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**A Storm of Substandard Writing**  
*Analyses on What Went Wrong with the Later Seasons of  
Game of Thrones*

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*Analysis on What Went Wrong with the Later Seasons of Game of Thrones*

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A Storm of Substandard Writing: *Analysis on What Went Wrong with the Later Seasons of Game of Thrones*

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## Abstract

This thesis discusses the television series *Game of Thrones* and how they are adapted from George R.R. Martin's book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. *Game of Thrones* is an enormously successful television show that broke many records regarding viewing numbers and awards. The development of adaptation is discussed, and the expectations for quality television regarding *Game of Thrones* and how the last season and the series conclusion disappointed many fans. The first seasons were mostly faithful to the novels and added to the source material to give new perspectives. They, therefore, looked like a promising start for an adaptation to novels that were considered by many to be unadaptable. Later seasons did not prove to live up to the expectations of many fans of the novels. However, many non-book fans also felt that the story did not live up to expectations from earlier seasons. *Game of Thrones* is far from the only book adaptation that receives mixed reviews or television series to get fans complaining about the change of pace from earlier seasons that were regarded as quality television. The thesis explores how women are represented within the series as well as taking a closer look at the development of three central characters, Sansa, Daenerys and Tyrion, within the story and their journeys from earlier to later seasons of *Game of Thrones*. They are all examples of how the showrunners lost sight of their stories and characters' developments in later seasons. The problematic aspects of later seasons of *Game of Thrones* do not stem from the fact that the show is not a completely faithful adaptation of the novels since earlier seasons changed many aspects of the story. The problem with the later seasons is that the showrunners are unable to continue the high standards of quality television that earlier seasons set.

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# 1. Introduction

Adaptations have always been popular, and various works have been adapted in different ways throughout history. Today, adapting written works to films or television shows is incredibly popular. Every year numerous works are adapted to the screen. Classical works have remained a popular topic to adapt as well as noir fiction and historical events. In the last two decades, adaptations of fantasy novels to the screen have become enormously popular, with notable examples being *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*.

Adapting a work is a complicated process. As Sanders puts in her book, *Adaptations and Appropriations*: “Many of the film, television, or theatre adaptations of canonical works of literature... openly declare themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor” (Sanders 2). However, when canonical works are adapted to the screen, they are always finished; therefore, the adapters know their end goal and where the story leads them. So, what happens when the adapters do not know where the story ends or the journey to the ending if the written work is not finished?

Unlike *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, *A Song of Ice and Fire* (from here on referred to as *ASoIaF*) by George R.R. Martin is a more mature fantasy aimed at an older audience. The story is extensive and complicated and features multiple point-of-view characters, focusing on political games within a larger plot inside a fantasy world. The five novels published have over four thousand pages, twenty-four point-of-view characters, and hundreds of other characters. It would be challenging for anyone to adapt the story and do it justice. In 2011 the first season of *Game of Thrones* (from here on referred to as *GoT*) was aired on the American cable network, Home Box Office (from here on referred to as HBO), and it was overall a successful adaptation of the first novel of the *ASoIaF* series. However, before Martin could finish his story, the television show overtook him, and the show’s creators had no source material to rely on for its last seasons.

This essay will look at how *GoT* handled having to go on without the source material to rely on and how the show, the characters and the plots suffered from the lack of it. The argument to be made is that when *GoT* followed the books, it was overall a good television show and well adapted, capturing the spirit of the novel while also allowing room for some changes and creative freedom. However, after the showrunners

stopped following the novels and said they were finished with the source material, they lost sight of the spirit of the books and the spirit of the show. The *GoT* series started to fail as a story long before the final season as the creators of the series failed to understand the spirit of the books they are based on and what made the series popular and appealingly in the first place.



