quality Television: Why HBO Chose to Adapt It**

As discussed previously in Chapter 4, George R. R. Martin did not really believe that his epic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* could be adapted to the screen, since he believed it to be too violent and grand in vision. Indeed, the overly realistic and brutal narrative, full of sexual scenes is not something that would serve as a successful source material for linear television, since networks are mostly limited by the different rules and standards that they have to adhere to. Furthermore, a film or a series of films would not have done the epic fantasy series a service, since the narrative is so wide in scope (and there are so many important characters), that creating a film version of it would have simplified the story too much. After the future showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss persuaded the author that they could create an adaptation of the fantasy saga, and they successfully convinced HBO that their idea will bring the network a lot of success, HBO decided to invest money into the idea of the two fans, and *Game of Thrones* was officially born.

HBO has a long history with creating quality television series, the most famous example being *The Sopranos* (1999–2007). However, the network had not created any fantasy shows previously, since they are really expensive to make thanks to the immense amount of CGI that is needed to realistically portray fantastic things. However, in 2008, Sue Naegle became HBO's new president of entertainment, and she was really interested in an upcoming project that paved the way to *Game of Thrones*. The Southern Gothic vampire series was titled *True Blood*,<sup>380</sup> which became a true HBO hit later on, and thus opened the door for upcoming fantasy series as well. When in late 2008, Richard Plepler and Michael Lombardo were thinking about whether to order a pilot of *Game of Thrones*, they knew that not only would the show cost a lot of money for the network, but it would also have to live up to the expectations of the fantasy audience, for whom Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* films set the

---

<sup>380</sup> Felix Gillette and John Koblin, *It's Not TV: The Spectacular Rise, Revolution, and Future of HBO* (New York: Viking, 2022), chap. 16, para. 7.



bar really high.<sup>381</sup> However, Benioff and Weiss were convincing enough, and the first pilot of the show was created – and turned out to be a failure. According to Gillette and Koblin,

[...] it was terrible—a convoluted, off-putting mess. The costumes looked funny. The hair and makeup looked worse. The relationships between characters were confusing. The tone felt weirdly quaint, like a British period drama. And for a grandiose epic fantasy story, the pilot felt frustratingly claustrophobic. It lacked a sense of grandeur.<sup>382</sup>

The show was not cancelled, however: Benioff and Weiss were given a second chance, and HBO ordered a reshot pilot and ten episodes. Although fantasy shows were not something that HBO was originally interested in, *Game of Thrones* had qualities that other series of the network also shared, thus having the potential of becoming a future hit: the narrative had interesting, morally grey characters; the storyline was complicated, with dark power dynamics lurking under the surface; and it was full of erotic and gory scenes, which were previously so popular on shows like *The Sopranos* or *Rome*.

The first episode attracted 2.2 million viewers, but pulled in more and more people as the season went on. The first season was criticized for the harsh treatment of female characters and the “unnecessary” depiction of topless women, but received mostly positive reviews from critics and audiences in general.<sup>383</sup> The rest is history: *Game of Thrones* became one of the most successful series of HBO, and it inspired several other platforms to create their own version of epic fantasy adaptations, so that they may fill the hole that *Game of Thrones* left in the audiences after the show ended in 2019. However, there is another reason why fantasy became a crucial genre on streaming platforms, which is the close relationship between quality television and fantasy.

## 6.6. Streaming Services as Quality Television?

Although the history of quality television can be traced back to the era of broadcasting, with the rise of streaming services (especially in the case of Netflix), more and more original shows were created by these platforms that can also be categorized as quality television. In *Netflix and the Re-invention of Television*, Mareike Jenner highlights the close link between binge-watching and quality television.<sup>384</sup> As in the case of Netflix shows whole seasons are published at once, instead of the traditional way of airing new episodes on a regular (usually

---

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., chap. 16, para. 28.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., chap. 16, para. 39.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., chap. 17, paras. 42–48.

<sup>384</sup> Jenner, *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television*, 140–44.

weekly) basis, the publication pattern is similar to that of DVD box sets, which are strongly tied to the concept of quality television. The introduction of these sets allowed fans to interact with their favorite content on their own terms, while it also allowed a deeper and more thorough analysis of these programs. According to Jenner, in the case of Netflix, “[n]arrative structures and aesthetics do not tend to differ much from the American ‘quality’ TV texts of TV III and Netflix also draws heavily on the cultural politics of this era of the ‘legitimation’ of television (see Newman and Levine 2012).”<sup>385</sup> This technique, however, is not only present on Netflix, since other streaming platforms (like Amazon Prime or Max) also tend to create bingeable narratives that can be enjoyed one episode at a time, but can also be binged almost as long films if the audience wishes to consume them that way. Although binge-watching and the quality feature were essential in the branding of the platform, Netflix started to emphasize diversity and thus emulating HBO’s strategy to brand itself through its programming.<sup>386</sup> Jenner points out that quality television always aimed at highlighting liberal values and racial diversity, as “[a] number of the HBO-style ‘quality’ TV series include racially diverse casts and often deal with questions of sexual identity.”<sup>387</sup> Netflix started to emulate this strategy by focusing more on diverse representation, which in turn helped to support its transnational reach and niche marketing.

Although the season-drop is only related to Netflix, as other streaming services like Amazon Prime or Hulu tend to make new episodes available on a weekly basis, all of these platforms allow the bingeing of content after the episodes are already accessible, thus the connection between bingeability and quality are apparent on other services as well. Although the episodic nature is important (and it also allows audiences to consume series in however long chunks they want), the emphasis is still on the season: while audiences can binge whole seasons like 10–12-hour long films, it is also possible to enjoy the episodes by watching them on a daily or weekly basis. Each episode allows its own complication to unfold, however, there is usually a larger story that directs the development of the story.

However, when it comes to streaming platforms’ turn towards quality television in terms of their original content, it is not only the bingeability of their series that make them similar to quality programming, but other features as well. More and more streaming originals tend to create narratives that have a very peculiar aesthetic style, and utilize an ensemble cast, so that audiences become invested in the lives of numerous main characters. The introduction of an

---

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 173.

ensemble cast is also mostly supported with character development and serious themes, and these series also tend to reflect on contemporary society. All of these features can appear in different genres as well, however, I would argue that fantasy narratives serve as a great source material for quality television series, since there is a close fit between their features. Thus, one of the reasons why streaming platforms are turning towards the adaptation of these narratives (besides wanting to meet the expectations of audiences by creating shows that they are interested in), they also recognize the potential of these stories, which make them good source materials for quality programming.

### 6.7. The Proliferation of a Niche Genre on Streaming Platforms: Why Fantasy?

Several fantasy films have been created in the last 20 years that have since become cultural artifacts (the *Harry Potter* series, *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit* trilogy, just to name a few), however, the upsurge in the creation of fantasy shows started with HBO's famous *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019). The television series was quite innovative in the fantasy genre with its detailed depiction of brutality and sexuality (while building on the legacy of *The Sopranos* [HBO, 1999–2007] or *The Wire* [HBO, 2002–2008]), the complexity of the narrative, and the practice of killing off main characters, and it soon became an international sensation. The success of *Game of Thrones* can be measured in exact numbers: on average, more than 25 million people watched the episodes of the show (not including illegal downloads), which made it the most popular series of the 2010s.<sup>388</sup> After the show ended, fans started to speculate about what “the next *Game of Thrones*” is going to be, including Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who wanted to create a *Game of Thrones* equivalent for Amazon Studios.<sup>389</sup> Even though the series ended, the legacy of *Game of Thrones* is still alive – while several prequels and sequels are currently in the making, HBO's *House of the Dragon* (2022– ) made sure that even after the 2019 season 8 finale of its original predecessor, fans are still talking about the world of Westeros.

As streaming platforms started to become prominent at the end of the 2010s, and after *Game of Thrones* ended in 2019, streaming networks decided to create their own adaptations of epic fantasy sagas to build on the momentum that the fantasy adaptation created. Netflix made a huge success by adapting Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* (2019– ), which was followed by three other fantasy series: *Sweet Tooth* (2021–2024) is based on the DC Comics

---

<sup>388</sup> Hughes, “Game of Thrones.”

<sup>389</sup> “Have Any of These 15 Shows Become ‘the next Game of Thrones’?,” *Winter Is Coming*, April 16, 2022, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://winteriscoming.net/2022/04/16/15-shows-next-game-of-thrones-lord-of-the-rings-witcher-wheel-of-time/>.

comic book series (created by Jeff Lemire) that describes a world in which after a virus appears and kills the majority of the human population, hybrid babies are born with animal features and characteristics. *Shadow and Bone* (2021–2023) is based on Leigh Bardugo’s young adult trilogy, and tells the tale of Alina Starkov, an orphan who discovers that she has special powers – however, the series was cancelled after two seasons. *The Sandman* (2022–), similarly to *Sweet Tooth*, is based on a DC Comics comic book series written by Neil Gaiman, and introduces the adventures of Lord Morpheus, the king of dreams, after he was captured in an occult ritual in 1916. Amazon Prime also quickly recognized the need for their own fantasy shows, so they decided to adapt Robert Jordan’s and Brandon Sanderson’s *The Wheel of Time* (2021–), and created a prequel for Tolkien’s famous *The Lord of the Rings*, titled *The Rings of Power* (2022–). Although the popularity of *Game of Thrones* and the void that it left in the audience was definitely an important, decisive factor in the creation of fantasy shows by the streaming platforms, there may be two other reasons behind their ever-growing number. Firstly, fantasy shows require huge monetary investments as they tend to rely on the use of CGI for the depiction of realistic magical creatures and landscapes – which is something that broadcast channels do not usually have the budgets for. Secondly, I argue that the reason why streaming platforms keep adapting epic fantasy series is that there is a close fit between the features of the genre and those of quality television, and as such, they help streaming platforms to position themselves as part of a quality television brand.

## 6.8. Fantasy, the Magical Source for Quality Television

By providing an explanation for why fantasy is a great source for quality television adaptations, I am going to rely on Robert J. Thompson’s and Sarah Cardwell’s aforementioned definitions of the term. Thompson’s first assertion about quality television is that it is not regular television, as it tends to break rules and transform traditional genres.<sup>390</sup> The most emblematic example for this might be the third season of *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991; 2017), where David Lynch pushed the narrative boundaries of television by making it more similar to experimental cinema. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, this can be seen in the violent nature of the show; however, presenting sexual and violent scenes on television is not a must in every fantasy narrative. Since one of the most important features of fantasy is that it breaks the rules of reality and combines the elements of the real world with the components of the fantastic, transformation plays an essential role in subtler fantasy shows as well. By mixing

---

<sup>390</sup> Thompson, “From ‘The Golden Age of Television’ to ‘Quality TV,’” 13.

the features of several different genres, fantasy series can also cater to a wide range of audiences: in almost every fantasy adaptation, one can focus on the coming-of-age story of certain characters, character development, political intrigue, romance, the fight between good and evil, magic, the history and the mythology of the fictional world or just the spectacular aesthetics itself. This also goes hand in hand with what Thompson calls artistic freedom and a quality pedigree,<sup>391</sup> as the execution of these complex narratives tends to be very detailed. The complexity of the narratives allows different audiences to connect to different aspects of the same story: while younger audiences may find the gory details and the coming-of-age narrative of the characters the most interesting, those who are interested in politics or romantic relationships can focus on that as well.

