

Prequels, Sequels and Everything Else: Transmedia Storytelling and the Game of Thrones Universe
Nikolett Sipos

Abstract: Game of Thrones has become one of the most popular fantasy franchises of the 21st century. The starting point of this universe was George R.R. Martin's epic fantasy saga, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which became a worldwide success thanks to the HBO adaptation titled *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), created by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss. Since then, several other adaptations have been born and are currently in the making, including media campaigns (*The Maester's Path*, 2011), books (*A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms*, 2005; *The World of Ice and Fire*, 2014; *Fire & Blood*, 2018), podcasts (*Pod of Thrones*, *Game of Owns*), and games (*A Game of Thrones: Genesis*, 2011; *Game of Thrones*, 2014). The visual storyworld of the franchise has been further expanded by the HBO prequel *House of the Dragon* (2022–), but there are other Westeros series in the making as well. Thus, with all the media incarnations, Game of Thrones became a true example of a transmedia story – in this paper, I am going to introduce how these media entries are linked in this huge transmedia universe, and how they fit into the world of media convergence.

Keywords: transmedia storytelling, adaptation, Game of Thrones, House of the Dragon

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Introduction

In the early 2000s George R.R. Martin's epic fantasy series, *A Song of Ice and Fire* had already had a fanbase in the fantasy community, but the real success of the story was initiated by the HBO adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019). Although the television show is based on Martin's fantasy novels, the creators had to face a serious problem after the fifth season: 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*, which is still in the process of writing) (Martin 2021) 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. Martin was able to give an outline of the story to the creators, David Benioff and Dan Weiss, so that they could finish the story without canceling the series and disappointing millions of people who became huge fans of the television show (Bruney 2019). Even though the creators mainly relied on the most important aspects of Martin's vision, the last three seasons were not as successful as the previous ones in the sense that they left many of the fans disappointed with "bad writing" and emphasizing cinematography instead of the "carefully nurtured plots and character development" (Hughes 2019). Since the television show created an ending that had not existed before, *Game of Thrones* became a transmedia universe that has also been expanded with the different books and games that were created in the franchise (and all the fan fiction and paraphernalia, which, although do not contribute to the narrative unity of this universe, are all integral parts of the franchise from a social and economic point of view). In this paper, I am going to introduce how the different media entries of the *Game of Thrones* franchise are linked in this huge transmedia universe, and how they fit into the world of media convergence.

Transmediality and Transmedia Storytelling

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" (Kinder 1993, 38), 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. (Kinder 1993, 122–23)

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. While children are playing out stories with their beloved characters, they also learn how to be a consumer.

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. (Evans 2011, 21)

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” (Kearney 2004, 281). 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. (Evans 2011, 22)

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 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” (Jenkins 2006, 97–98). The reason behind the use of multiple media platforms is that “each medium does what it does best” (Jenkins 2006, 98): 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 one or more playable characters, thus creating a truly immersive experience. Another important feature is that “[e]ach franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don’t need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa” (Jenkins 2006, 98) – 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 (Jenkins 2007). However, it is really important that the different media incarnations should not retell the same story over and over again: although “[r]eading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption” (Jenkins 2006, 98), redundancy reduces fan interest and can easily lead to the fall of franchises. At the same time, “[o]ffering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty” (Jenkins 2006, 98). Nonetheless, the introduction of different media is not only beneficial for loyal fans, but is also able to “attract different market niches” (Jenkins 2006, 98). As Jenkins suggests,

[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. (Jenkins 2006, 98)

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 (Jenkins 2006, 98). This feature leads to strong economic advantages, as in the case of a successful narrative, companies can achieve 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 (Askwith 2003). 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” (Jenkins 2006, 333). 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” (Jenkins 2006, 106). 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 may be 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 (Delouya and Clark n.d.).

In the case of transmedia stories, “[t]he whole is worth more than the sum of the parts” (Jenkins 2006, 104): 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 franchises and transmedia narratives.

The last possible feature of transmedia stories in *Convergence Culture* is “additive comprehension”—a term coined by game designer Neil Young (Jenkins 2006, 127). Additive comprehension means that by adding a small detail to a certain media incarnation, the interpretation of the whole narrative is turned upside down: “[h]e cites the example of the director’s cut of *Blade Runner*, where adding a small segment showing Deckard discovering an origami unicorn invited viewers to question whether Deckard might be a replicant” (Jenkins 2006, 127).