## 2. Adaptation theory

Adaptation from written text to screen is always complex, and there are a lot of decisions to make. The relationship with the existing fans is often complicated since they have expectations and demands. Linda Hutcheon's book *A Theory of Adaptation*, looks at different versions of adaptations, the reasons for adapting works and the problems and expectations of adaptations. Hutcheon states that when film adaptations are discussed, they are most often in terms of negative loss (37), and the same can likely be said about adaptations from books to television shows. Hutcheon argues that no matter what, critics will always feel that adaptations are worse than the source material, and this can be seen with over hundred adaptations of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, where people always think that it never captures the original story well enough (Hutcheon 70). Often it is believed that the audience is more demanding of fidelity when classic works are adapted, whether it is on stage, in films, television shows or other forms of adaptation (Hutcheon 29). However, with more recent works, such as the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Philip Pullman and J.K. Rowling, the readers often expect just as much faithfulness to original works and the classics (Hutcheon 29) Although, there is much more to consider than just the reception of the existing source material fans. When adapting works, it is a risk that the adapter relies too much on the source material so that without prior knowledge of the original works, the new version fails to stand on its own (Hutcheon 121). To be successful, the new version must appeal to both new and old audiences (Hutcheon 212). Hutcheon comes to a critical point: "Of course, all these complications of possible reception mean that adapters must satisfy the expectations and demands of both the knowing and the unknowing audience." (Hutcheon 128). However, complicated it is to adapt things, the argument here is that *GoT* was a successful adaptation in earlier seasons when the show followed the novels, even though it made some changes. It only started to have more problems when it stopped following the novels' plot. It failed to follow the spirit of the novels and follow the logical plot and character developments that were established in earlier seasons.

*GoT* had eight seasons from 2011 to 2019. At present, there have been five novels published of the *ASoIaF* series; however, unlike the television show, the book series is not finished, and Martin says he plans to write two more novels. Novels number six and seven have no release day yet (Kovács 2). The last novel, *A Dance of*

*Dragons*, was published in 2011, so it has been over a decade since it was published. Martin has, however, released numerous other material that relates to *ASoIaF* that happen in the same universe, usually prequel stories, for example, short stories under the series *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* that happen hundred years prior to the events of *ASoIaF*, a novel called *Fire and Blood* about events two hundred years before the events of *ASoIaF* and a fictional history book called the *History of Westeros* which is the fictional land where most of *ASoIaF* takes place.

The last twenty years are sometimes described as “the Golden age of television” (Malhara 265). HBO has long been recognised for its many quality television shows (Steiner 183-184), especially those that can be called “narratively complex” (Mittell 29), and showrunners have played a crucial part in many of their most famous shows (Steiner 183-184). *GoT* is often categorised with what is defined as “quality TV” and “narratively complex” (Schlütz 100-101). It received much critical acclaim and won a record number of Emmys, having been nominated for hundred and sixty and winning fifty-nine of them (*Television Academy*). It is the most expensive series in HBO’s history, but it has also been its biggest success (Miller ch. 12).

*GoT* was created by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss based on Martin’s novels and Benioff and Weiss stayed as the showrunners of *GoT* for the eight-season run. Martin had turned down offers of making film adaptations of his *ASoIaF* novels since he believed that the story was too big and could not be adapted faithfully (Miller ch. 12). Since television adaptations have more flexibility and more time than movie adaptations (Hutcheon 55) it is understandable that Martin would have viewed that in a more favourable light. Benioff and Weiss read the novels and became fans of Martin’s work, wanting to make a television show adaptation of them on HBO (Miller ch. 12). They famously had a long lunch meeting with Martin who agreed to give it a try, believing they were right for the job (Miller ch. 12).