Epic fantasy narratives also tend to work with several main characters, which allows show makers to employ an ensemble cast,<sup>392</sup> usually in the form of already esteemed actors. The ensemble cast and the story also allow multiple plots to unfold, which is supported by the seriality of the narrative. In the case of epic fantasy stories, there is usually at least one major plot that directs the flow of the events: in *The Witcher*, for example, Geralt of Rivia tries to save Princess Cirilla of Cintra from those who want to exploit her power for their own reasons, but the story also introduces several subplots throughout the years, following the adventures of Geralt, Yennefer of Vengerberg, Ciri and Jaskier, and introducing other major characters later on. This feature is also supported by character development and continuing storylines, and heavily relies on the memory of the series (and the novels as well): epic fantasy series usually include intricate schemes and plottings, sometimes even magical prophecies that can later play an important role in the story. The coming-of-age trope also plays an important role in fantasy novels, as the main characters usually have to grow and become wiser in order to defeat evil at the end of the story.

According to Thompson, another feature of quality television is that it tends to mix genres and has complex writing.<sup>393</sup> Epic fantasy series are also often characterized by these qualities: although one could say that their genre is fixed, they show a tendency to mix components of other genres as well. Fantasy novels usually focus on political intrigue and wars between different nations or groups, however, including elements of romance, horror or action is also a common practice. In the case of adaptations, complex writing is usually a

---

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 15.

given, as epic series of novels are likely to employ several characters and storylines, while introducing the history of the fantastic world and the diverse range of characters.

As fantasy often builds on the formulas of ancient myths, it can also serve as a great source material for quality television series, which tend to apply allusions to high and popular culture. Although these connections are not always evident at once, most epic fantasy series tend to use several elements from mythology. For example, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (although it is not an epic series but a single novel) introduces several god figures from the history of the world: the Norse Odin, the Queen of Sheeba, or the Ghanaian trickster god Anansi. In the case of *Harry Potter*, Rowling also included references to Greek and Roman mythology: one of the members of the Order of the Phoenix, Remus Lupin is a werewolf, and is named after one of the founders of Rome (who, according to the myths, are also connected to wolves), or Fluffy, the three-headed dog, who is a reference to Cerberus, the guardian of the underworld. However, fantasy is not only linked to mythology, but it can also use history as its foundational source: while George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is based on the War of the Roses, Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series is set in the era of the Jacobite risings in Scotland, and employs characters who are based on real historical figures (although it is not entirely historically accurate).

Thompson also places an emphasis on the controversial subject matter of quality television, and points out that these shows tend to focus on liberal humanism.<sup>394</sup> Although not every fantasy story employs controversial elements, the majority of these stories introduces something surprising for the audience. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* includes several detailed scenes about brutality, sexuality and incest, while Gabaldon's *Outlander* series is also loaded with the depiction of cruelty and eroticism. The author of *His Dark Materials*, Philip Pullman was considered to be the "anti-[C.S.] Lewis" because, as he stated in an interview with *The Washington Post*, in his trilogy he was "trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief."<sup>395</sup>

Thompson points out that the aspiration towards realism is an important factor of quality television – so how does fantasy, an inherently *unrealistic* genre become a fruitful source material for quality TV series? Despite the fact that fantasy narratives contain supernatural elements, the very aim of their televisual adaptations is to depict these elements as realistically as possible. The more lifelike the representation of a magical world is, the more

---

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Alona Wartofsky, "The Last Word," *Washington Post*, February 19, 2001, accessed: 18 August, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/02/19/the-last-word/4bad376f-4ab7-441c-9c50-afc7e63dd192/>.

astonishing it will be for the audience. In the case of contemporary fantasy series, reality also plays an important role in the sense that the (usually) pseudo-medieval setting of these stories is shown in its unglamorous reality. The characters are not the simply good or bad versions of old tales, but have complex personalities and usually make bad decisions as well.

Although the number of awards and the critical acclaim is not necessarily related to the original texts, their literary reputation and previous success amongst audiences play an important role in their adaptation. Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* began as a national success story in Poland, and its video game adaptation soon became popular internationally. Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* had many fans in the fantasy community, while Amazon Prime's *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* could feed off the success of its predecessors: Tolkien's mythology of Middle-earth and the film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Besides the aforementioned features, there are other qualities of fantasy that make it attractive for streaming platforms as well. Since fantasy adaptations can work with already existing material, which tends to be epic in nature (since most epic fantasy series are quite lengthy and have several volumes), if the adaptation deems to be successful, there are numerous possibilities to continue the series in different ways. The length of the narratives itself means that numerous seasons can be made, while the number of characters, the history or the mythology of the fantastic world, or even certain seemingly minor storylines can serve as a basis for a future prequel, sequel or a spin-off for the series. This is what happened with *The Witcher* as well: building on the success of the series, showrunners decided to create a mini-series prequel titled *The Witcher: Blood Origin* (2022), focusing on how the first witcher was created, and introducing the events that led to the Conjunction of the Spheres. The detailed worldbuilding means that writers are able to use the different elements of these fantasy source narratives creatively. Thus, we can argue that the seriality of these narratives make them great source materials for quality television series.

In this chapter, I wanted to point out the fact that the popularity of *Game of Thrones* had a great impact on the way fantasy is perceived today, since it inspired streaming platforms to create their own fantasy adaptations and also helped popularize the genre that used to be niche in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the reasons why fantasy can be used so effectively in the world of media convergence and mega-franchises is that by building a world without limits, companies are able to build on the extensive nature of these narratives, and create mega-narrations with prequels, sequels, and different types of media entries, since the complex worldbuilding and the immense number of characters allow networks and companies to exploit the infinite

opportunities that the genre possess. However, it is important to note that while fantasy is more popular than ever, it does not mean that it is the only genre towards which streaming platforms turn – I simply wanted to highlight that fantasy is more present than before, and it is an important segment of contemporary streaming programming.



## 7. Conclusion

As the previous chapters have shown, *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* had an immense impact on the evolution of fantasy and television in the last two decades. While fantasy has been a niche genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it slowly started to grow into a global phenomenon, thanks to the success of narratives like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* – however, when it comes to television shows, the impact of HBO's adaptation is undeniable. The purpose of this research was to introduce how the different elements of this narrative universe work together, and to show the diverse ways in which it influenced contemporary culture. The reason why this topic is so important is that although research has been focusing on the thematic readings of the books and the adaptation, there have only been a few studies that were focusing on the impact of the narrative. While fans still do not know when the last volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is going to be published (or whether it will be published at all), and whether the westerosi narrative will be complemented by other books (for example a possible continuation of *Fire & Blood*), and the series was finished in 2019, the fact that HBO is still working on different spin-offs in the franchise shows that the history of *Game of Thrones* is far from being over. At the time of writing this thesis, several series are in the making that are set in Martin's universe, and there have also been rumors about a possible movie in early development at Warner Bros.<sup>396</sup> While some people may look at *Game of Thrones* as a fad of pop culture, its impact is undeniable – and Martin's story about the boy who found some direwolf pups in the snow has all the opportunities to become something even bigger in the upcoming decades.

This dissertation had three main purposes. First of all, I wanted to look at all the factors that made *Game of Thrones* such a successful franchise, and analyze how Martin's novels fit into the fantasy genre in general, since the author has been famous for his realistic depictions of problematic concepts like rape, incest, and sexuality, which is something that does not have a long tradition in fantasy. Secondly, since *Game of Thrones* has a wide array of different media incarnations, I wanted to look into how these different elements relate to each other. I was especially interested in the relationship between the novels and their television adaptation, since *Game of Thrones* is a peculiar example for this strange type of transmedia storytelling, in which the transmedia universe was not planned before. Although the

---

<sup>396</sup> James Hibberd, "'Game of Thrones' Movie in Early Development at Warner Bros.," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 31, 2024, accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/game-of-thrones-movie-warner-bros-1236050190/>.

showrunners believed that by the time they will arrive at the end of the narrative that has existed at that time (the fourth volume of the saga), the last three books will already have been published, and thus they will have a source material to work from. However, since the author still has not finished his series, the television show outpaced the books, and thus created a whole range of storylines and events that have not existed before. Thus, I wanted to elaborate on how this interesting case of transmedia storytelling impacts the way that scholars of adaptation theory and transmedia storytelling think about these two notions in question.

Lastly, I also wanted to offer an authorial portrait of George R. R. Martin and introduce his poetics which also influenced his magnum opus. I was especially interested in how his past career as a screenwriter influenced his writings and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since the televisual influences can be easily recognized in his writings. This idea was also supported by the fact that although Martin has claimed several times that his saga will never be adapted, since it is an impossible task to undertake, Benioff and Weiss still managed to persuade the author to sell them the rights and thus created one of the most successful series of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In order to give an overarching analysis of the *Game of Thrones* storyworld, I had to rely on the theories of different fields that are somewhat related to each other, but still are independent areas on their own. By borrowing the concepts and ideas of the fields of adaptation theory, transmedia storytelling, and theories of fantasy, and thinking about the history of television, streaming platforms, and popular culture and entertainment in general, this thesis became truly interdisciplinary in nature. However, although it would definitely be worth focusing on small elements of this universe alone, I argue that by looking at the *Game of Thrones* universe from a bird's-eye view, we are able to see connections that would not be so evident if we only focused on certain elements, and we get closer to understanding where the success of the franchise is coming from. Lastly, I believe that by thinking about this meganarration from this perspective, we can also get closer to understanding how contemporary storytelling works nowadays. While the impact of *Game of Thrones* on popular culture is undeniable, there are several other transmedia universes that also belong to the category of speculative fiction and are just as popular as their westerosi sibling. The most famous examples might be the *Star Wars* universe, which started out as a film trilogy and later turned out to be something greater that George Lucas could have ever imagined; the Marvel and DC comics, that started out as a niche form of entertainment for a small audience, but turned out to be incredibly successful narratives with new films coming out each and every year, or the *Harry Potter* series, which has a similar evolution to that of *A Song of Ice*

*and Fire*, but in this case, Rowling managed to finish the last volume of the narrative before the filmmakers got to the seventh adaptation of the series. As all of the aforementioned examples show, contemporary storytelling is getting closer to the ancient practices of the past, where ancient, mythic storyworlds were growing exponentially.