Jenkins also created two important blogposts on the topic: 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” (Jenkins 2007). 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*) (Jenkins 2007). 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 (Jenkins 2007).

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 (Jenkins 2011). 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 (Jenkins 2011).

Jenkins also adds something new to the idea of additive comprehension: he states that most transmedia content can serve four functions (from which one or more can be present at the same time): new additions can offer backstories, map the world, offer new perspectives on the action from other characters' point of view, and are also able to deepen audience engagement (Jenkins 2011). 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." (Jenkins 2010) 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 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. (Jenkins 2010)

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 (Dena 2010). 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" (Jenkins 2011).

Whilst Jenkins' theory can serve as a useful starting point when thinking about the nature of transmedia universes, 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)" (Ryan and Thon 2014, 2). 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" (Ryan and Thon 2014, 3). If we focus on the abstract sense of the center of media convergence, than 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?" (Ryan and Thon 2014, 3).

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 ranges from 'all media' to 'one' or perhaps even to 'none.' (Ryan and Thon 2014, 3)

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” (Ryan and Thon 2014, 4)), while “a transmedially valid yet not medium-free concept is interactivity” (Ryan and Thon 2014, 4). The last is the category of medium-specific components, which “can occasionally be extended to other media through a metaphoric transfer” (Ryan and Thon 2014, 4).

The Game of Thrones universe

The origins of the Game of Thrones universe date back to the summer of 1991, when the author, George R.R. Martin suddenly had an idea for a scene 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 (Gilmore 2014). After writing the story – which became the first chapter of *A Game of Thrones* – Martin realized that there is more to it than a single short story, so he continued writing and came up with the idea of writing a fantasy trilogy: as a result, in 1996, the first volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, *A Game of Thrones* was published (Gilmore 2014). Although Martin’s story is now famous all over the world, it did not have a huge success after the publication, because the market for an epic fantasy series was limited (Flood 2016). However, the fans of speculative fiction started to spread the word, and the series (which was intended to be a trilogy) published by HarperCollins became more and more popular (Flood 2016). The second volume, *A Clash of Kings* (1999) became a *New York Times Bestseller* in 1999 (*The New York Times* 1999), and after the success of Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* adaptation, producers and filmmakers wanted to create their own adaptation of Martin’s books (Gilmore 2014). Nevertheless, the author rejected these offers, saying that his story is far too complex to be made into a series of films, and focusing on one single character’s point of view would not do justice to the complexity of the narrative (Gilmore 2014). The novels are famous for their realistic depictions of sexuality, violence and for showing the less romanticized side of a world that closely resembles the European Middle Ages. According to Martin, the only way to put the story on screen is by making a television series on a network like HBO – a network that is not afraid to screen scenes that are sexual, violent, and complicated (Gilmore 2014). Although the author did not believe that his epic fantasy saga would ever appear on television, he met David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, who wanted to adapt *A Song of Ice and Fire* into a television series on HBO (Cogman et al. 2012, 5). 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 (Birnbaum 2015).

As Martin’s universe was mostly famous in the fantasy community, the creators decided to start a campaign around the show in order to hype and bring awareness to the upcoming series. The first episodes of the show aired from April to June 2011, and the alternate reality game, *The Maester’s Path* was originally launched on February 28 2011 (“The Maester’s Path Begins” 2011). According to Klastrup 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 (...)” (Klastrup and Tosca 2014, 296). 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 the possible viewers. The HBO show proved to be a huge success: *Game of Thrones* became one of the most popular television shows in history, counting 25 million viewers per episode (Hughes 2019).