Despite good receptions throughout the show's entire run, the last season of *GoT* faced a backlash and became a subject of much debate since it left a lot of fans disappointed by the ending. This can be seen on the ratings on IMDb.com where no episode in the first seven season has under eight stars, many have over nine and some even up to nine point nine stars (IMDb.com). However, no episode in the last season has over eight stars and the last episode has only four stars (IMDb.com) The two

episodes before the final have a five point five and six stars and stand as the second and third lowest rated episodes in the series (IMDb.com). A lot of articles were written about the divisive ending where the ending, plot and receptions of fans are discussed. Kosin states in her article written the day of the premier: “*Game of Thrones* just aired its conclusive episode, and, to put it nicely, it was *terrible*” (Kosin). She states that the final season lacked a proper conclusion to the world building of the seven earlier seasons and left fans disappointed (Kosin). She goes on to discuss the overwhelming bad reception of fans on twitter, pointing out plot holes and illogical conclusions for multiple characters (Kosin). In his article Beauchamp calls the final episode a “personal slap in the face” and criticises it for leaving behind the political realism from earlier seasons that captivated him originally (Beauchamp). Those are just two of the countless opinion pieces that were written after the final season aired analysing and criticizing the ending. This even led to an infamous petition on Change.org under the title “Remake Game of Thrones Season 8 with competent writers.” where HBO is asked to remake the final season. Today the petition has over 1.85 million signatures, and when it was first made, it received a response from actors and the president of HBO (Percival).

The first seasons of *GoT* are quite a close adaptation of the first novels, especially season one. The additional material often added a level of depth to the story, especially when it showed perspectives from characters that are not point of view characters in the books. Using the source material made the show successful, and in her article, Jones argues that the first season made improvements with a lot of the female characters (20) from the novels and contributes it to changing views regarding women's roles between the publication of the first novel and the first season. For example, scenes with Queen Cersei Lannister and her husband, King Robert Baratheon, where they are simply talking about their lives (Jones,15). The scene shows how the king and queen are both bitter, resentful people but also humanises them to the viewers and gives them an understanding of their characters' motives (season 1 episode 5, 00:43:30-00:49:46). Adaptations frequently expand the source work often giving expanded point of view and perspectives from side-lined characters (Sanders 18-19). This is an excellent example of how the first season looked promising for the continuation of the story and how the show's producers seemed to understand the story and its characters and use it as an opportunity to expand the story from the novels. Therefore, it is even more

disappointing how the later seasons seem to have few, or no similar scenes and often logical plot and character development seem to take the back seat within the story. Adding more material to *GoT* that was not in the novels, changing plotlines or characters are not a problem when it is well done and complements the story as seen in the first seasons.

In earlier seasons Martin was more involved in the making of the show. In the first four seasons he wrote one episode for each season. Martin stated on his blog in 2015 that his withdraw from writing scripts for *GoT* was because he was trying to focus on writing the sixth novel of the series and that the writing should be in good hands with Benioff, Weiss and Brian Cogman writing the sixth season (Martin, “Conventions and Cancelations”). Martin had neither written an episode for season five nor would he for later seasons. There are examples of authors refusing to endorse adoptions of their works (Hutcheon 114). For example, Hemingway felt that too many changes had been made to the plot and character motivations in adapting *A Farwell to Arms* and would not endorse it (Hutcheon 114). This is not the case for Martin, since he never opposed HBO’s *GoT* even though he did not agree with the direction it took. In the book *Tinderbox* Martin says that he became nervous when the show was getting closer to being caught up with the novels and he had to prioritise writing the novels over writing for the television show (Miller ch. 14). Martin has often stated in interviews as he does in *Tinderbox*, a book about HBO and its success, that he wished the television show had run for longer (Miller ch. 16). Even though Martin has not finished the book series, there was still plenty of material left to adapt from the fourth and fifth novel that the show’s creators decided against using, rushing forward with concluding the series without the help of the source material. Paul Haas states in *Tinderbox* that Martin begged HBO to do more seasons of *GoT* and the directors at HBO agreed with him (Miller ch. 16). Haas says that Martin was not happy with Weiss and Benioff for not following the outline that he had laid out for the story after the first five seasons (Miller ch. 16). However, he says that Weiss and Benioff were tired of running the show and wanted to end it despite the wishes of HBO or Martin himself (Miller ch. 16).