In order to understand how the different elements of this vast narrative universe relate to each other, Chapter 2 of this dissertation (“Adaptations, Transmediality, and [Popular] Media Convergence”) laid down the theoretical background for the upcoming chapters that are focusing on the transmediality of *Game of Thrones*. The first section was focusing on defining adaptations, starting with Linda Hutcheon’s theory, who denies the secondary natures of adaptations, and highlights how every adaptation is a process as well. In Hutcheon’s understanding, each adaptation is a *palimpsest*, since they are resonating with other works, thus, they are intertextual in nature – I argue that while all of these features are important if we want to understand how adaptations work, we should also focus on how these works are embedded into the industry and the economy. One of the other very influential theories that can be used if we want to understand the *Game of Thrones* universe is the theory of Simone Murray, who states that one of the biggest problems of adaptation studies is that they are not materialized enough. According to the author, when we are talking about the source material and its adaptation, we should always consider the industrial nature of literature, and the economic factors that contribute to the creation of the new media incarnation. The very reason why contemporary multi-platform storytelling was born is that media industries realized that if they can create different incarnations of the same narrative (books, films, series, games, or even action figures), fan audiences will be likely to consume more of their products, which turns into profit. Thus, building on Murray’s theory, I argued that when we are talking about adaptations, the socio-economic background should always be considered.

Chapter 2 also introduced Douglas Lanier’s theory of rhizomatics, which highlights the dynamic nature of adaptations. Lanier states that in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, the rhizome is “both a mode of relation and a form of conceptual structure”<sup>397</sup>, where the two beings are distinct, but they do move independently towards each other. I argued that the rhizomatic nature of adaptations seems applicable to our understanding of contemporary adaptations and transmedia narratives, since the different media incarnations are not secondary to the source material, but they are horizontally connected. However, from the perspective of the fandom, the different adaptations and spin-offs can still be seen as inferior

---

<sup>397</sup> Lanier, “Shakespearean Rhizomatics,” 31.

to the “original” text. Fans tend to compare the source material to its adaptation in terms of fidelity and authenticity; thus, in order to understand how they approach these texts, I offered two definitions for these concepts. I argued that the issue of *fidelity* refers to how faithfully and accurately an adaptation follows the storyline of its source material, while *authenticity* refers to the new elements that are introduced, and how genuinely they fit the narrative world of the “original” work. While the subchapter introduced other adaptation theorists as well (including Thomas Leitch, Kamilla Elliott, or Johannes Fehrle), I have found Hutcheon’s, Lanier’s and Murray’s theories to be the most helpful when thinking about the transmedia universe of *Game of Thrones*.

The next section of this chapter was focusing on the theoretical background of transmedia storytelling, touching upon how while the term itself is quite a new invention, the phenomenon is not newfangled at all: even Greek mythology or religious stories can be understood as transmedial in nature. While the first mentions of the term can be connected to Marsha Kinder and Mary-Celeste Kearney, who were focusing on transmedia storytelling from a commercial point of view (where media industries are interested in selling the same narratives – or their elements – on different platforms so that audiences will consume more products), the most influential theory of transmedia storytelling may be connected to the name of Henry Jenkins. According to Jenkins, “[a] transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.”<sup>398</sup> While Jenkins’s approach towards transmedia storytelling is incredibly helpful if we want to understand storyworlds that were created with the intention that each narrative unit will be introduced on the platform it is most suitable for (thus, where the transmediality of the story was *intentional* from the very moment of creation, like in the case of *The Matrix* franchise), his approach is not always suitable when we would like to discuss works that became transmedial naturally, as in the case of the *Harry Potter* universe, *Star Wars*, or *Game of Thrones*, which Marie-Laure Ryan calls “the snowball effect.”<sup>399</sup> Consequently, I have introduced the theory of Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, who believe that until we talk about transmedia storytelling and media convergence without describing what exactly media converges *around*, the latter concept will just be a buzzword. Thus, they argue that when we focus on transmedia storytelling, we should focus on the narrative elements and components. Lisbeth Klastrup and Susanna Tosca also build on this approach, by introducing the concept of *transmedial worlds*, which contain three dimensions: *mythos* (the backstory of the world),

---

<sup>398</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 97–98.

<sup>399</sup> Ryan, “Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality,” 363.

*topos* (the geographical and time setting), and *ethos* (the moral codex of characters).<sup>400</sup> Building on this variety of approaches, I argued that while the Jenkinsian approach gets us closer to understanding the nature of transmediality, his use of the term is quite restricted, thus, it would be more useful to think about transmedia storytelling as a broader umbrella term.

In the penultimate section of this chapter, I summarized Jenkins's theory of media convergence, which refers to the "flow of content across different media platforms."<sup>401</sup> However, while Jenkins was right about describing how media convergence works in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he failed to describe how the phenomenon of convergence is closely connected to the idea of deconvergence, as, according to Lothar Mikos, the fact that different narrative universes appear on several platforms leads to the fragmentation of audiences.<sup>402</sup> In conclusion, I argued that the borders between the concepts adaptation and transmedia storytelling are incredibly blurry; however, using a label for *Game of Thrones* would not lead us closer to the understanding of the complexity of the narrative universe – still, comprehending these definitions is crucial if we want to see how the different elements of the storyworld are connected to each other.

Chapter 3 ("Transmedia Storytelling and Fantasy") focuses on the definition of the genre, and it also discusses how *A Song of Ice and Fire* fits into the traditional concept of fantasy. In the first section of the chapter, several approaches towards fantasy have been introduced, starting with Tolkien's famous essay, titled "On Fairy-stories", in which he describes three essential features of fairy stories: Recovery, Escape, and Consolation. Tolkien's theory was followed by Tzvetan Todorov's concept of the fantastic, who thinks about the term from a rhetorical perspective. I argued that although Todorov's ideas had an immense impact on how we think about fantasy, since he is concentrating on a wide array of text from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century which contain fantastic elements, his theory does not get us closer to conceptualizing fantasy as a genre. Rosemary Jackson's approach, in which she talks about fantasy as a *mode*, could be more useful, since modern narratives tend to appear on different media platforms as well, thus we cannot really look at fantasy as *only* a literary genre anymore. However, while highlighting the subversive nature of the genre, she claims that *The Lord of the Rings* is a failed fantasy, since it lacks the subversiveness that fantasy narratives should have. Kathryn Hume also builds on the relationship between fantasy and its allusions to the real world, by

---

<sup>400</sup> Klastrop and Tosca, "Game of Thrones. Transmedial Worlds, Fandom, and Social Gaming," 296–97.

<sup>401</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2–3.

<sup>402</sup> Mikos, "Transmedia Storytelling and Mega-Narration: Audiovisual Production in Converged Media Environments."

deliberately departing from the *real* – however, she also categorizes Langland's and Dante's work as fantasy. I argued that although the academic consensus has been following Jackson's idea of calling fantasy a mode, talking about fantasy as a *genre* and the fantastic as a *mode* would be more useful, since it would help us think about the fantasy works of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in a much clearer and precise way. Thus, by the *fantastic* I understand all the elements that are unrealistic and non-mimetic, while fantasy should be used as a genre, building on the definition of Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston:

fantastic narratives are fictional action stories with prominent supernatural content that is inspired by myth, legends, or folklore. Further, this content is believed by few or no audience members and is believed by audiences to have been believed by another culture. Moreover, it is not naturalized, solely allegorical, merely parodic, simply absurd, or primarily meant to frighten audiences. These are all important elements for a definition of fantasy, though the relations they bear to one another might be debatable.<sup>403</sup>

In his seminal works (*Strategies of Fantasy* [1992] and *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* [2014]) Brian Attebery also calls fantasy a genre, and highlights three essential features: a break with reality, the comic structure, and the use of eucatastrophe. However, while these features are definitely true for fantasy, they can also be applied to science fiction stories as well, where the technological advancements are not necessarily built on realistic scenarios, but still follow the logic of the particular world they discuss – thus, I would define fantasy a story which breaks with reality, and focuses on the fantastic instead of science (like in the case of science fiction) or the feelings of horror and dread (like in the case of horror). Fantasy narratives are also comic in nature, as they propose a problem that is solved by the end (which is also usually connected to the problem of thinning), and they also have a rich mythical lore that can be expanded.

Attebery also highlights how fantasy is connected to the history of *mythopoiesis* and the creation of myths, which serves as an integral part of the definition described below. Lastly, the works of Lucie Armitt and Farah Mendlesohn were also mentioned: while Armitt examines the fantastic from a structuralist, psychoanalytic, feminist, and postmodern point of view, she concentrates on works in general which are non-mimetic in nature, thus, her theory is not useful in my understanding of fantasy. While Mendlesohn created a systematic approach by coming up with the categories of portal-quest, immersive, intrusive, liminal, and

---

<sup>403</sup> Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston, "What Is Fantasy?," 161–62.

the irregular categories of fantasy, which could serve as a useful basis for the analysis of fantastic texts, it does not contribute to our understanding of fantasy as a genre.

After coming up with a definition of fantasy, the next section of this chapter described the relationship between *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since Martin is constantly referred to as “the American Tolkien” on book covers, in interviews, and all over the internet. I have introduced the argument of Joseph Rex Young, who believes that this proposition is wrong, since there are several differences between the works of Tolkien and Martin. While Martin’s characters are morally more ambiguous and multifaceted, he also puts a lot of emphasis on the role of dirt, which is connected to the alazons: characters who want to present themselves greater than they actually are. By showing the not-so-romantic side of this pseudo-medieval world, describing sexuality and brutality, and using toilet humor, Young argues that if we want to identify Martin as the American equivalent of a British fantasy author, we should rather call him “the American Pratchett.”

By describing the differences between Tolkien’s and Martin’s epic fantasy sagas, the last section of this chapter argued that the reason why a vast number of transmedia stories belong to the category of speculative fiction (mostly fantasy and science fiction) is because this genre has all the qualities that a transmedia story can fully exploit: being encyclopedic in nature, having a detailed mythical lore, being immersive in nature, and enumerating several characters, stories of speculative fiction can serve as great source materials for transmedia narratives.

After discussing the theoretical background, in order to understand the narrative universe of *Game of Thrones*, Chapter 4 (“Prequels, Sequels, and Everything Else: the Proliferation of the *Game of Thrones* Universe”) focuses on the narrative elements of the franchise. In the first three subsections, I have attempted to list all of the media entries that exist in this storyworld, however, due to the limitations of space, I have omitted works that were created by fans. While it would be interesting to see how the different works of fanfiction fit into this narrative universe, it is impossible to list all of the examples since the narrative has become so popular in the last three decades that thousands of texts were written about this storyworld. After listing all the books, television shows, games and other media that were born in the franchise, the fourth section of the chapter describes the transmedial relationship between these elements. After the currently existing volumes have been adapted by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, *Game of Thrones* became a transmedial experience – however, from a Jenkinsian understanding, we cannot talk about a systematic transmedial planning. While *A Song of Ice and Fire* contained all of the features that make it a great source material for a transmedia

project (detailed worldbuilding and history, rich lore, numerous interesting characters), the series only added new elements to the already existing material once it started to depart from Martin's storyline and added a new ending that has not existed before. By building on Michael Graves' idea about how the borderline between adaptations and transmedia stories are porous, I argued that while the series began as an adaptation, the franchise became a case of transmedia storytelling once it outpaced the books: not only can any of the listed media entries serve as an entry point to the narrative universe, the items are also self-contained and are on the same level, but by consuming more of them, the whole will be worth more than the sum of its parts. However, since this case was not systematically planned, I argued that Lothar Mikos's term of *meganarration* is more useful if we want to describe the incredibly rich narrative universe of *Game of Thrones*.

