

STEERING THE AUTHOR DISCOURSE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORSHIP IN QUALITY TV, AND THE CASE OF *GAME OF THRONES*

TOBIAS STEINER

Name Tobias Steiner

Academic centre Institute for English and American Studies,
Universität Hamburg Graduate School of the Research Center
Media and Communication (Hamburg, Germany)

E-mail address steiner.tvstudies@gmail.com
[www.rcmc-hamburg.de/graduate_school/phd-candidates/
tobias-steiner/](http://www.rcmc-hamburg.de/graduate_school/phd-candidates/tobias-steiner/)

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines how the authorship is discursively constructed and employed as an indicator of quality in the marketing of US cable network HBO's TV series 'Game of Thrones'. It relates the authorial concept of literary studies to that in the visual media and analyses *mise-en-scène* and narrative structure of the show pilot in order to detect markers of an authorial voice within the text. Subsequently, it turns to a selection of paratexts – critical reviews, producers' commentaries and special features of the show's DVD box set – to show how the team of producers help manufacture and promote the presence of a showrunner-auteur collective in order to foster a perception of this text as a 'quality TV' narrative.

Castles, swords and chain mail, machinations and counter-schemes, the occasional dragon and even a newly-invented language – for many people this reads like *Dungeons & Dragons*-esque fantasy in the tradition of J. R. R. Tolkien. George R. R. Martin not only shares the middle initials with the creator of *Lord of the Rings*, but, with *A Song of Ice and Fire*, has created a series of novels that received enthusiastic acclaim from international critics and readers, established him as a renowned fantasy author and won him the unofficial title of “American Tolkien”.¹ In 2007, Martin agreed to collaborate with cable network HBO’s writer-producers David Benioff and Daniel B. Weiss to act as the showrunner-troika overseeing the adaptation of Martin’s epic novel series to TV under the name of *Game of Thrones* (*GoT*).² Its master narrative features the medieval fantasy world of Westeros, in which five families strive to seize the all-governing Iron Throne, and, with five seasons completed and season six already in the making, the overall result has led TV critics to hail the show as one of the pinnacles of quality television storytelling.³

Television critics and scholars alike have been eager to employ the label of *Quality TV* “to elevate certain programs over others, with such programs united less by a formal or thematic elements than a mark of prestige that reflects well upon the sophisticated viewers who embrace such programming” (Mittell 2011). Since the mid-2000s, and, due to a variety of arguments around e.g. the concept’s implicit re-enforcement of normative classifications, *Quality TV* as a concept has become highly contested (see e.g. Edgerton and Rose 2005, McCabe and Akass 2007, Mittell 2011, 2015). It is important to point out that, in the context of this essay, I apply the term *quality television* in the way Newman and Levine understand it, “in reference to those programs that target a narrow, upscale audience and that are widely viewed as high quality by these viewers as well as by many critics and scholars. [Those viewers, critics, and scholars] do not use the term as [their] own designation of value. In this respect, [their] use follows that of Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi” (Newman/Levine 2012: 172, referring to Feuer/Kerr/Vahimagi 1984). I see *Quality TV* as a discursive construct that is used by a variety of agents

including network officials, producers and writers to assign cultural value to a television text (aka. a series or serial) and to position networks that develop such texts as distinctive in the marketplace.

This essay will therefore examine how the construction of authorship as an indicator of quality plays a crucial role in the success of *GoT* in order to make visible the workings behind the larger discursive attribution of quality. As Seiter and Wilson have argued in the context of soap operas: “Television studies debates around quality have tended to limit the discussion to certain genres [mainly drama], while others, [...] have been discussed only in terms of the popular” (in Edgerton/Rose 2005: 137). The latter definitely holds also true for the genre of fantasy. As I will show, then, the distinct marketing of authorship as a perceived marker of quality has proven a successful strategy of HBO in the particular context of *Game of Thrones*. To do so, I will relate the authorial concept of literary studies to that in the visual media and then analyse *mise en scène* and narrative structure of the *GoT* pilot in order to detect markers of an authorial voice within the text. Subsequently, I turn to a selection of paratexts – critical reviews, producers’ commentaries and special features of the show’s DVD box set - to explore how the team of Benioff, Weiss and Martin help manufacture and promote the presence of a showrunner-auteur collective in order to help foster a perception of this text as a quality television narrative. Ultimately, they actively engage in a “cultural upgrade” of the text in order to foster elevation from ‘popular fantasy’ to the purported prestige of quality television.

01 AUTHORSHIP IN VISUAL MEDIA: A MUCH-DEBATED CONCEPT

The concept of authorship originated in literary studies, building on the Renaissance notion of an individual genius who, through the act of writing, becomes a creator of divine art. Due to a contemporary shift in focus more on the function of authorship as a discursive practice,⁴ though, its validity in a poststructuralist, postmodern understanding of literature, as well as an adaptation to the media of film and television have been fuelling scholarly debates ever since.⁵ In the visual media that inherently lacked legitimisation through an author due

1 See e.g. Lev Grossman, ‘Books: The American Tolkien’ *TIME Magazine US*, Nov 13, 2005. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1129596,00.html>> accessed July 15, 2015.