### 3. Complex television

As Steiner discusses in his article, showrunners in modern television shows hold a lot of power and are responsible for the quality of producing, writing, and controlling the story's narrative and are supposed to have oversight of the countless factors that go into making television shows today (183). Since the 1990s, television shows defined as complex have become more prominent, starting with HBO's *Sopranos*, and often complex and quality is used interchangeably (Malhara 263). One of the characteristics of this Golden age of television is “the emergence of highly complex and convoluted forms of serial narrative” (Malhara 265). Malhara describes it as “Quality/complex television consists of certain programs that are viewed as superior in terms of content and viewers” (Malhara 265). The definition “narrative complexity” is another definition that describes the same thing. Mittell describes that version of television shows as refusing the need to close the plot within every episode as many television shows do, keeping each episode as a separate story (32). Instead, the narrative complexity model tells an ongoing story (Mittell 32). This form creates a challenge for the viewers and encourages them to engage more actively when viewing as well as being more rewarding than the traditional form of storytelling on television (Mittell 32). Having a narrative complexity in a television show creates more opportunity for a deeper story and ongoing plotting than many other forms of media, such as what creators can do within a two-hour movie (Mittell 31). Therefore, it appeals to the producers' medium as well as the audience since it gives them more opportunity and often more creative control than films (Mittell 31).

*GoT* is a version of complex television and is often regarded as high quality and a high production value drama despite being a fantasy genre show (Steiner 148). It has an ongoing plot over multiple seasons with multiple characters. This, suites it well as an adaptation of the novels since they have a large cast of main characters, and many ongoing plots and earlier seasons reflect that well. Despite the fantastical elements of *GoT*, at its core, it is a story of individuals (Malhara 267). It features a cast of realistic “grey” characters capable of good and evil, making the show appealing to the audience (Malhara 267). This creates expectations from viewers as with other quality television shows to keep up the standers of quality television throughout the series run. Steiner writes in his article that a television adaptation is a good way to satisfy readers of the

novels since this way of storytelling fits Martins writing well with the complex weaving of the narrative (183).

### 3.1 Comparing *Game of Thrones* to other adaptations

*GoT* is far from the only show that has received negative reception from fans in later seasons. Later seasons of *The Walking Dead* faced a backlash after the premiere of season six (Kroener 32). Between the first and second episodes of season seven of *The Walking Dead*, viewership fell from seventeen million to twelve point five million in the United States (Kroener, 32). Disagreement with the direction of the series went so far that some critics online announced they were to stop covering the show, and others even went so far as to encourage people to stop watching the program (Kroener 32). Kroener discusses why this happened, and he concludes that the show failed to live up to viewers' expectations of quality television (32). The first episode of the seventh season had a huge shock factor where two beloved characters are killed brutally (Kroener 40). Kroener says this episode fails to inspire viewers with good storytelling but relies on the shock factor diverting from earlier seasons where good storytelling is prominent (40). The first seasons set the show's expectations high, which means that the producers must meet established expectations of genre fans that the show is quality television since it had already an established fanbase from earlier seasons (Kroener 35). This example is comparable to *GoT* since both shows became lacking in later seasons and did not hold up to fans expectations of how narratively complex and quality television shows should be.

Rick Riordan is an author that is famous for disliking the adaptation of his novels, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*. In 2018 he published a blog post where he discusses his objections to the script of the first movie that was adapted from the first *Percy Jackson* novel (Riordan). There he posts his correspondence to the producer, carefully explaining his problems with the script and how it fails to portray the spirit of his story. His problem is not more minor changes to the story, but how it completely misses the point of the novels and how the adaptation will alienate fans of his stories, which should be the core audience. As he predicted, the reception of the films was poor, and fans of the novels were not satisfied just as the author after reading the scrips (Holub). Only two films were made, and the rest were cancelled after the second one came out. Now Disney+ is working on a mini-series adaptation from the *Percy Jackson*

novels in close contact with Rick Riordan in order to attempt to make a more faithful adaptation that captures the spirit of the novels (Holub). The older *Percy Jackson* adaptations are an example of how the producers failed to listen to the advice of the author of the story and did not understand what made the story popular in the first place. This is comparable to how Martin distanced himself from *GoT* when the show diverted from the novels, and it ended by the story completely missing its mark in many aspects.