With the creation of *House of the Dragon*, HBO also complicated the narrative web of the franchise, since it included several allusions in both of its currently existing seasons that serve as thematic echoes of *Game of Thrones* (Aegon's Prophecy, the Catspaw dagger, Daemon's vision in Season 2, the title sequence, or even the soundtrack and the composer). When it comes to the video games, they do not necessarily add anything new to the already existing information, but being immersive in nature, they definitely add something new to the fan experience, while also support the marketing of the franchise, by piggybacking on its success and still attracting new audiences.

After elaborating on why *A Song of Ice and Fire* was a good fit for a successful transmedia project, in Chapter 5 ("Screen and Text: The Relationship between George R. R. Martin's Works and the Screen Industries) I have painted an authorial portrait of Martin and discussed the adaptation process of *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon*. In the first section of the chapter, I described the author's literary background: although he only achieved international fame after his epic fantasy series was adapted, he already had a flourishing career in the science fiction and horror circles as a short story writer, while also being employed as a screenwriter and producer for television, working on popular series like *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1985–1989), and *Beauty and the Beast* (CBS, 1987–1990). Throughout this section, I have argued that it was not only the themes that he had already used in his other previous writings that had an impact on *A Song of Ice and Fire*, but also his experience in Hollywood. All of his texts are characterized by a detailed and immersive worldbuilding, which is also present in his other fictional universe, called "Thousand Worlds." Just like Westeros, this universe is also characterized by chaos. and furthermore, both of these worlds employ morally complex and gray characters.



In the next section, I have briefly touched upon Martin's poetics: one of the most influential features of his works is that his short stories and novels can be seen as generic hybrids. While *A Song of Ice and Fire* combines the elements of fantasy, historical fiction, and romance, his short stories tend to be a combination of science fiction and horror, while still focusing on Martin's *ars poetica*: the human heart in conflict with itself. While this topic is heavily present in his fantasy narrative, the saga was also influenced by his years of working in television, since all of the author's writings were deemed to be too grandiose. Since his imagination was limited (due to mainly monetary constraints), *A Song of Ice and Fire* was born as a logical result of that, since by writing a story that was so epic in scope, he could finally set his imagination free, while also making his old dream of writing an epic fantasy series come true. Not only do his lengthy and detailed descriptions of scenes play an incredibly realistic picture about the setting that resembles the Middle Ages (thus highlighting its darker side, instead of focusing on the romantic, chivalric features), but they also add an almost *filmic* impression, since they allow the readers to see and experience everything down to the tiniest detail in their mind.

In the second half of this chapter, I was focusing on Martin's take on adaptations, and the adaptation processes of *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon*. The author is a supporter of faithful and authentic adaptations, however, agrees that certain changes need to be made if we want to move a narrative from one medium to another. Martin also created a long blogpost about how both *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon* made a mistake when they were showing the Targaryen banner: while the original sigil shows a dragon with three heads and two legs, the one in the shows (although it was faithfully depicted in the first few seasons of *Game of Thrones*) shows a dragon with four legs, which, although it complies with the real rules of heraldry, does not fit the world of Westeros. While the author did not give an elaborate opinion about the adaptation of the two series, these statements show that the author believes in the importance of detail.

Furthermore, I discussed the adaptation process of the television shows, and the question of how *A Song of Ice and Fire* became such a great success when the author used to claim that his narrative is unfilmable. I concluded that one of the most influential features that made the story such a good source material is its seriality: although the books are written from the perspective of different point-of-view characters, thus being episodic in nature, these characters could serve as great starting points in finding out the main directions of the narrative, and creating an ensemble cast, instead of focusing on a small number of characters. The immersive nature of the text also supported the rich portrayal of the characters, and the

rich lore made it possible to dream about other spin-offs that could continue the infinite history of Westeros. Furthermore, the saga also broke the rules of what has been seen previously (thus fitting an important feature of quality television drama), since it stopped glamorizing the medieval world of fantasy narratives, while its hybridity also allowed different audiences to become interested in different elements and themes of the show. I also described how, the adaptation process of *Fire & Blood* was quite different: while in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the first five volumes served as a detailed source material for the television show, where certain storylines had to be omitted in order due to televisual constraints, in the case of *House of the Dragon*, lots of background information had to be filled by the writers, since the book the series is based on is written like an imaginary history, enumerating only the important facts of the events that happened in the history of House Targaryen.

In the last subchapter I also elaborated on the issue of authorship, building on the theories of Michel Foucault, Jason Mittell, and Matthew Freeman. I argued that in the case of transmedia narratives that are the products of the snowball effect, the concept of the author is especially problematic, since these narrative franchises are mostly controlled by a company – in the case of *Game of Thrones*, HBO. In the case of these meganarrations, several authors participate in the creation process, including the originating author, the showrunners, scriptwriters, directors, and all the creative personnel who participates in the creation of the different media entries. Since these media entries are controlled by a particular brand, I argued that in the case of storyworlds that are born by following the logic of the snowball effect, we should talk about authorship by branding, where these franchises are not controlled by a single author but rather a company, who decides which media entries are official, and which not. Authorship by branding also highlights the commercial nature of these transmedial storyworlds, while allowing the presence of several different authors as well.

The last chapter of the dissertation, “Fantasy, Streaming Platforms and Transmediality” discussed the features of the adaptation industry in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup>-centuries, and highlighted the impact of *Game of Thrones* on television, and how it set an example for future fantasy series to come. Lastly, I have discussed why streaming platforms turned towards the adaptation of epic fantasy series, despite the niche nature of the genre. First of all, I described the possible reasons why adaptations have been so popular in the last few years. The repetition or replication of an already existing (successful) narrative means that the work that will be based on it may be successful as well – besides drawing in an already existing fanbase, the directors and producers who cannot come up with their own ideas can also build on narratives they fell in love with, which in turns makes writers’ job somewhat easier. However,

this is a double-edged sword: although adaptation studies turned away from the question of fidelity criticism, audiences still *do* care about how their beloved narratives are treated by the adaptors. By translating an already existing text to the screen, filmmakers risk upsetting the fans, since if they are not satisfied with the end result, they will be very open about it on different platforms, which in turn influences the general reception of the film or television show. Nostalgia may also be a helpful factor, since audiences who grew up loving a certain text will be more likely to turn to other media incarnations that have something to do with that narrative. If the adaptation is linked to the “original”, cross-marketing also plays an important role: not only does it have economic advantages in the sense that the fanbase will turn to the adaptation, but it is also good for the adapted text, since those who are not familiar with it but like the adaptation, will be more likely to turn towards the original, just as it has happened with *Game of Thrones*. Lastly, although I have mostly emphasized the economic advantages of adaptations, the role of the audience should not be left out, since they are constantly motivated by the need of searching for something new, while still looking for the already familiar.

In the next section of this chapter, I looked into the concept of fantasy television. However, instead of “fantasy television”, the word *telefantasy* is used in academic scholarship to denote programs in which magical elements are used to depict a world that differs from our reality. In this section, I have argued that although telefantasy is a concept that helps us think about how the fantastic appears in television, academic research should also focus on the narrower category of fantasy television, a particular set of films and shows that are trending in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I argued that fantasy television could be defined as a genre in which magic and the fantastic play an essential role, but the focus is not on technological advancements, a possible future or the feeling of fear, but on the fantastic itself. These series also have an incredibly rich mythology and history, and they also tend to focus on the questions of ethics, morality, and human nature respectively. I have also referred to Andrew Lynch’s theory of how there is a close relationship between US quality television and telefantasy, and came to the conclusion that the narrower category of fantasy television is also worth looking into – thus, the next section focuses on the relationship between quality television, streaming platforms, and fantasy. I argued that the reason why streaming platforms have turned towards the creation of fantasy adaptations is that they are trying to position themselves as quality brands, for which fantasy serves as a great source material, as there is a close fit between the features of the genre and those of quality television. The section titled “Conceptualizing Quality Television” was based on the theories of Robert J. Thompson and Sarah Cardwell: by

identifying the most important features of this type of programming, I have showed that the most popular fantasy shows of the 21<sup>st</sup> century all fit the criteria offered by these two scholars. Besides these features, fantasy shows also offer a sense of escapism: by talking about contemporary issues in a fantastic setting, audiences are able to cope with their problems in a place that is far from their reality, which eases their anxiety that is connected to their modern lives. However, I have argued that another reason why quality fantasy television became such a successful practice in the last decade is that HBO set an example for streaming platforms that they wanted to follow, in order to attract large audiences. HBO has a long history in creating quality television series – although fantasy was not something that the network was interested in, after the success of *True Blood* and the persuasion of David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, HBO decided to order a pilot (and re-do the first one after its catastrophic execution), and made history by creating one of the most influential series of the 2010s.

In the last section of this chapter, I have argued that the reason why streaming services have turned towards the creation of quality television programs is that (as Mareike Jenner suggests), they are trying to position themselves as quality brands. Secondly, the qualities of diversity and liberal values (which are integral features of quality television) are also important for Netflix, thus, by creating their own fantasy shows (and thus inspiring other streaming platforms as well), they have managed to emulate this strategy that was previously only characteristic of linear television. Since there is a close fit between the features of quality television and fantasy, coming up with their own programs (and trying to create “the next *Game of Thrones*”), they could achieve two goals at the same time. In conclusion, in Chapter 6 of the dissertation I wanted to point out that *Game of Thrones* had an immense impact on the current reception of fantasy, and it also inspired streaming platforms to create their own fantasy adaptations, and as such, marked a turning point in the history of television.

Since the *Game of Thrones* franchise is such a vast universe, and it keeps expanding every year, the discussion of this topic can only serve as introductory research into how these elements interact with each other. Due to the constraints of length, I could not focus on the narrative analysis of each and every element of the franchise, and fan productions also have been omitted from this research. I believe that it would be worth looking into how the different fan fictions and online role-playing games contribute and relate to the master narrative. Martin himself famously claimed that he is not a fan of fanfiction for two reasons: firstly, he believes that writers have to come up with their own characters and storyworlds, because that is the only way they are going to learn how to become professionals; secondly, “there are all sorts of copyright issues when you’re using other people’s work... My

understanding of the law is that if I knew about [it] I would have to try to stop it, so just don't tell me about it and do what you want there."<sup>404</sup> Even though the author does not want to support emerging writers to pursue writing fan fiction, I believe that looking into these fan narratives would also be an interesting enterprise.