2 See George R. R. Martin, ‘From HBO’ *Not a Blog*, July 16, 2010. <<http://grrm.livejournal.com/164794.html>> accessed Aug 03, 2015.

3 See e.g. Matt Roush, ‘Roush Review: Grim Thrones is a Crowning Achievement’ *TV Guide*, April 15, 2011. <<http://www.tvguide.com/News/Roush-Review-Thrones-1031879.aspx>> accessed Jul 21, 2015.

4 See Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’ *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 101-20.

5 cf. e.g. Lavery 2010, Newman and Levine 2012.

	Beginning of TV programming, the "Single Play" as prominent form	Development & consolidation of TV genres	First talk of "Quality TV"	Emergence of Quality TV: TV considered producer's medium	First recognition of TV auteurism	Full-blown interest in TV auteurs and creators begins	Future of the medium of TV in doubt
TV	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
	Beginnings	2 nd Decade	3 rd Decade	4 th Decade	5 th Decade	6 th Decade	7 th Decade
Cinema	1890s	1900-1920	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s
	First film screenings	Theatrical film born; movies sometimes known as "photoplays"	Development & consolidation of film genres	The studio era in its prime: film considered producer's or star's medium	Developing interest in directors as film artists	Trouffaut's seminal essay on auteurism published	Golden Age of auteurism: Sarris brings auteur theory to the US

△ FIG. 1. DEVELOPMENT OF AUTHORSHIP DISCOURSE IN FILM & TV IN THE US (LAVERY 2010)⁷

to their collaborative nature, an all-controlling visionary force behind the production of visual texts was particularly longed for by French and US critics.⁶ While, with the medium of film, critics and scholars were eager to identify such authorial figures in the director of certain films during the 1960s and 70s, television, "because of the technological complexity of the medium and as a result of the application to most commercial television production of the principles of modern industrial organization" (Allen 1992: 9) was slower to catch up to the status of an author-driven medium (see Fig.1).

Nowadays, authorship in television is often intrinsically tied to the showrunner, a position on top of a television drama's production hierarchy that is also variably labelled 'showrunner-auteur', 'writer-producer', or 'hyphenate' of a TV show, thus, according to Newman and Levine, reflecting its accountability for "aesthetic integrity of the television text" (2012: 40), including all duties that this accountability entails, e.g. overseeing the work of script writers, directors, sound and video editors and adding his or her own personal artistic vision and style to the process. Jason Mittell attributes this type of authorial figure with "authorship by responsibility" or "management" (2015: 98, 102).

6 For a more inclusive discussion of the topic, see e.g. Truffaut 2009[1954]; Sarris 1963; Kipen 2006; Caughie 2008; Newman/Levine 2012; Mittell 2015.

7 cf. David Lavery, 'The Imagination will be Televised' (presentation transcript, Stuttgart: 2010) 5. <http://davidlavery.net/Collected_Works/Essays/The_Imagination_Will_Be_Televised.pdf> accessed 21 Nov 2015.

On a narrative level, authorship in serialised drama usually manifests in a novelistic formation of story-arcs incorporating an extensive master-narrative with only few or no self-contained plot-threads, therefore connecting episodes to larger narratives. Newman and Levine identify authorship in a general trend regarding *mise en scène*, i.e. the visual presentation of a show, thus ensuring the before-mentioned 'aesthetic integrity'.⁸ Because it is the showrunner who is in control of the look and feel of a show, the position often functions as the "television equivalent of a novelist or cineaste" (Newman/Levine 2012: 42) in the promotion of a show. Moreover, the showrunner-auteur acts as a perceived guarantor of art, and legitimises the television show as following the vision of one authorial figure. Moreover, Newman and Levine argue, that, on the reception side, the showrunner-auteur acting as brand manager can become the object of cult fan engagement which may read television texts as glorified products, as valuable parts of the showrunner's *œuvre*, which in some cases can even lead to the showrunner achieving a status of celebrity (cf. 2012: 43-58).

02 AUTHORSHIP AND HBO

Since its success with shows such as *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under*, *The Wire* or *Boardwalk Empire*, celebrating showrunners as producers of artistically-valuable quality television has been a particularly crucial element of cable network HBO's larger strategy of quality programming.⁹ Although it did not invent putting the focus of attention on one showrunner-auteur, the network has made it an art form in itself to build a public image of a creative haven promising quality, where writers are provided with a maximum of support and a minimum of interference. As I have noted elsewhere, "[writer]-producers who had learned their craft on production sets of the Big Three [networks], but felt the urge to break out of the production cycles of regular TV", flocked to the premium cable network, "thus boosting HBO's inventiveness factor even more." A steadily-growing collective of showrunners including Tom Fontana with *Oz*, Matt Weiner with *The Sopranos* and, later, *Mad Men*, Aaron Sorkin with *The West Wing* and later

8 Jason Mittell, 'No, The Sopranos didn't ruin television', JustTV Blog, Feb 21 2012. <<http://justtv.wordpress.com/2012/02/21/no-the-sopranos-didnt-ruin-television/>> accessed Feb 23, 2012.

9 cf. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, 'It's not TV, it's HBO's original programming' in *It's not TV*, ed. by Marc Leverette et al. (New York: Routledge, 2008) 87.