### 3.2 Representation of women in *Game of Thrones*

The treatment of women in *GoT* has always been under scrutiny from the beginning of the series (Ferreday 23). Despite having a diverse cast of women, it has still been criticised for its treatment of main female characters. Extreme violence, especially sexual violence against women, has become one of the things the show has been known for (Ferreday 23-24). This has led to much controversy within the fandom, especially within online feminist spaces (Ferreday 24). Jones argues in her article that the fantasy genre has had “a long and sordid history of its depiction of women” (14). She goes on to say that in even more recent history, female protagonists are still few and far between (Jones,14). However, the first novel of *ASoIaF*, *A Game of Thrones*, has a spectrum of diverse female characters, and Jones says that Martin has given them power through political ranks and strength of their own. Needham analysed sexual objectification in *GoT* noting that the show has added several acts of sexual violence against women that are either consensual sex in the novels or not there at all (9). She also claims this becomes more common later in the series (Needham, 9). Needham further claims that the show uses “sexual empowerment” for women that has more to do with the male gaze than the actual empowerment of the women (13). She goes on to reason that “sexual empowerment” is more prevalent than the experiential growth of the characters and argues that this is disappointing since those characters’ stories are far more powerful in the novels than in the show (Needham,13). The added sexual violence against leading women in *GoT* in earlier seasons were early signs of the show’s creators’ willingness to add shock factors into the story, instead of sticking to the source material for no apparent reason other than creating a controversy.

## 4. *Game of Thrones*' story failings and character journeys

In later seasons of *GoT*, many characters' journeys stray far away from their book counterparts. Some diverged from their book characters at the beginning of the television show, while others changed in later seasons. Three prominent characters on *GoT* and their journeys will be explored. What they all have in common is that their later seasons development changes away from formerly established character traits in the television show. Sansa, Daenerys and Tyrion are all characters that were a part of the show from the first season to the last, appearing in every season. They all get long character arcs and developments through the series' eight-season run.

### 4.1 Sansa Stark

Sansa Stark starts her journey in *ASoIaF* as a young, naive girl that hopes that her life will be a fairy-tale. She is in love with the idea that she will marry the beautiful prince and be by his side as his loyal queen. Alesi and Jones both argue that Sansa's traditional feminine qualities have made her one of the more unpopular characters in earlier seasons, especially compared with women that resist the established gender roles within the story (Alesi 161; Jones 17). Sansa is brought to reality late in the first novel when her handsome prince, now king Joffrey, beheads her father after she begs him to show mercy. After that, Sansa concludes that “*There are no heroes... In life, the monsters win*” (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 746), and she stands alone amidst enemies and has to face the threat of violence by them daily. Despite everything Sansa must endure, she remains stoic through it all and refuses to give into the fear and desperation. She has her own way of showing defiance against the people that would do her harm, as powerless as she is. After Joffrey forces her to look at her father's decapitated head, Sansa contemplates pushing him off the ledge they are standing on (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 750). However, she is stopped by Joffrey's bodyguard without Joffrey noticing. Instead of sacrificing herself violently, she shows resistance in more minor ways, as seen when she convinces Joffrey to spare the life of a drunken knight, Ser Dantos (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 45-46). She cooperates with her captors and uses her feminine qualities to survive the court. This is something that many other characters would not survive within the story. As Jones put it in her article: “Her innocence and damsel demeanor fit well into the traditional chivalric female characters who passively await the active men's returns or rescue” (Jones 17). However, throughout the story, she



shows that she is more than just a damsel in distress. Sansa knows how to survive the treacherous court and play along with her captors effectively to save herself and even other people from harm. Furthermore, despite all the horrors she faces, she never loses her kindness.