One of the original aims of this research was to see how the upcoming volumes (especially *The Winds of Winter*) are going to complicate the relationship between the books and their adaptations – however, since fans are still waiting for Martin to finish writing the story, I could not find any answers for this question. Once the author manages to finish up the story and publish at least the sixth volume, it would be worth looking into how the different elements of the two media incarnations relate to each other, and how the books impact the general reception of the books and the television show respectively. One might also dream about the possibility of the publication of the last volume, *A Dream of Spring* as well, however, whether we are going to receive the ending for the saga is still a mystery of the future. Furthermore, once the new spin-offs will eventually come out (the next one being *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms*, based on Martin's short story collection of the same name), we can look into how they contribute to the already existing universe, and how they relate to the currently existing television shows thematically, visually, and in other respects as well.

Besides the research in transmedia storytelling, further research should be done on how Martin's narrative fits into the category of fantasy literature, since although it is commonly compared to traditional classic works like *The Lord of the Rings* or the writings of Terry Pratchett, it would be worth looking into how it relates to other notable examples.

With this dissertation, I wish to have contributed to the research on *Game of Thrones*, in order to shed light on the importance of this fantastic narrative universe. Although the significance of this topic in fan circles and in popular culture is undeniable, I believe that it is still an underrepresented topic in academia – thus, it would be worth coming up with new approaches that deal with Martin's saga. While the franchise will serve as a touchstone in the evolution of the history of fantasy, I argue that the way that it became a form of meganarration also tells a lot about the contemporary storytelling practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is incredibly interesting to see how as fantasy is moving us into the past by creating worlds that resemble ages that are long gone (and talk about contemporary issues), we came full circle by arriving at the storytelling practices of ancient times, where the stories that were recited in communities belonged to an incredibly rich mythology that almost everyone was

---

<sup>404</sup> Dan Selcke, "George R.R. Martin: 'I'm Not a Fan of Fanfiction,'" *Winter Is Coming*, November 10, 2019, accessed: 3 November, 2024, <https://winteriscoming.net/2019/11/10/george-rr-martin-fanfiction-explanation/>.

familiar with. The technological advancements and the changes that they have caused in our world created an environment in which people turned towards science, and away from the supernatural – however, the growing interest in the genre of fantasy shows that in a world in which reality might seem darker than ever before, what people really need is the existence of magic.

## References

- “1997 Award Winners & Nominees.” *Worlds Without End*. Accessed: August 19, 2024.  
[https://www.worldswithoutend.com/books\\_year\\_index.asp?Year=1997](https://www.worldswithoutend.com/books_year_index.asp?Year=1997).
- Alvarez, Sandra. “George R. R. Martin’s Quest for Realism in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.” *Medievalists.Net*, May 14, 2013. Accessed: May 17, 2025.  
<https://www.medievalists.net/2013/05/george-r-r-martins-quest-for-realism-in-a-song-of-ice-and-fire/>.
- Álvarez-Ossorio Rivas, Alfonso, Fernando Lozano Gómez, Rosario Moreno Soldevila, and Cristina Rosillo López, eds. *Game of Thrones - a View from the Humanities Vol. 1: Time, Space and Culture*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- , eds. *Game of Thrones - a View from the Humanities Vol. 2: Heroes, Villains and Pulsions*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- Armitt, Lucie. *Fantasy. The New Critical Idiom*. London New York: Routledge, 2020.
- . *Theorising the Fantastic. Interrogating Texts*. London ; New York: Arnold : Distributed exclusively in the USA by St. Martin’s Press, 1996.
- Askwith, Ivan. “A Matrix in Every Medium.” *Salon*, May 12, 2003.  
[https://www.salon.com/2003/05/12/matrix\\_universe/](https://www.salon.com/2003/05/12/matrix_universe/).
- Attebery, Brian. *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2014.
- . *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- . *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- Bal, Mieke. “Introduction.” In *Reading “Rembrandt”: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*, Nachaufl. Amsterdam Academic Archive. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.
- Barker, Martin, Clarissa Smith, and Feona Attwood. *Watching “Game of Thrones”: How Audiences Engage with Dark Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021. doi:10.7765/9781526152183.
- Barnett, David. “How Game of Thrones Achieved World Domination... Long before the TV Show Even Aired.” *The Independent*, April 16, 2019. Accessed: 17 May, 2025,  
[https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long\\_reads/game-of-thrones-season-8-books-novels-publishing-final-series-a8855126.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/game-of-thrones-season-8-books-novels-publishing-final-series-a8855126.html).

- Baroni, Raphaël, Anaïs Goudmand, and Marie-Laure Ryan. "Transmedial Narratology and Transmedia Storytelling." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality*, edited by Jørgen Bruhn, Asun López-Varela Azcárate, and Miriam De Paiva Vieira, 365–89. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-28322-2\_16.
- Barthes, Roland, and Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text: Essays*. London: FontanaPress, 1977.
- Battis, Jes, and Susan Johnston, eds. *Mastering the Game of Thrones: Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015.
- Bentz, Adam, and Tom Russell. "Game Of Thrones Jon Snow Spinoff Series No Longer In Development At HBO." *ScreenRant*, April 9, 2024. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://screenrant.com/game-thrones-jon-snow-spinoff-cancelled-why-kit-harington-response/>.
- Birnbaum, Debra. "'Game of Thrones' Creators: We Know How It's Going to End." *Variety*, April 15, 2015. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://variety.com/2015/tv/news/game-of-thrones-ending-season-5-producers-interview-1201469516/>.
- Bocco, Federica. "Every Game of Thrones Spinoff in Development HBO, Ranked by Hype." *Winter Is Coming*. Accessed July 22, 2023. <https://winteriscoming.net/2023/04/08/every-game-thrones-spin-off-coming-hbo-ranked-hype-level/>.
- Borman, Max. "Telltale Games Needs to Return to Westeros." *Game Rant*, May 20, 2022. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://gamerant.com/game-thrones-telltale-game-series-cancel-return-westeros/>.
- Brake, Matthew, ed. *Theology and Game of Thrones*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022. doi:10.5771/9781978707634.
- Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston. "What Is Fantasy?" *Philosophy and Literature* 32, no. 1 (2008): 161–72. doi:10.1353/phl.0.0013.
- Cardwell, Sarah. "Is Quality Television Any Good? Generic Distinctions, Evaluations and the Troubling Matter of Critical Judgment." In *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, edited by Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, First edition. London [England]: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2019.
- Carroll, Shiloh. *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones*. Medievalism, volume 12. Cambridge ; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2018.



- Clark, Travis. "How Much Money 'Game of Thrones' Episodes Cost to Make in the Final Season, and throughout the Series." *Business Insider*, April 15, 2019. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-much-game-of-thrones-episodes-cost-for-production-2019-4>.
- Clute, John, and John Grant, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. London: Orbit, 1999.
- Cogan, Eric. "George R.R Martin Interview." *Fantasy Online Network*, August 18, 2004. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040818173139/http://www.fantasyonline.net/cgi-bin/newspro/101242423282166.shtml>.
- Delouya, Samantha, and Travis Clark. "All 31 Marvel Cinematic Universe Movies, Ranked by How Much Money They Made at the Global Box Office." *Business Insider*. Accessed April 12, 2023. <https://www.businessinsider.com/marvel-movies-ranked-how-much-money-at-global-box-office-2021-11>.
- Dena, Christy. "PGA's Transmedia Producer!" *Christy Dena's Field Notes From Earth*, April 5, 2010. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.christydena.com/2010/04/pgas-transmedia-producer/>.
- Dinsdale, Ryan. "George R.R. Martin Has Written 1,100 Pages of The Winds of Winter, the Same Number as Last Year." *IGN*, November 20, 2023. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.ign.com/articles/george-rr-martin-has-written-1100-pages-of-the-winds-of-winter-the-same-number-as-last-year>.
- Dougherty, Martin J. *The Wars of the Roses: The Conflict That Inspired Game of Thrones*. London: Amber Books, 2015.
- Dowd, A. A. "Flash in the Pan: Why Multiplex Multiverses Are Destined to Fail." *The Guardian*, June 15, 2023, sec. Film. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/jun/15/the-flash-movie-multiverse-failure-marvel-dc>.
- Dozois, Gardner. "George R. R. Martin." In *Dreamsongs I*, by George R. R. Martin. London: Gollancz, 2006.
- Dyson, Stephen Benedict. *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.
- Eder, Jens. "Transmediality and the Politics of Adaptation: Concepts, Forms, and Strategies." In *The Politics of Adaptation. Media Convergence and Ideology*, edited by Dan Hassler-Forest and Pascal Nicklas, 66–81. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

- Elliott, Kamilla. "Introduction: The Problem of Theorizing Adaptation." In *Theorizing Adaptation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- . *Theorizing Adaptation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Escurignan, Julie. "Branding Game of Thrones Across Media: HBO's Visual Creation of a Brand Identity." In *Present Scenarios of Media Production and Engagement*, edited by Simone Tosoni, Nico Carpentier, Maria Francesca Murru, Richard Kilborn, Leif Kramp, Risto Kunelius, Anthony McNicholas, Tobias Olsson, and Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 25–38. Bremen: edition Lumière, 2017.
- Evans, Elizabeth. *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life*. New York, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.
- Fehrle, Johannes. "Introduction: Adaptation in a Convergence Environment." In *Adaptation in the Age of Media Convergence*, edited by Johannes Fehrle and Schäfke-Zell Werner, 7–30. Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019.
- Firstpost. "Game of Thrones Winter Is Coming Game Now Available for PC, Mobile App to Follow," March 27, 2019. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.firstpost.com/tech/gaming/game-of-thrones-winter-is-coming-game-now-available-for-pc-mobile-app-to-follow-6335821.html>.
- Flood, Alison. "Game of Thrones: An Epic Publishing Story." *The Guardian*, August 5, 2016. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/05/game-of-thrones-an-epic-publishing-story-george-rr-martin>.
- Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author." In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, by Michel Foucault, Donald F. Bouchard, and Sherry Simon, 113–38, 1. printing, Cornell paperbacks, [Nachdr.]. Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 20.
- Frankel, Valerie Estelle. *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014.
- Freeman, Matthew. "Characterising Transmedia Storytelling. Character-Building, World-Building, Authorship." In *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds*, by Matthew Freeman, 21–42. Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies 99. New York London: Routledge, 2017. doi:10.4324/9781315439525.