The Newsroom, David Milch with *Deadwood*, David Simon with *The Wire* and, most recently, *Show Me a Hero*, and Larry David with *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (1999–) “added enormously to the growing reputation of HBO as a harbinger of innovation and quality” (Steiner 2015:16)¹⁰ – and they have been very eager to support and foster this perception in promotional interviews.¹¹ By creating shows that are different from ‘regular’ public and private network content in ways of both promotion and production (e.g. genre-blending), those showrunner-auteurs were and are of paramount importance for adding to HBO’s reputation as the one cable channel far ahead of any other in terms of quality.¹² Ultimately, as Catherine Johnson has noted, “HBO’s ‘difference’ from free-to-air network television is thus articulated in a brand strategy that draws on a critical history of US television in order to position both its programming and its audience as ‘elite’ and sophisticated.” (2007: 10). In recent years, though, other premium cable and broadcast networks adapted this branding strategy to their needs, therefore, with critically-acclaimed shows such as *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-13), *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-15),¹³ *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-), *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-) and *Orphan Black* (BBC America, 2013-) on both network and premium cable channels, is ultimately leading to a “HBO-ification”¹⁴ of US television drama.

03 AUTHORSHIP AND THE TEXT OF GAME OF THRONES

Within the general discourse around quality, and authorship in television in particular, the identification of a single, visionary figure in charge of overseeing the artistic integrity of a TV show can often become a difficult endeavour. And due to the earlier-mentioned collaborative nature, visual media can generally only infer an authorial voice or function. Jason Mittell, with a friendly nod to Foucault, defines this “inferred

author function” as “a viewer’s production of authorial agency responsible for a text’s storytelling, drawing on textual cues and contextual discourses” (2015: 117).¹⁵

In the following, I will therefore analyse three different loci of a possible authorial voice, thus hoping to identify such textual cues of an inferred voice within the text itself, and through a selection of paratexts that might point to such contextual discourse in the case of *Game of Thrones*.

As has been mentioned earlier, an authorial voice on the level of the text itself is most likely to be found in a show’s mise-en-scène and its narrative structure. With the case of *Game of Thrones*, the narrative structure of both the pilot and the subsequent episodes of *GoT* largely follow the form of George R. R. Martin’s novels: different threads of the larger narrative comprise chapter-like character POV sequences, each chapter/thread focuses on one character and follows his or her development. Rather than choosing a more direct first-person perspective, *GoT*’s point-of-views are realised by third-person perspectives, thus allowing for a stronger identification with each chapter’s protagonist because the viewer is able to witness not only the actions of the protagonist, but also his or her immediate reactions to the world. This way of storytelling has the effect of throwing the viewer directly into the narrative, with the audience initially stumbling from scene to scene, trying to grasp what is happening. One quickly learns that this fantasy narrative features gritty realism, where one will not find clear-cut character delineations of manichean Good vs. Evil in the tradition of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, but rather an intricate tale based on a medieval world that tells of both the good and the dark sides of the human being, and the conflicts this internal struggle causes for each of the characters. Avid readers of the novels feel right at home with the way of storytelling presented in the TV show because the television producers have made sure to adapt the basic features of how Martin weaves his narrative strands.

Regarding the particularity of *GoT*’s narrative, the show’s pilot also announces an over-arching theme and peritext which subsequently and by definition introduces all of the show’s following episodes and sets a distinct frame to the narrative: the opening sequence. *GoT*’s opening sequence introduces the viewer to a stylised computer-generated imaging (CGI) map of the narrative’s world which is concavely arranged on the inner side of a globe. In its centre resides a glowing

10 The showrunners’ list of series is, of course, only fragmentary.

11 cf. e.g. Mark Lawson, ‘Mark Lawson Talks to David Chase’, in *Quality TV*, ed. by Janet McCabe et al. (London: I.B Tauris, 2007) 213-215.

12 cf. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, ‘It’s not TV, it’s HBO’s original programming’ in *It’s not TV*, ed. by Marc Leverette et al. (New York: Routledge, 2008) 91. and

13 cf. Tim Molloy, ‘AMC and the Triumph of the TV Auteur’ *The Wrap*, Dec 15, 2010. <<http://www.thewrap.com/tv/article/amc-and-triumph-tv-auteur-23277>> accessed Feb 07, 2012.

14 Colin Tait, ‘The HBO-ification of Genre’ *Cinephile*, Vol. 4, 2008. <<http://cinephile.ca/archives/volume-4-post-genre/the-hbo-ification-of-genre/>> accessed 04 April 2012.