Sansa in the television show starts her journey similar to Sansa in the novels. The television series represents her as the young, naive girl she was in the books, often the less liked of the two sisters, as Jones states in her article because a modern audience might relate more to the tomboyish Arya (17). Jones descriptions capture Sansa's character and journey well within the first season and novel

However, while Martin uses her as an echo of these past female roles, by the end of the novel and series Sansa develops and awakens to the reality of the world and finds it far darker than the beautiful songs she loves. Her story is very much one of coming into her womanhood and leaving her innocent childhood behind (Jones 17).

After her father's beheading, Sansa learns to live with her enemies, and just as in the novels, she shows kindness to people around her, even though she is being treated cruelly by her captors. The show's creators seem to understand Sansa's character and make viewers sympathise with her, even if she might not be as popular as her sister with the audience. Even in the face of cruelty, her kindness is one of her defining character traits. As in the novels, she saves the knight Ser Dantos from a horrible fate by tricking Joffrey into let him have a more lenient punishment after Ser Dantos shows up drunk to a tourney (season 2, episode 1, 00:05:38-00:07:24). On the television show, she is also shown slyly pressuring Joffrey to put himself into more danger in battle by implying that it would be braver to be where the fighting is thickest, like her brother Robb (Season 2, episode 9, 00:18:58-00:19:57). This shows that she knows who her real enemies are, and she displays resistance, not by physically fighting them but by getting ideas into their heads and playing along with them. In the same episode, she is shown calming down the other ladies at the court when Cersei abandons them. Alesi describes Sansa's strategy as her using traditional feminine qualities to play the game of thrones and says that she learns political intelligence in order to survive (169). The early seasons show examples of how Sansa in the television show, just as in the novels, learns to play "the game of thrones" in her own way, often using her feminine qualities and

cunning to play to her advantage or even just showing general kindness to people around her that have done her no harm.

As discussed, Martin has not finished the *ASoIaF* series, and the source material therefore ran out for the television series. However, the writers decided against using all the source material for Sansa after season four. The season ends with her making a new dress, agreeing to go along with Littlefinger's plans and looks promising that now finally, Sansa will stop being the passive player she has been for much of the story and come into her own (season 4, episode 8, 00:40:50-00:41:14). She is no longer a hostage in Kingslanding to be tortured by Joffrey or Cersei. As Alesi put it in her analysis of Sansa's character journey: "By the time Sansa walks down the steps of the Eyrie in season 4, dressed in a gown she herself has made as a symbolic representation of the identity she has chosen to take control of, she has evolved from pawn to player" (169). In fourth novel, *A Feast for Crows*, Sansa stays in the Vale with Littlefinger, learning from him and playing politics with the Vale lords. However, the show diverges from this plot. In season five, Sansa's story takes over another plot from the fifth novel, where her childhood friend Jane Poole is married against her will to Ramsey Bolton to pretend that Jane is Arya to strengthen the Bolton's claim to the North (Martin, *A Feast for Crows* 353; Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 291). On the show, Sansa's storyline merges with Jane's and Littlefinger convinces her to go north to marry Ramsey. This storyline feels weak and comes off as a strange choice for Sansa. She has spent the more significant part of the first four seasons being tortured by the Lannister, and now she willingly goes to marry one of her family's worst enemies, the son of the man who betrayed and murdered her brother and mother. What comes off as even more illogical is Littlefinger willingly giving Sansa, his most prized possession since she is now the heir to the North, to the Boltons, a family he knows little about since he is oblivious to the fact that Ramsey is a violent sadist who tortures people for his own amusement. Littlefinger has usually been the master manipulator through earlier seasons and a master of playing the political game in Westeros. Yet after Sansa has gotten to know him and learned from him, she still trusts him enough to go to the North after a short speech from Littlefinger that she will get revenge for her family's murder (season 5, episode 3, 00:16:50-00:20:00). She requests no further explanation of his plans and goes north with him. By having Sansa's plot diverge from the story she has in the novels, the

show's creators start to lose sight of her character's journey and make her make choices that make no sense for a character that is supposed to be learning to play "the game of thrones".