- “Game of Thrones: Legends | Puzzle RPG Battle Strategy Mobile Game | Zynga Game of Thrones Official Site.” Accessed March 16, 2024.  
<https://www.gameofthroneslegends.com/>.
- “Game of Thrones the Video Game Hits This Summer,” *PCMag*, July 13, 2011. Accessed 17 May, 2025, <https://www.pcmag.com/archive/game-of-thrones-the-video-game-hits-this-summer-266826>.
- Gamper, Anna. *Beyond the Wall: Game of Thrones aus Interdisziplinärer Perspektive (German Edition)*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH, 2022.
- García, Elio M., and Linda Antonsson. “Blood of Dragons: FAQ - 1. About the Game.” *Blood of Dragons: The “A Song of Ice and Fire” MUSH*, October 9, 2019.  
<https://www.westeros.org/BoD/FAQ/Category/C146/>.
- . “Blood of Dragons: The ‘A Song of Ice and Fire’ MUSH.” *Blood of Dragons: The “A Song of Ice and Fire” MUSH*. Accessed March 15, 2024.  
<https://www.westeros.org/BoD/>.
- Gaughan, Liam. “Every ‘Game of Thrones’ Spinoff Series in Development or Cancelled.” *Collider*, August 23, 2022. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://collider.com/game-of-thrones-every-spinoff-in-development-or-cancelled/>.
- Gjelsvik, Anne, and Rikke Schubart, eds. *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones and Multiple Media Engagements*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Gillette, Felix, and John Koblin. *It’s Not TV: The Spectacular Rise, Revolution, and Future of HBO*. New York: Viking, 2022.
- Gilmore, Mikal. “George R.R. Martin: The Rolling Stone Interview.” *Rolling Stone*, April 23, 2014. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/george-r-r-martin-the-rolling-stone-interview-242487/>.
- Graves, Michael. “Transmedia Storytelling, Adaptation, and the Reversing of Justified.” *Adaptation* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 1–17. doi:10.1093/adaptation/apw039.
- Grossman, Lev. “Books: The American Tolkien.” *Time*, November 13, 2005. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1129596,00.html>.
- Haimson Lushkov, Ayelet. *You Win or You Die: The Ancient World of Game of Thrones*. First edition. London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017. doi:10.5040/9781350989894.
- Harper Voyager. “EasterCon – Eat, Drink and Talk SFF! | Harper Voyager Books,” April 10, 2012. Accessed 17 May, 2025,  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120416072042/http://harpervoyagerbooks.com/2012/04/10/eastercon-eat-drink-and-talk-sff/>.

- Harris, Jeffrey. "This Is Still the Worst Change Netflix's 'The Witcher' Made From the Books." *Collider*, August 5, 2023. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://collider.com/witcher-netflix-worst-book-change/>.
- Hassler-Forest, Dan. "Game of Thrones: Quality Television and the Cultural Logic of Gentrification." *TV/Series* 6 (2014): 160–77. doi:10.4000/tvseries.323.
- Hawkins, Blake, and Jordan Iacobucci. "Was The Rings of Power That Bad? - Because the Numbers Paint a Different Picture." *CBR*, November 3, 2022. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.cbr.com/lotr-rings-of-power-response-positive/>.
- Hermansson, Casie. "Flogging Fidelity: In Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse." *Adaptation* 8, no. 2 (August 2015): 147–60. doi:10.1093/adaptation/apv014.
- Hibberd, James. "All the 'Game of Thrones' Spinoffs in the Works at HBO." *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 19, 2021. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/all-the-game-of-thrones-spinoffs-in-the-works-at-hbo-4153435/>.
- . "'Game of Thrones' Movie in Early Development at Warner Bros." *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 31, 2024. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/game-of-thrones-movie-warner-bros-1236050190/>.
- . "'Game of Thrones' Team Explains Changing Sansa's Story from the Books." *Entertainment Weekly*, April 26, 2015. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://ew.com/article/2015/04/26/game-thrones-sansa-ramsay-interview/>.
- . "'House of the Dragon' Renewed for Season 2 at HBO After Premiere Ratings Blowout." *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 26, 2022. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/house-of-the-dragon-season-2-1235199922/>.
- . "The Fantasy King." *Entertainment Weekly*, July 22, 2011. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://ew.com/article/2011/07/22/fantasy-king/>.
- Huddleston, Tom. *The Worlds of George RR Martin: The Inspirations Behind Game of Thrones*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Quarto Publishing Group UK, 2024.
- Hughes, Sarah. "Game of Thrones: How It Dominated the Decade – Then Lost Its Way." *The Guardian*, December 30, 2019. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/dec/30/game-of-thrones-best-tv-2010s>.

- Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. Oxon: Routledge, 2014.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- In Conversation With... George R.R. Martin on Game of Thrones Part 3 / TIFF Bell Lightbox*, 2012. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlJblxV3QHQ>.
- IMDb. "Game of Thrones (TV Series 2011–2019) - Awards." Accessed January 5, 2024. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0944947/awards/>.
- Itzkoff, Dave. "His Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy: George R. R. Martin Talks 'Game of Thrones.'" *The New York Times*. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://archive.nytimes.com/artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/his-beautiful-dark-twisted-fantasy-george-r-r-martin-talks-game-of-thrones/>.
- J. R. R. Tolkien vs George R. R. Martin*. Epic Rap Battles of History, 2016. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAAp\\_luluo0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAAp_luluo0).
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2009.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre." *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 135. doi:10.2307/468283.
- Jamieson, Gill. "Conference Report: Game of Thrones, an International Conference, University of Hertfordshire, 6-7 September, 2017 by Gill Jamieson." *CST Online*, October 20, 2017. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://cstonline.net/conference-report-game-of-thrones-an-international-conference-university-of-hertfordshire-6-7-september-2017-by-lyndsay-duthie/>.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. Updated and with A new afterword. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006.
- . "Hollywood Goes 'Transmedia.'" *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, April 27, 2010. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/04/hollywood\\_goes\\_transmedia.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/04/hollywood_goes_transmedia.html).
- . "Introduction: 'Worship at the Altar of Convergence': A New Paradigm for Understanding Media Change." In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Updated and with A new afterword., 1–24. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006.
- . "Spoiling Survivor: The Anatomy of a Knowledge Community." In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006.

- . “Transmedia 202: Further Reflections.” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, July 31, 2011. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining\\_transmedia\\_further\\_re.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html).
- . “Transmedia Storytelling 101.” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, March 21, 2007. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia\\_storytelling\\_101.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html).
- Jenner, Mareike. *Netflix and the Re-Invention of Television*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-94316-9.
- Jiang, Kelly. “Game of Thrones Winter Is Coming™ Launches Worldwide.” *Business Wire*, March 26, 2019. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20190325005827/en/Game-of-Thrones-Winter-is-Coming%E2%84%A2-Launches-Worldwide>.
- Johnson, Catherine. “Quality/Cult Television. The X-Files and Buffy the Vampire Slayer in US Television of the 1990s.” In *Telefantasy*, by Catherine Johnson, 95–124. London: BFI Publ, 2005.
- . *Telefantasy*. London: BFI Publ, 2005.
- Jones, Nate. “6 Things We Learned From the New Winds of Winter Chapter.” *Vulture*, May 31, 2016. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.vulture.com/2016/05/winds-of-winter-new-chapter-what-we-learned.html>.
- Kain, Erik. “Disappointing News For ‘Game Of Thrones’ Spinoff ‘A Knight Of The Seven Kingdoms’ Release Date.” *Forbes*, May 14, 2025. Accessed: 17 may, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2025/05/14/disappointing-news-for-game-of-thrones-spinoff-a-knight-of-the-seven-kingdoms-release-date/>.
- Kearney, Mary Celeste. “Recycling Judy and Corliss: Transmedia Exploitation and the First Teen-Girl Production Trend.” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004): 265–95.
- Keen, Helen. *The Science of Game of Thrones: From the Genetics of Royal Incest to the Chemistry of Death by Molten Gold--Sifting Fact from Fantasy in the Seven Kingdoms*. First United States edition. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2016.
- Kinder, Marsha. *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games from Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08131>.
- Kirschling, Gregory. “George R.R. Martin Answers Your Questions.” *Entertainment Weekly*. Accessed July 22, 2023. <https://ew.com/article/2007/11/27/george-rr-martin-answers-your-questions/>.

- Klastrup, Lisbeth, and Susana Tosca. "Game of Thrones. Transmedial Worlds, Fandom, and Social Gaming." In *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, edited by Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, 295–314. Frontiers of Narrative. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014.
- Klein, Amanda Ann, and R. Barton Palmer. "Introduction." In *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes, and Reboots: Multiplicities in Film and Television*, edited by Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer, 1–21. University of Texas Press, 2016.  
doi:10.7560/309001.
- Langley, Travis, ed. *Game of Thrones Psychology: The Mind Is Dark and Full of Terrors*. New York: Sterling, 2016.
- Lanier, Douglas. "Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value." In *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, edited by Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin, 21–40. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014. doi:10.1057/9781137375773\_2.
- Larrington, Carolyne. *All Men Must Die: Power and Passion in Game of Thrones*. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.
- . *Winter Is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones*. First edition. London: I.B. Tauris, 2019. doi:10.5040/9780755693375.
- Larrington, Carolyne, and Anna Czarnewus, eds. *Memory and Medievalism in George R.R. Martin and Game of Thrones: The Keeper of All Our Memories*. London New York Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.
- Leitch, Thomas. "Adaptation, the Genre." *Adaptation* 1, no. 2 (September 1, 2008): 106–20. doi:10.1093/adaptation/apn018.
- Leitch, Thomas M. "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory." *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (2003): 149–71. doi:10.1353/crt.2004.0001.
- "Locus Online: George R.R. Martin Interview Excerpts." Accessed July 22, 2023.  
<http://www.locusmag.com/2005/Issues/11Martin.html>.
- Lopez, Ule. "Game of Thrones UE5 Mobile MMORPG Announced by Netmarble Neo." *Wccftech*, January 27, 2022. Accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://wccftech.com/game-of-thrones-mmorpg-for-mobile-devices/>.
- Loughlin, Danny. "Game of Thrones Book Stats – A Song of Ice and Fire Series – WordsRated." *Wordsrated*, November 20, 2023. Accessed: 15 August, 2024, <https://wordsrated.com/game-of-thrones-stats/>.
- Lynch, Andrew. *Quality Telefantasy: How US Quality TV Brought Zombies, Dragons and Androids into the Mainstream*. London and New York: Routledge, 2022.