15 This might also hold further implications for a yet untheorized “inferred reader/viewer function”, which might echo Stuart Hall’s modes of preferred, negotiated and oppositional reading (cf. Hall [1973] 1980) and Newcomb and Hirsch’s “Cultural Forum” (1983)...

comet-like ball of fire surrounded by several rotating metal rings, into which depictions of a tale (a dragon fighting a stag, resembling the imagery of ancient tapestries) are forged. From this comet, the CGI sweeps through space and allows a view on massive continents and seas that clearly differ from the real world's geography. The CGI then zooms in towards one of the continents, out of which, driven by and consisting of a complex set of cogs and sprockets, a city labelled 'King's Landing' emerges. After a few seconds of hovering over this elaborately-growing clockwork, the CGI continues its camera flight and glides over valleys, lakes, forests and settlements, following a marked trail towards a different location, where a similar clockwork enfolds and forms a solid castle by the name of 'Winterfell', with turrets, walls, stables and even a large tree, all part of the clockwork. The CGI journey continues towards a monumental wall, next to which another clockwork-castle artificially emerges, cog by cog, until it becomes clear that this is a stronghold governing the wall, and, by the movement of the camera, implying that something unknown does exist beyond that wall. The camera-flight then withdraws from the wall, flies back over Winterfell towards King's Landing and then changes direction, tilts its perspective in flight and expands again into a zoom over what looks like a desert, to encounter a smaller set of cogs forming a wide-spread clockwork from which emerge large horse statues and a set of foreign-looking tent-houses. And throughout the whole sequence, an impressively orchestrated show theme provides an epic soundscape to the opener.

With this opening sequence (duration 1:40 minutes), the show introduces the viewer to the complex world of the narrative. By employing the clockwork-metaphor, it foreshadows the interconnectedness of each of the sub-plots: Master cogs in the centre of each clockwork, emblazoned with the major participating parties' coat of arms, help to identify the realms of the corresponding houses. With the deliberate choice of background music over a narrative voice-over that could have provided an explanatory introduction to the fictional world, the viewer is still kept in the dark about more details of the narrative setting. And, last but not least, the vastness of the world explored by those fast and steep CGI camera flights symbolises and promises the largeness of the underlying narrative: all that land will be relevant for the storytelling/worldbuilding process, and it is going to be an epic narrative, covering so much space. Ultimately, the opening sequence can both be understood as the series creator's graphic framework and summary of the show's key features: a highly complex narrative with myriads of contributing elements (i.e. cogs) that

lead to grim storytelling with what one might label 'internal realism' (a believable, realistic character depiction in a fantasy world), driven by a mechanical (clockwork) rationale of total consequence following the causes and effects of human interaction.

Following the CGI interlude of the opening sequence, the pilot then subsequently introduces 18 major characters, including the core families of the Houses of Stark, Lannister, Baratheon and Targaryen, manages to interweave those with four larger back-stories fuelled by loyalty, betrayal, vanity, incest, corruption and loneliness and ends with a cliff-hanger to make sure that viewers will want to continue with the show. Since exposition or any kind of introductory element is completely missing during the pilot episode, the method of *in medias res* presentation throws the viewer right into the fictional world and, by doing so, challenges him or her into active participation and investment in order to make sense of what is presented. One benefit of such an *in medias res* multi-perspectivisation clearly is the possibility of introducing large numbers of characters and relationships, which set the basis for several season-long story arcs, among them the plot of the 'Menace behind The Wall', which the viewer was thrown into right from the start of the pilot. Robin Nelson frames these elements as follows: "[P]acey cutting of dynamic images and a strong soundtrack typify the modern drama series [...] it is perceived to be necessary at the start of any drama to capture the audience [...] where] an exceptionally fast-cut sequence precedes the unfolding of the action proper of the episode" (Nelson 1997: 36). While *GoT* might be seen as a fantasy-genre show, many of its features suggest that this show actually is a high-production-value drama.

These particular features, I want to claim, can be identified as markers of an inferred authorial voice *within* the text of *GoT*: the deliberate choice of telling all sub-plots in chapter-like story-arcs with usually a collection of "chapters" forming one particular episode, the choice of third-person perspective as the main way of presenting the plot threads, the distinct visual style which in some parts remains very observant and distant and in other parts quickly switches to an attentive, participatory mode, all of those elements identify a larger underlying idea of telling the story. It has to be noted, though, that *GoT*, through its particular creative setup, also further complicates the task of attributing authorship. Although there seems to exist a certain kind of authorial voice that governs all of the master-narrative over the course of the show's first season, it is not quite clear how to actually grasp it and, furthermore, to whom we might accredit this voice

to. Can we attribute 'authorship by responsibility' to Weiss and Benioff, the actual showrunners, or is it rather a second instance, that of George R. R. Martin, the author of the original book series, who has the final word on the look and feel of the show to make sure that everything confirms to the standards set by his novels?¹⁶ One might argue that Martin's source material was written in a way that has a distinctively televisual quality to it – its presentation in character-driven chapters, each of which features a different protagonist in order to build up larger story-arcs, calls for serialisation.¹⁷ The discourse around the adaptation process – which included the act of re-imagining and altering the book's story-lines by Benioff and Weiss, but then had to be sanctioned by Martin in the final process – highlight the particular difficulty of an attribution of authorship on a textual level to one of the parties involved. When we adapt the notion of an author 'aura' as introduced in Jonathan Gray's seminal study on paratexts to our case of *GoT*, we might say that, for the *GoT* universe, George R. R. Martin "serves as shorthand for a set of values, themes, and aesthetic moves that are seen to be consistent across his work." (Gray 2010: 122). This consistence is implicitly also seeping through into the new outlet of Martin's universe, the television series.