Besides the original novels and the HBO series, the Game of Thrones universe has other components as well. There are three novellas about the adventures Dunk and Egg, the future Lord Commander of the Kingsguard and the future king Aegon Targaryen, that are set 90 years before the first novel, *A Game of Thrones: The Hedge Knight* (1998), *The Sworn Sword* (2003), and *The Mystery Knight* (2010) were published in a single volume, *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* in 2015. Martin wrote six other novellas as well – *Blood of the Dragon* (1996) is based on the Daenerys chapters from the first volume, while *Path of the Dragon* (2000) is also inspired by her chapters from *A Storm of Swords*. *Arms of the Kraken* (2002) is set after the death of King Balon Greyjoy, and concentrates on the fight for the

throne of the Iron Islands between Victarion Greyjoy, Euron Crow's Eye and Asha Greyjoy. *The Princess and the Queen* (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 latest Westeros novel by George R.R. Martin is *Fire & Blood* (2018), which tells the story of House Targaryen. Besides the novels and the novellas, Martin also wrote two companion books in collaboration with Elio M. García Jr. and Linda Antonsson: *The World of Ice and Fire* (2014), which 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" (Martin, García, and Antonsson 2014), and *The Rise of the Dragon* (2022), which describes the history of House Targaryen. The success of the series inspired several other mediums as well, including a cookbook (*A Feast of Ice and Fire*), a parody (*A Game of Groans: A Sonnet of Slush and Soot*), a collection of maps (*The Lands of Ice and Fire*), podcasts (*Pod of Thrones*, *Binge Mode | Game of Thrones*, *Game of Owns*, etc.), boardgames and cardgames, and several videogames (*A Game of Thrones: Genesis* by Cyanide, or the episodic *Game of Thrones* by Telltale Games).

Building on the success of *Game of Thrones*, HBO decided to create an adaptation of Martin's *Fire & Blood* (2018) as well, titled *House of the Dragon* (2022–), which became a huge success: the series counted 29 million viewers per episode in the United States alone, and "its global demand for its premiere was 64 times more than the demand for the average show worldwide" (Pallotta 2022). The show also raised controversy about how it introduced racial diversity with its casting: the members of House Velaryon (who, in the novels, are described having pale skin, violet eyes and silver-gold hair" are played by black actors, that was both praised and criticized by fans of the series (Matadeen 2022).

At the time of writing this article, HBO is also working on other *Game of Thrones* spin-offs as well: *The Sea Snake* is going to show the adventures of Corlys Velaryon, a character from *House of the Dragon*; *Snow* is going to focus on the life of Jon Snow after the events of *Game of Thrones*; and *The Hedge Knight* is going to be based on Martin's *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms*. The working title of Princess Nymeria's story is *Ten Thousand Ships*: the prequel is set about 1000 years before the events of *Game of Thrones*, and is going to be about the ancestor of House Martell, the founder of Dorne. Fans can also expect an animation series titled *The Golden Empire*, which is still in development.

Transmediality and the Game of Thrones universe

Once the currently existing volumes of *A Song of Ice and Fire* had been adapted (as at the time of the writing of this article, the author, George R. R. Martin is still working on the last two books of the series) to a television show, the Game of Thrones storyworld became a transmedia experience. However, according to Jenkins's definition, in terms of the franchise we can only talk about transmedia storytelling from the moment when the HBO series outpaced the books and decided to create an alternative ending, that had not existed before. Although the ending of the adaptation is 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, as the author has been working on the sixth volume, *The Winds of Winter* since 2011) may also be different from the show – the author has been writing about how as he is working on this volume,

[t]hings 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. [...] 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. (Martin 2022)

However, the question arises: should we call the Game of Thrones a case of transmedia storytelling, or should we still talk about the television show as a simple adaptation of an epic fantasy series? In order to answer this question, 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. (Hutcheon 2006, 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 (Graves 2017, 2).

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” (Graves 2017, 2). 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 be based on the last two volumes, these books will already exist; however, as fans are still waiting for Martin to finish the penultimate volume, the franchise became a case of transmedia storytelling.

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” (Jenkins 2006, 97–98) became suitable for the Game of Thrones universe once the last three seasons that are not based on the books (since the last two volumes are still in the process of writing) were created. 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. Although the first few seasons of the adaptation were mostly faithful to their adapted source, reading across the different media entries of the 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. Thus, Jenkins's idea about how in the case of transmedia stories, "[t]he whole is worth more than the sum of the parts" (Jenkins 2006, 104) is also true for the Game of Thrones universe.

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. Probably the most famous (and the first already existing prequel of *Game of Thrones*) is *House of the Dragon*, which is 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 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.

Although the Seven Kingdoms originally started out as a story about a young boy who has found some direwolf pups in the snow (Gilmore 2014), it had become one of the most influential fantasy franchises of the 21st century. 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 is 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.

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