- Maas, Jennifer. “‘House of the Dragon’ Finale Hits Season 2 Viewership High With Nearly 9 Million Viewers, But Down From Season 1 Ender.” *Variety*, August 5, 2024. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://variety.com/2024/tv/news/house-of-the-dragon-season-2-finale-ratings-1236096169/>.
- . “‘House of the Dragon’ to End With Season 4, Season 3 to Begin Production in Early 2025.” *Variety*, August 5, 2024. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://variety.com/2024/tv/news/house-of-the-dragon-end-season-4-1236095543/>.
- Mantoan, Lindsey. *Vying for the Iron Throne: Essays on Power, Gender, Death and Performance in HBO’s Game of Thrones*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2018.
- Marie-Laure Ryan. “Transmedia Storytelling: Industry Buzzword or New Narrative Experience?” *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 7, no. 2 (2015): 1. doi:10.5250/storyworlds.7.2.0001.
- Martin, George R. R. “A Bit More (Fake) History.” *Not A Blog*, January 2017. Accessed: 21 July, 2023, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/519773.html>.
- . “A Blast From My Past.” *Not A Blog*, 0 13, 2023. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2023/12/13/a-blast-from-my-past/>.
- . *A Clash of Kings*. London: Harper Voyager, 2011.
- . *A Dance with Dragons*. London: Harper Voyager, 2011.
- . *A Feast for Crows*. London: Harper Voyager, 2011.
- . *A Game of Thrones*. London: Harper Voyager, 2011.
- . “A Knight and a Squire.” *Not A Blog*, April 14, 2023. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2023/04/14/a-knight-and-a-squire/>.
- . “A Winter Garden.” *Not A Blog*, July 8, 2022. Accessed: 29 October, 2023, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/07/08/>.
- . “Amazing Animation.” *Not A Blog*, December 31, 2023. Accessed: 29 October, 2023, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2023/12/31/amazing-animation/>.
- . “Bantam to Publish The World of Ice and Fire | George R.R. Martin.” *George R. R. Martin*. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://georgerrmartin.com/bantam-to-publish-the-world-of-ice-and-fire/>.
- . *Dreamsongs I*. London: Gollancz, 2006.
- . *Dreamsongs II*. London: Gollancz, 2008.
- . “Dunk and Egg.” *Not A Blog*, April 2014. Accessed: 16 August, 2024, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/365715.html>.



- . *Dying of the Light*. Gollancz. Great Britain, 2000.
- . “Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin.” *George R. R. Martin*, January 27, 2013. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130329220944/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.
- . “Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin.” *George R. R. Martin*, March 27, 2014. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140327041507/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.
- . “Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin.” *George R. R. Martin*, April 2, 2015. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150402163112/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.
- . “Excerpt from the Winds of Winter | George R.R. Martin.” *George R. R. Martin*, May 10, 2016. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160511182726/http://www.georgerrmartin.com/excerpt-from-the-winds-of-winter/>.
- . *Fire & Blood*. London: Harper Voyager, 2018.
- . “FIRE & BLOOD Is Back!” *Not A Blog*, July 12, 2022. Accessed: 15 July, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/07/12/re-release-of-fire-and-blood/>.
- . “Here There Be Dragons.” *Not A Blog*, July 11, 2024. Accessed: 17 July, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2024/07/11/here-there-be-dragons-2/>.
- . “Preface: From Page to Screen.” In *Inside HBO’s Game of Thrones: Seasons 1 & 2.*, by Bryan Cogman, George R. R. Martin, David Benioff, and D. B. Weiss, 4–5. California: Chronicle Books LLC, 2012.
- . “Random Updates and Bits o’ News.” *Not A Blog*, March 9, 2022. Accessed: 5 January, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/03/09/random-updates-and-bits-o-news/>.
- . “SNOW... and Other Stuff.” *Not A Blog*, June 23, 2022. Accessed: 24 January, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2022/06/23/snow-and-other-stuff/>.
- . “Social Gaming.” *Not A Blog*, May 22, 2012. Accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://grm.livejournal.com/280977.html>.
- . “The Adaptation Tango.” *Not A Blog*, May 24, 2024. Accessed: 16 July, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2024/05/24/the-adaptation-tango/>.

- . “The Dragons Are Here.” *Not A Blog*, October 2013. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/344674.html>.
- . “The Dragons Take Wing.” *Not A Blog*, October 30, 2019. Accessed: 24 January, 2024, <https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2019/10/30/the-dragons-take-wing/>.
- . “The Swords Are Drawn.” *Not A Blog*, July 2017. Accessed: 4 January, 2024, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/544709.html>.
- Martin, George R. R., Elio M. García, and Linda Antonsson. *The World of Ice & Fire. The Untold History of Westeros and the Game of Thrones*. London: Harper Voyager, 2014.
- Martin, George R.R. “The Show, the Books.” *Not A Blog*, May 2015. Accessed: 10 April, 2021, <https://grrm.livejournal.com/427713.html>.
- McCormick, Colin, and Craig Elvy. “Game Of Thrones: What Went Wrong With Season 8.” *ScreenRant*, February 29, 2020. Accessed: 12 March, 2024, <https://screenrant.com/game-thrones-hbo-season-8-bad-reason/>.
- McIntyre, Gina. *House of the Dragon: Inside the Creation of a Targaryen Dynasty*. Insight Editions. San Rafael, 2023.
- Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.
- Mendlesohn, Farah, and Edward James. *A Short History of Fantasy*. Revised and Updated edition. Faringdon, Oxfordshire: Libri Publishing, 2012.
- Mikos, Lothar. “Transmedia Storytelling and Mega-Narration: Audiovisual Production in Converged Media Environments.” In *Media Convergence and Deconvergence*, edited by Sergio Sparviero, Corinna Peil, and Gabriele Balbi, 358. Global Transformations in Media and Communication Research - A Palgrave and IAMCR Series. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Miller, Laura. “Just Write It!” *The New Yorker*, April 4, 2011. Accessed: 4 January, 2024, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/04/11/just-write-it>.
- Mittell, Jason. “Authorship.” In *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, by Jason Mittell, 86–117. New York; London: NYU Press, 2015.
- Murray, Janet Horowitz. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York: Free Press, 1997.
- Murray, Simone. “Materializing Adaptation Theory: The Adaptation Industry.” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2008): 4–20.

- Norman, Dalton. "Aegon's Conquest: Confirmation & Everything We Know About The Game Of Thrones Prequel." *ScreenRant*, February 15, 2024. Accessed: 19 August, 2024, <https://screenrant.com/aegons-conquest-confirmation-updates/>.
- O'Meara, Radha, and Alex Bevan. "Transmedia Theory's Author Discourse and Its Limitations." *M/C Journal* 21, no. 1 (March 14, 2018). doi:10.5204/mcj.1366.
- Palatinus, David Levente. "From Niche to Mainstream? Screen Culture's Impact on Contemporary Perceptions of Fantasy." In *J.R.R. Tolkien in Central Europe: Context, Directions, and the Legacy*, edited by Janka Kaščáková and David Levente Palatinus. Routledge Studies in Speculative Literature. New York, NY: Routledge, 2023.
- Parker, Laura. "A Gaming Company Devoted to Narrative Tackles 'Thrones.'" *The New York Times*, April 27, 2014, sec. Arts. Accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/arts/video-games/a-gaming-company-devoted-to-narrative-tackles-thrones.html>.
- Pavlac, Brian Alexander, ed. *Game of Thrones versus History: Written in Blood*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2017.
- Poniewozik, James. "The Problems of Power: George R.R. Martin's A Dance With Dragons." *Time*, July 12, 2011. Accessed: 4 January, 2024, <https://entertainment.time.com/2011/07/12/the-problems-of-power-george-r-r-martins-a-dance-with-dragons/>.
- Porter, Rick. "TV Ratings: 'House of the Dragon' Finale Scores Big." *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 24, 2022. Accessed: 18 August 2024, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/house-of-the-dragon-finale-tv-ratings-sunday-oct-23-2022-1235247566/>.
- Ramée, Jordan. "New Game Of Thrones Mobile Title Lets You Explore Alternate Futures With The Series' Characters." *GameSpot*. Accessed March 16, 2024. <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/new-game-of-thrones-mobile-title-lets-you-explore-/1100-6461346/>.
- Risen, Tom. "TELEVISION: How Fans Saved 'The Expanse.'" *Aerospace America*, October 18, 2018. Accessed: 18 March, 2023, <https://aerospaceamerica.aiaa.org/television-how-fans-saved-the-expanse/>.
- Rocket, Stubby the. "How Much of George R. R. Martin's The Winds of Winter Is Out So Far?" *Reactor*, March 17, 2024. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://reactormag.com/how-much-winds-of-winter-is-out/>.

- . “New Winds of Winter Chapter Coming Out Today.” *Reactor*, March 20, 2014. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://reactormag.com/new-winds-of-winter-chapter-coming-out-today/>.
- Rohr, Zita Eva, and Lisa Benz, eds. *Queenship and the Women of Westeros: Female Agency and Advice in Game of Thrones and A Song of Ice and Fire*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. “Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality.” *Poetics Today* 34, no. 3 (01, 2013): 361–88. doi:10.1215/03335372-2325250.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure, and Jan-Noël Thon, eds. “Storyworlds across Media: Introduction.” In *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, 1–21. Frontiers of Narrative. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014.
- Sacks, Ethan. “George R.R. Martin Surprises ‘Song of Ice and Fire’ Fans with Free Chapter of next Book | New York Daily News.” *NYDailyNews*, 30 December, 2011. Accessed: 17 August, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120307221835/http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/pageviews/2011/12/george-rr-martin-surprises-song-of-ice-and-fire-fans-with-free-chapter-of-next-boo>.
- Selcke, Dan. “George R.R. Martin: ‘I’m Not a Fan of Fanfiction.’” *Winter Is Coming*, November 10, 2019. Accessed: 3 November, 2024, <https://winteriscoming.net/2019/11/10/george-rr-martin-fanfiction-explanation/>.
- . “George R.R. Martin Responds to Critics Who Call His Song of Ice and Fire Books ‘Gratuitous.’” *Winter Is Coming*, May 7, 2024. Accessed: 15 July, 2024, <https://winteriscoming.net/posts/george-r-r-martin-responds-to-critics-who-call-his-song-of-ice-and-fire-books-gratuitous-01hx7mc91z4g>.
- Sergeant, Alexander. “Across the Narrow Screen: Televisual World-Building in *Game of Thrones*.” *Screen* 62, no. 2 (August 26, 2021): 193–213. doi:10.1093/screen/hjab020.
- Servais, Olivier, and Sarah Sepulchre. “Towards an Ordinary Transmedia Use: A French Speaker’s Transmedia Use of Worlds in *Game of Thrones* MMORPG and Series.” *M/C Journal* 21, no. 1 (March 14, 2018). doi:10.5204/mcj.1367.
- Shacklock, Zoë. “‘A Reader Lives a Thousand Lives before He Dies’: Transmedia Textuality and the Flows of Adaptation.” In *Mastering the Game of Thrones. Essays on George R.R. Martin’s A Song of Ice and Fire*, edited by Jes Battis and Susan Johnston, 262–79. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015.