The treatment of Sansa Stark in the fifth season of *GoT* became a cause for controversy after the show's creators decided of changing her storyline. She becomes the victim of her new husband's violence, starting with a rape scene on her wedding night that caused outrage within the fan community. As discussed above, violence against women in *GoT*, especially sexual violence against main characters added to the television show, was already a debated topic among fans. After the episode five in season five aired, where she marries Ramsey Bolton, many online reviewers criticised the plot line and had harsh words for the direction *GoT* was taking at that point. Both Robinson and Leon agree that the added sexual violence against Sansa in the story is unnecessary, added little to the plot regarding character development and is put there for shock value (Leon; Robinson "*Game of Thrones Absolutely Did Not Need to Go there with Sansa Stark*"). Leon and Robinson also criticised that the scene does not even focus on Sansa's pain, but instead it lingers on Theon Greyjoy who is forced to watch. It therefore does not even focus on Sansa's suffering, but instead a man who is forced to watch her torture. The violence against Sansa in season five feels way out of line since it seems to serve little to no purpose. By changing Sansa's storyline, the series' creators miss an opportunity to explore the complex political game in Westeros and show growth from Sansa as a player in her own right. Instead, they subject the viewers to even more sexual violence against one of the prominent women in the series.

After all that Sansa has been through, the television series tells the viewers that now Sansa is a strong woman, and the things she has endured have made her strong and wise. She has spent a long time around people who have mastered playing politics and are supposed to have learned from people like Tyrion, Cersei and Littlefinger. However, the later seasons fail to show how Sansa is actually "a smart character" throughout seasons six to eight. Instead, they focus on Sansa's bad relationships with her family and people who would be her allies. She comes off as dislikeable and often treats people around her with distrust, having lost all the kindness that remains in her character in the novels. Season eight shows Sansa making strange political decisions, betraying her family and distrusting people she has no cause to distrust, as they are trying to help her.

The most obvious case of this is Sansa's dislike of Daenerys. At the beginning of the season, Daenerys comes to Winterfell on the bidding of Jon Snow to help the North fight against the White Walkers and the army of the dead. Sansa should therefore have little cause to distrust Daenerys, and even if she does, she should know not to publicly be hostile to a person that is now their ally and a powerful person with a large army and two dragons (season 8, episode 1). Having learned from master manipulators and players in the political games of Westeros, it comes off as ridiculous that Sansa seems to be barely able to control her contempt against Daenerys and is visibly angry with her for no apparent reason. It is understandable that Sansa would be distrusting after all the horrors she has had to face from her enemies; however, she should at least appear to be corporative with a person who is there to help her. In her article, Johnston talks about the long-running traditions of pitting women against women in literature (1). There she says: "Literary history tells us that women set deadly snares for other women, and that women should beware women." (18) and wonders what causes this literary tradition that appears repeatedly in stories (1). The friction between Sansa and Daenerys seems to have no other reason than they are two powerful women and can therefore not be friends. This is despite their journeys and lived experiences being similar in many ways, so they have plenty of common ground. They are both young women, forced into power in a man's world after facings physical and sexual violence from people that should have protected them. Nonetheless, the show's creators seem to decide that there is no way for them to form a friendly bond, and this makes Sansa come off as unreasonable and act like a spoiled child and not as the mature political player that the show keeps on telling us she is.