04 AUTHORSHIP, PARATEXTS AND GAME OF THRONES

As has been shown, an attribution of an authorial voice via the inferred author function on the textual level of the show is rather difficult. As I will show in the following paragraphs, the inferred author function is highly dependent on paratexts that help frame such a reading in particular ways. With *GoT*, there exists a whole universe of paratexts surrounding the show that reinforce if not a clear attribution to, then at least a discourse around authorship. According to French literary theorist Gérard Genette's definition of the paratext, the concept can be broken down to the formula of *paratext* = *epitext* + *peritext*. With explicit referral to literary text, Genette defines the epitext as those elements "which are situated outside the book: generally with the backing of the media (interviews, conversations), or under the cover of private communication

16 cf. George R. R. Martin, 'From HBO' *Not A Blog*, Jul 16, 2010 <<http://grm.livejournal.com/164794.html>> accessed Feb 02, 2012.

17 cf. Jason Mittell, 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television' *The Velvet Light Trap* 58, 2006. 29-40.

(correspondence, private journals, and the like)" (1991: 264). The peritext on the other hand "necessarily has a *positioning*, which one can situate in relationship to that of the text itself: around the text, in the space of the same value, like [...] the preface [...or] the title of chapters" (1991: 264; *emphasis in original*). As has been noted earlier, *GoT*'s opening sequence can be interpreted as a peritext. Cultural and Media scholar Georg Stanitzek argues against Genette's strict boundaries to a book/work paradigm and makes cases for paratexts in the media of Film and Television. He finds that televisual paratexts in particular cover a wide range of peri- and epitextual elements, e.g. film/show teasers, trailers and both on- and off-air promotional strategies, which may serve to enhance the promotion of authorial intentions in the underlying texts (i.e. film, show, narrative) (Stanitzek 2005: 38). Jonathan Gray further expands and actualizes this understanding: "that paratexts contribute to the text and are often vital parts of it is to argue that paratexts can be part of the creative process, and not just marketing "add-ons" and "ancillary products," as the media industries and academia alike have often regarded them." Gray further argues that "to ignore paratexts' textual role is to misunderstand their aesthetic, economic, and socio-cultural roles" (Gray 2010: 222). And while Gray calls for a more phenomenological approach to paratexts, Matt Hills again extends this reading towards a 'truly' phenomenological universe of para-paratexts that might also "work to (re) frame a targeted paratext. [...M]ultiple paratexts might [also] reflect on one another via chains of contextualization" (Hills 2015: 25-6).

In the following, I will apply Stanitzek's and Gray's notion of the paratext to the case of *GoT*, where a selection of epi- and peritexts will serve to display how authorial intentions are one reoccurring theme highlighted by almost every participating faction. As Jonathan Gray has noted: "Television authors still try to exert authority and control over "their" texts, [and] producer-end paratexts hold significant power in inflecting audiences' interpretive frameworks" (2010: 124). The selection of peritexts include the showrunners' and production team's personal statements voiced in the extra features of the show's DVD box set, and surrounding press releases published by HBO and George R. R. Martin. Epitexts comprise elements of HBO's multimedia interaction with fans and 'opinion leaders' in order to shape the reception of the show, as well as critics' reviews.

While two of the DVD box sets' extras are concerned with dissecting the intradiegetic level of *GoT* (e.g. an in-detail introduction to the characters), other extras shift the focus of

attention towards the extradiegetic level of the narration. Extra #5 deals with the adaptation process of transforming the book text into a television narrative. The showrunners Benioff and Weiss voice their respect of Martin (“We are all walking in his dream right now”¹⁸) and underline their efforts to make the adaptation as ‘truthful’ as possible in order to transport the authorial intentions of Martin to the television screen. Furthermore, Benioff, Weiss and Martin highlight that the only way of adapting the literary original could have been with HBO, because the story is perceived as far too complex and ‘rich in detail’ (hinting at the shortcomings of telling an epic story in the limited time frame of a movie, as well as explicit content of both the novels and the series, which they imply would have been cut out in productions of other channels).¹⁹ By attributing those production possibilities as inherent with HBO, they implicitly elevate the channel towards a harbinger of Quality and Uniqueness. Subsequently, the showrunners and the author mutually praise the on-going collaboration, building on the myth of a showrunner-auteur troika who collectively engage in creating each of the different narrative threads in order to weave an “intricate tapestry”.²⁰ It is important, though, to question the motivation behind such statements, because they often also fulfil the function of promoting the individual, or in the case of *GoT*, the auteur-collective as a part of the larger HBO marketing strategy.²¹ This also mirrors Gray’s notion of television authors as “mediators between the industry and audiences, and the author function as a *discursive entity* used by the industry to communicate messages about its texts to audiences, by the creative personnel often conflated into the image of the author(s) to communicate their own messages about these texts to audiences, and by audiences to communicate messages both to each other and to the industry” (Gray 2010: 127 my emphasis).