- Shanfeld, Ethan. "George R.R. Martin and Neil Gaiman Hate When Hollywood Makes 'Illegitimate' Changes to Source Material: 'F—Ing Morons.'" *Variety*, October 28, 2022. Accessed: 16 July, 2024, <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/george-rr-martin-neil-gaiman-hate-hollywood-changing-source-material-1235416651/>.
- Silverman, Eric J., and Robert Arp, eds. *The Ultimate Game of Thrones and Philosophy: You Think or Die*. First printing. Popular Culture and Philosophy 105. Chicago: Open Court, 2017.
- Smith, Dinitia. "A Fantasy Realm Too Vile for Hobbits." *The New York Times*, December 12, 2005, sec. Books. Accessed: 22 July, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/12/books/a-fantasy-realm-too-vile-for-hobbits.html>.
- Spangler, Todd. "'Game of Thrones: Conquest' Multiplayer Strategy Mobile Game Launch Date Set." *Variety*, October 3, 2017. Accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://variety.com/2017/digital/news/game-of-thrones-conquest-game-launch-date-1202578765/>.
- Stam, Robert. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation." In *Film Adaptation*, edited by James Naremore. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000.
- Stanley, T. L. "George R.R. Martin's Reaction to Bad TV Experience: Writing 'Game of Thrones.'" *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2010. Accessed: 12 March, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/show-tracker/story/2010-05-03/george-r-r-martins-reaction-to-bad-tv-experience-writing-game-of-thrones>.
- Straumann, Barbara. "13. Adaptation – Remediation – Transmediality." In *Handbook of Intermediality*, edited by Gabriele Rippl, 249–67. De Gruyter, 2015. doi:10.1515/9783110311075-015.
- Tapp, Tom. "'Harry Potter' TV Series Due To Hit Max In 2026: Everything We Know About The Cast, Who's Creating It, What J.K. Rowling Says & More – Update." *Deadline*, May 22, 2024. Accessed: 18 July, 2024, <https://deadline.com/2024/05/harry-potter-tv-series-max-release-date-cast-1235323284/>.
- Television Academy. "Game Of Thrones." Accessed January 5, 2024. <https://www.emmys.com/shows/game-thrones>.
- The New York Times. "BEST SELLERS: February 21, 1999," February 21, 1999, sec. Books. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/21/books/best-sellers-february-21-1999.html>.

- The New York Times. "BEST SELLERS: November 19, 2000," November 19, 2000, sec. Books. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/19/books/best-sellers-november-19-2000.html>.
- The New York Times. "BEST SELLERS: November 27, 2005," November 27, 2005. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/27/books/arts/best-sellers-november-27-2005.html>.
- Thompson, Rebecca C., and Sean Carroll. *Fire, Ice, and Physics: The Science of Game of Thrones*. Cambridge, Mass. London: The MIT press, 2019.
- Thompson, Robert J. "From 'The Golden Age of Television' to 'Quality TV.'" In *Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER: Hill Street Blues, Thirtysomething, St. Elsewhere, China Beach, Cagney & Lacey, Twin Peaks, Moonlighting, Northern Exposure, L.A. Law, Picket Fences, with Brief Reflections on Homicide, NYPD Blue & Chicago Hope, and Other Quality Dramas*, by Robert J. Thompson, 1st Syracuse University Press ed. The Television Series. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1997.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. A Volume in the CWRU Press Translations. Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. "On Fairy-Stories." In *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, Expanded ed., with Commentary and Notes., 27–84. London: HarperCollins, 2008.
- Tolkien, J. R. R., Verlyn Flieger, and Douglas A. Anderson. *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*. Expanded ed., with Commentary and Notes. London: HarperCollins, 2008.
- Trumbore, Dave. "10 'Game of Thrones' Games That Best Adapted George R.R. Martin's 'A Song of Ice and Fire.'" *Collider*, May 15, 2021. Accessed: 22 July, 2023, <https://collider.com/best-game-of-thrones-games/>.
- Vacano, Jost. "Shooting The NeverEnding Story." *The American Society of Cinematographers*, March 14, 2024. Accessed: 18 June, 2024, <https://theasc.com/articles/the-neverending-story>.
- Vary, Adam B. "'House of the Dragon' Showrunner Talks [SPOILER] in the Finale, Changes From George R.R. Martin's Book, and What to Expect for Season 2." *Variety*, October 24, 2022. Accessed: 16 March, 2024, <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/house-of-the-dragon-finale-explained-aemond-luke-rhaenrya-daemon-season-2-1235412136/>.

- Wartofsky, Alona. "The Last Word." *Washington Post*, February 19, 2001. Accessed: 18 August, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/02/19/the-last-word/4bad376f-4ab7-441c-9c50-afc7e63dd192/>.
- West, Ed, and George R. R. Martin. *Iron, Fire and Ice: The Real History That Inspired Game of Thrones*. New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2019.
- Westeros. The "A Song of Ice and Fire" Domain. "The Citadel: FAQ - 2.1.12. What Is Fire and Blood or the GRRMarillion?," 3 November, 2014. Accessed: 14 August, 2024, [https://www.westeros.org/Citadel/FAQ/Entry/What\\_is\\_Fire\\_and\\_Blood\\_or\\_the\\_GRR\\_Marillion](https://www.westeros.org/Citadel/FAQ/Entry/What_is_Fire_and_Blood_or_the_GRR_Marillion).
- Westeros. The "A Song of Ice and Fire" Domain. "The Citadel: So Spake Martin - July 2012," July 31, 2012. Accessed: 16 August, 2024, <https://www.westeros.org/Citadel/SSM/Month/2012/07/>.
- Westeros. The "A Song of Ice and Fire" Domain. "The Maester's Path Begins," February 28, 2011. Accessed: 9 April, 2024, [https://www.westeros.org/News/Entry/The\\_Maesters\\_Path\\_Begins](https://www.westeros.org/News/Entry/The_Maesters_Path_Begins).
- Wilson, Jeffrey R. *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones*. London and New York: Routledge, 2023.
- Winter is Coming. "Have Any of These 15 Shows Become 'the next Game of Thrones'?" April 16, 2022. Accessed: 17 May, 2025, <https://winteriscoming.net/2022/04/16/15-shows-next-game-of-thrones-lord-of-the-rings-witcher-wheel-of-time/>.
- Young, Joseph Rex. *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form*. New York; London: Routledge, 2019.
- Zwart, Melissa de, and Jason Bosland, eds. *Law and Law Breaking in Game of Thrones*. Chastwood: NSW LexisNexis, 2015.

## Összefoglaló

A disszertáció a *Trónok harca* franchise transzmediális univerzumára fókuszál. Megvizsgálva, hogy hogyan kapcsolódnak egymáshoz ebben a narratív univerzumban a különböző médiumokba tartozó elemek, a disszertáció fő célja, hogy megértse, hogyan befolyásolta a *Trónok harca* az adaptációelmélethez és a transzmedialitáshoz való hozzáállásunkat. Annak érdekében, hogy megértsük ennek az univerzumnak a természetét, a disszertáció az adaptációelméletet, a transzmediális történetmesélést, a televíziós tanulmányokat, a streaming platformok logikáját, és az irodalmi elemzéseket helyezi középpontba, hiszen a kortárs narratív univerzumokat nem érthetjük meg igazán pusztán az irodalmi verziójukra fókuszálva. Elsőként feltérképezem, mik lehetnek azok a tényezők, amelyek a *Trónok harcát* egy ennyire népszerű narratívává tették, és megvizsgálom, hogyan illeszkedik a fantasy műfajába.

Másodszor megvizsgálom a transzmedialitás kérdését: amellet érvelek, hogy az a tény, hogy a televíziós adaptáció megelőzte az „eredeti” könyveket, hatással van arra, hogy hogyan gondolkodunk az adaptációelmétről és a transzmediális történetmesélésről. Az elmúlt pár évtized technológiai fejlődései nagyban hozzájárultak a médiakonvergencia állandó fejlődéséhez, amire a *Trónok harca* egy kiváló példa; azonban a narratíva egy különös esetként szolgál, mivel az adaptáció előbb fejezte be a történetet, mint maga az adaptált mű, hiszen a regénysorozat még mindig nem lezárt. Ezáltal a határvonal az adaptáció és a transzmediális történet fogalmai között még elmosódottabbá vált.

Végezetül kíváncsi voltam, milyen hatással volt Martin forgatókönyvírói múltja az írásaira és általánosságban *A tűz és jég dala*-ra, mivel más műveinek olvasása során (főleg a novelláira fókuszálva) a figyelmes olvasók kiérezhetik a televíziós hatásokat, amelyek befolyásolták az író poétikáját. Érdeemes megvizsgálni azt a tényt is, hogy a szerző korábban többször kijelentette, hogy *A tűz és jég dala* adaptálhatatlan, a *Trónok harca* azonban mégis egy rendkívül sikeres adaptációvá vált – így Martin poétikájának részletezése után az utolsó előtti fejezet megvizsgálja a kapcsolatot Martin eredeti Westeros narratívái és ezek adaptációi (*Trónok harca*, *Sárkányok háza* [HBO, 2022–] közötti kapcsolatot, és hogy hogyan inspirálta a *Trónok harca* más fantasy sorozatok létrejöttét.



## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the transmedial universe of the *Game of Thrones* franchise. By looking at how the different media incarnations in this narrative universe relate to each other, the main aim of this thesis is to understand how *Game of Thrones* impacted the way we should look at adaptation theory and transmediality. In order to understand the nature of this universe, this thesis focuses on the fields of adaptation theory, the theory of transmedia storytelling, television studies, the logic of streaming platforms, and literary analysis as well, since contemporary narrative universes cannot be fully understood by solely focusing on their literary version. Firstly, I look at the factors that made *Game of Thrones* such a popular narrative, and analyze how it fits into the fantasy genre in general.

Secondly, I look into the question of transmediality: I argue that the fact that the televisual adaptation outpaced the “original” books should change the way we think about the questions of adaptation theory and transmedia storytelling. The technological advancements of the last few decades contributed a lot to the constant evolution of media convergence, of which *Game of Thrones* is a great example; however, the narrative serves as an interesting case since it was the adaptation that continued the storyline of the adapted text, given that the novels still have not yet been finished. Thus, the borders between the concepts of adaptation and transmedia story become even blurrier.

Lastly, I am also interested in how Martin’s past career as a screenwriter influenced his writings and *A Song of Ice and Fire* in general, since while reading his other works (mostly focusing on his short stories), eager readers can instantly feel the televisual influences that had an impact on his poetics. The fact that the author claimed several times that the adaptation of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is something that could never happen, and *Game of Thrones* still became an incredibly successful adaptation, is also worth looking into – thus, after the discussion of Martin’s poetics, the penultimate chapter of this thesis analyzes the relationship between Martin’s original Westeros narratives and their adaptations, namely *Game of Thrones* and *House of the Dragon* (HBO, 2022–). The last chapter of this dissertation is linked to the impact of the series, and how *Game of Thrones* inspired the creation of other fantasy shows as well.