Another extra of the DVD box set is completely dedicated to explaining the motivations and efforts behind creating a fictional language for the show.²² Here, Martin’s novels and the work of the HBO crew are set in the tradition of J.R.R. Tolkien, who, with the Elvish language featured in *Lord of the Rings*, was the first to include a uniquely-invented language in a fan-

tasy world. The spirit of this tradition is picked up by Benioff and Weiss in the commentary passages, where they explain why they decided to include a fully-formed fictional language in the world of *GoT*. The showrunners highlight the fact that, although George R. R. Martin had included a small selection of Dothraki terms in his novels, they were the driving forces behind creating the language for the show.²³ Martin credits the showrunners’ creation as a great extension of his fictional world and thus honours their role in the process of authoring the show.²⁴ Benioff adds that the authenticity of the narrative has been improved by the addition of that element,²⁵ thus enhancing the narrative’s ‘internal realism’. Mark Wolf’s take on subcreation in the context of world-building and his layering of different levels of authorship proves helpful to frame the roles of the different agents here: Wolf introduces the roles of “heirs” and “torchbearers” who fulfil the responsibilities of keeping a narrative universe functioning and alive after the disappearance of the original author. The difference between “heir” and “torchbearer” is one of relation: while the heir is usually a person close to the late original author (family, friend), a “torchbearer” is brought into play by an institution. (cf. Wolf 2012: 274f.). In the context of *GoT*, the problem clearly is Wolf’s underlying assumption of a deceased original author and a subsequent diachronic succession of authorial agents: This complicates things in our particular case of *GoT*, since we have Martin as the original author who is actively progressing his literary universe, and the special particularity of Benioff and Weiss, who act as showrunner-“torchbearers” for Martin, but also expand the televisual universe following their own visions.

The general motivation behind all those accounts featured on the DVD is to provide the audience with a form of insider knowledge, information that the common television program viewer would not be able to access. In addition, DVD extras enable showrunners to interpret parts of the production and explain their intentions and motivations behind certain aspects of the show. According to Matt Hills, such commentary features therefore “cement the position of producers of a show (usually the writer, director, or showrunner) as objects of fascination and authority” (2007: 53). In the case of *GoT*, these extras, by focussing in equal parts on the comments of

18 cf. HBO extra feature: David Benioff, in ‘From the Book to the Screen’ at minute 00:42.

19 cf. ‘From the Book to the Screen’, minute 01:05 to 01:43

20 cf. ‘From the Book to the Screen’, minute 01:52 to 02:12

21 cf. McCabe/Akass 2008, p. 88.

22 cf. HBO extra feature: ‘Creating the Dothraki language’.

23 cf. HBO extra feature: David Benioff in ‘Creating the Dothraki language’, minute 00:24 to 00:36.

24 George R. R. Martin, ‘Klaatu Barada Nicto...’ *Not A Blog*, April 12, 2010. <<http://grm.livejournal.com/148593.html>> accessed April 20, 2012.

25 cf. ‘Creating the Dothraki language’, minute 04:30 to 04:38

the author and the showrunners, can be seen as legitimizing the showrunner-“torchbearers”, as well as consolidating the audience’s perception of Martin and the showrunners as a showrunner-auteur troika even further.

While many of the DVD extras aim at extending viewer pleasure through providing additional information on extradiegetic elements, the *Viewers’ Guide* featured on *GoT*’s official website strongly encourages its visitors to get immersed in a vast array of special features supporting and extending the show’s narratives. An interactive map of the fictional lands of Westeros displaying the locations of every episode’s narrative enables the viewer to geographically link and relate the different story-arcs and follow the progression in the narrative through changing areas of influence and territories of each of the Houses. And genealogical trees of all Kings and Houses (i.e. families) allow for an in-depth analysis of the complex web of social relations spun within the master-narrative. Through their content and their way of presentation – all of the material featured in the *Viewers’ Guide* is beautifully crafted in the look of ancient scrolls - these peritexts clearly enable viewer investment and allow for greater pleasure gained from the main narrative.

A different kind of peritext can be identified in George R. R. Martin’s blog.²⁶ The author uses his ‘Not A Blog’²⁷-platform to communicate with his fan base and has documented the progress of the adaptation project, from his initial production announcement of July 16, 2010,²⁸ to more recent updates regarding *GoT*’s chances of winning industry awards. His general style of writing is matter-of-fact and succinct, but when it comes to the collaboration with HBO and Benioff and Weiss, Martin tends to use emphatic language, such as addressing the cable network as “my friends at HBO”²⁹. Furthermore, he openly promotes the wealth of merchandise that is available for the *GoT* universe. In addition to that, he also features an on-the-road diary of his ongoing global reading tour, thus linking his own voice of the literary author with the multimedia campaign of the premium cable network. Doing so, Martin further enhances the perception of Benioff and Weiss as his

“torchbearers”, but also asserts his own position as the original author.

But Martin’s blog is only one among many cogs and wheels in the intricate clockwork of HBO’s viral marketing campaign machine. HBO targeted those people who were labelled by Amanda Lotz as ‘opinion leaders’ or ‘super-fans’³⁰ and had a limited set of give-aways produced and delivered, e.g. a package labelled ‘The Maester’s Path’. This package included a multi-medial³¹ invitation to the fictional world of Westeros, and implicitly aimed at the recipients’ collaboration in regards to spreading the news.³² In many ways, the campaign worked perfectly:³³ in addition to providing experiential descriptions within their blogs, many of the targeted group of ‘super fans’ also promoted details provided by HBO’s introductory letter to the package, which made a special point of praising the authorial collaboration between Martin and HBO.³⁴ Therefore, through reaching out to these influential viewers who might value and promote the show in online communities, HBO has shown to be able to tap into the online universe of chat rooms and blogs to ensure that there is lots of positive buzz created around the paratexts, the underlying text, and the network itself.

Critical reception of the show mostly followed the general trend defined by the positive feedback issued by the opinion leaders and their respective communities. Some critics

26 See George R. R. Martin, *Not a Blog*. <<http://grm.livejournal.com/>> accessed Aug 26, 2015.

27 Note the similar distinction strategies via a negation of mass media conformity applied by Martin and HBO (HBO’s campaign ‘It’s not TV. It’s HBO’).

28 cf. George R. R. Martin, ‘From HBO’ *Not a Blog*, July 16, 2010. <<http://grm.livejournal.com/164794.html>> accessed March 28, 2012.

29 George R. R. Martin, ‘You Win Or You Die’ *Not a Blog*, April 11, 2012. <<http://grm.livejournal.com/274885.html>> accessed April 14, 2012.

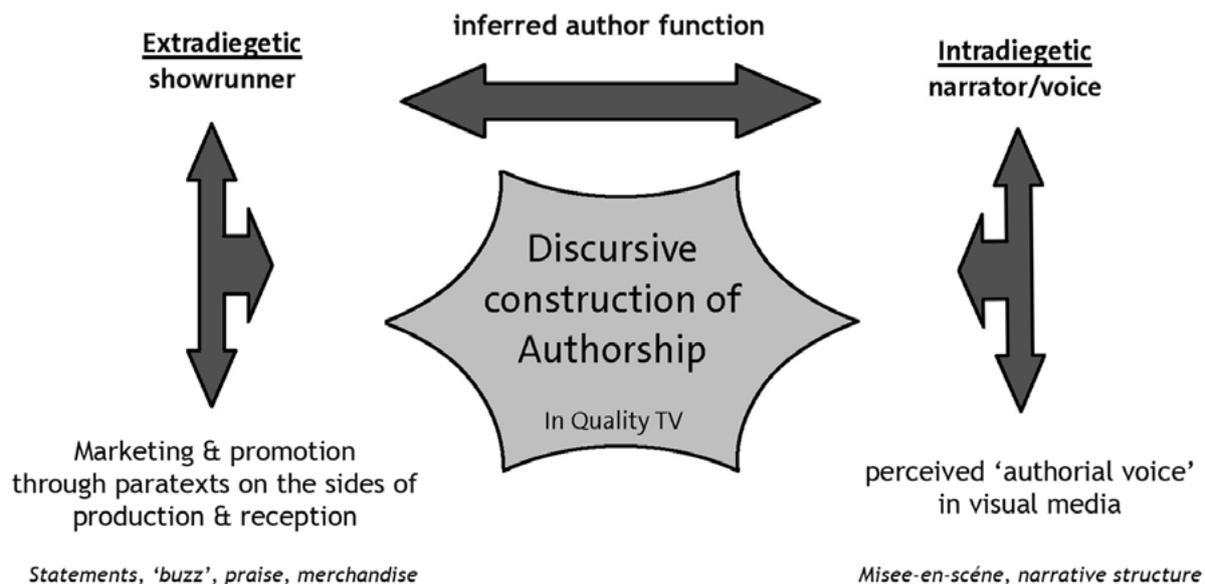
30 i.e. “those peer-influencing viewers who might talk up a series in offices and chat rooms” (Lotz 2014: 125)

31 In the true sense of the word; it included odour samples of the narrative’s different locations as well as cloth samples and papyrus rolls that allowed for a multi-sensory encounter with transmedia elements of the narrative.

32 For exemplary accounts, cf. e.g. J.C. Hutchins, ‘Winter Is Coming’ February 25, 2011. <<http://jchutchins.net/site/2011/02/25/winter-is-coming-a-transmedia-fiction-experience-with-j-c/>> accessed July 18, 2015. // Or: Myles McNutt, ‘Achieving Authenticity: Unboxing (the Unboxing of) Game of Thrones’ Maester’s Path’ *Cultural Learnings*, Feb 27, 2011. <<http://cultural-learnings.com/2011/02/27/achieving-authenticity-unboxing-the-unboxing-of-game-of-thrones-maesters-path/>> accessed Aug 19, 2015.

33 As Klastrop and Tosca note: “the company expected 3,000 fans to register on the website but in fact logged 40,000 users. Campfire [the transmedia outlet in charge of the campaign] expected 100,000 unique monthly visitors and ended up with 200,000. And *The Maester’s Path* website had more than 2 million page views, with an “average time spent on the Website of 10 minutes,” which is a long time by web standards. Perhaps even more interesting, Campfire estimates in the same interview that all together the campaign had more than 120 million “social impressions” - that is, the total number of people who had seen a status update, a blog post, or similar reference relating to Game of Thrones on social media sites such as Facebook, GetGlue, Twitter, and blogs.” (Klastrop and Tosca 2013: 304).

34 See picture of letter at: J.C. Hutchins, ‘Winter Is Coming’ February 25, 2011. <http://bit.ly/1ErWozZ>, accessed Jul 18, 2015.



△ FIG. 2. DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORSHIP: RELATIONS

and reporters even issued pre-air reviews of the first season, which is quite uncommon for television drama³⁵ (e.g. see *The Guardian's* suggestively-titled 'Is A Game of Thrones the most eagerly anticipated TV show ever?'³⁶). Targeting pre-existing *A Song Of Ice and Fire* fan communities, other critics highlighted products that used the show's almost instant success and fame to extend the *GoT* experience even further. Through the first season, *GoT*-inspired *haute couture* fashion³⁷, fan merchandise³⁸, and even books on the philosophical backgrounds of the show³⁹, as well as DVD sales numbers⁴⁰, became the

centre of critical attention. And most critics focussing on the show itself were eager to hail its qualities: in almost all critical accounts listed on *metacritic.com*, the tropes of authorship initially promoted by HBO through its various channels are re-employed by those reviewers (including statements such as 'expert control of the storylines', 'exceptional storytelling', and 'richly-drawn characters', 'intricate back story and plotlines') as indicators of authorial quality, culminating in an overwhelmingly positive feedback of the show (with an overall positive-negative review ratio of 47 to 0⁴¹, with six 'mixed' reviews that criticise the open display of explicit content, its complexity, or/and berate the whole series as 'boy fiction'). Ultimately, this also promotes a high-quality product backed by a showrunner-auteur troika.

35 cf. McNutt 2011.

36 cf. Mathilda Gregory, 'Is A Game of Thrones the most eagerly anticipated TV show ever?' *The Guardian*, July 13, 2010. <<http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2010/jul/22/game-of-thrones-most-anticipated>> accessed Aug 4, 2015.

37 cf. Patrick Kevin Day, "'Game of Thrones' inspires ... a high fashion line?' *LA Times*, Feb 16, 2012 <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/showtracker/2012/02/game-of-thrones-helmut-lang.html>> accessed Aug 02, 2015.

38 cf. David McCutcheon, 'Game of Thrones Goods in the Works' *IGN*, Nov 10, 2011. <<http://uk.ign.com/articles/2011/11/10/game-of-thrones-goods-in-the-works>> accessed Aug 03, 2015.

39 cf. Jacoby, Henry O. *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2012.

40 cf. Lisa Richwine, 'Exclusive - "Game of Thrones" rules HBO's DVD sales' *Reuters*, March 16, 2012. <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/03/16/uk-tv-gameofthrones-idUKBRE82Fo1420120316>> accessed Aug 28, 2015.

05 CONCLUSION

Game of Thrones can be seen as a prime example of how trans-media storytelling is exercised and celebrated by a television series. From George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Fire and Ice* book

41 As of April, 2012, when Season 1 of the show had concluded and Season 2 had just aired its premiere episode, cf. 'Game of Thrones' *Metacritic.com*, <<http://www.metacritic.com/tv/game-of-thrones>> accessed April 15, 2012.

series, of which the first volume was published almost two decades ago, to the television show, its surrounding paratexts and related products, including interactive web features on both HBO's proprietary streaming service HBO GO and the official show website, the DVD and BluRay collectibles, role play games, comics and merchandise – all those elements allow for a way of watching that extends the experience of consuming television content as-is. The existing authorship discourse is deliberately highlighted via the inferred author function by different agents with different agendas, particularly in the universe of paratexts on both sides of production (i.e. features and texts produced by HBO's production team and George R. R. Martin) and reception (i.e. texts produced by critics and fans) in order to reinforce the showrunner-troika's authorial 'Aura'. To quote Jonathan Gray: "Paratexts, and various forms of bonus materials in particular, aim to play a constitutive role in creating value for a film or television show, even if in practice this value is not created equally for all audiences. Some audiences will seek out such paratexts precisely in order to reaffirm their sense of the film or program's value. Others will regard the mere existence of paratexts and hype as the clearest example of the lack of artistic integrity, seeing them as akin to a painter selling his or her work in a shopping mall storefront with a gaudy neon sign. In either situation, the paratext helps create a sense of value (whether positive or negative)." (2010: 128) In the case of *GoT*, the selection of paratexts presented here give voice to the showrunners and the author of the literary original series of novels not only in the DVD extras but also in the specials featured on the show's website, strengthen a perception of importance of these factions on the reception side, and foster a discourse about authorship within the show, thus elevating the show towards a quality production that promises uniqueness and ingenuity.

On the other hand, the showrunner-auteur troika's agendas ought to be scrutinised because they play with a concept that has been and is much-debated in media studies, linking a perceived or constructed intradiegetic authorial voice to an also-constructed extradiegetic author, and utilising it for self-promotion and marketing purposes in order to enhance their own as well as the brand reputation (see Fig. 2). As I hope to have been able to show, then, the discursive construction along the tropes of authorship have proven a very fruitful means to achieve the goal of elevating television texts, and made the promotion of authorship an important element in HBO's marketing strategy – particularly within the realm of the *Game of Thrones* universe.

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