The first seasons of *GoT* do an excellent job at adapting Sansa's character to the screen. They capture her novel counterpart well and the portrayal of a young naïve girl navigating the dangerous political world of Westeros is a convincing one. However, when the show stops following her journey in the novels, they lose sight of Sansa's main character traits and turn her into an unlikable, unreasonable person far from the smart political player they keep on telling the audience she is. Instead of focusing on her journey of becoming an active political player, they delay her journey to power by subjecting her to even more violence that is not a part of her journey in the novels.

## 4.2 Daenerys Targaryen

The fate of Daenerys and the decision made for her character development proved to be especially conversational for *GoT* ending. In her article Yu says about Daenerys' ending: "Despite the immensely unpopular shift in Daenerys' character arc during the final two episodes, she is the moral heroine of the entire series" (Yu 154). After spending most of her journey on the show trying to be a just and fair ruler and liberating enslaved people, Daenerys turns to madness in the second last episode and burns down a big part of Kingslanding with her last dragon. Daenerys' journey and character development are key things that went wrong in the final seasons of *GoT*. Many fans have called the character's arc a "woeful execution" (Prince 81). The fact that Daenerys turns to madness and into a tyrant ruler is not a fundamental problem, however, the execution of the events leading up to it are poor and ill-prepared.

After spending much of her journey liberating enslaved people in an area in Essos called Slavers Bay, Daenerys is used to be celebrated by the masses where she goes in Essos, as can be seen in seasons three to six. She is less popular with the ruling class in the cities she conquers since Daenerys frees the people they have enslaved and has resorted to severe punishments for people in power who either refuse to obey her or that she feels have mistreated people. An example of this is when in episode four in season four, she crucifies one hundred and sixty-three men of the ruling class in the city Meereen (called "the Masters") as a punishment for them crucifying the same number of enslaved children (season 4, episode 4, 00:10:30-00:11:41). Despite ordering some horrific punishments for people in earlier seasons, within the context of the series, Daenerys' actions are usually understandable, and the story frames her as the hero of her story.

Unlike many other characters, Daenerys' journey throughout the earlier seasons differs in many ways from her journey in the books and some key character moments are changed. A lot of the character development for Daenerys in the books is internally and therefore harder to portray visually. Hutcheon explains that without written monologue, visual adaptations must rely on "visibly, physically embody their responses for the camera to record, or they must talk about their reactions" (25). Despite that, the first season does a satisfactory job of showing Daenerys' growth from a young child sold against her will into a marriage with a man she fears, into a young woman that rises

to power and takes control of her life. As Elwood puts it in her article: “Daenerys grows from a young victim of incessant abuse at the hands of male superiors into a powerful female conqueror and champion of human rights as the renowned Mother of Dragons” (Elwood 121).

Daenerys’ inner conflict in the books often stems from her wanting to be a just and a good ruler but showing that ruling is challenging. The fifth novel focuses primarily on this where Daenerys is serving as a queen in Meereen but finds it hard to choose what policies she should make as she struggles to hold control of a city where the higher classes oppose her rule. Early in the novel, she wants to be kind and fair, but she finds it harder to keep to that policy as the story goes on. In her last chapter of the third novel, she has crucified one hundred and sixty-three masters of the ruling class, just as she did in the television show because of the crucifixions of the slave children they ordered (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 980). Later in the chapter she wonders if she bears the same taint of madness that several her family members had (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 995). This shows that Daenerys is aware of the possibility of inheriting the darker traits of her family. The crucifixions of the masters are still on her mind at the beginning of the fifth novel where she keeps on justifying to herself her actions (Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 41). She even wonders if she went far enough with her punishment since the ruling class of Meereen is still reluctant to obey her (Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 41). This shows the internal battle within Daenerys, wanting to be a good person and a queen yet wanting keep order and have justice for those mistreated like the enslaved people. It also shows how Daenerys is unsure of herself and questions her actions. The fifth novel goes on to explore her inner character motives and how she goes from taking revenge against people that have hurt innocent children to allowing a child to be tortured because its father might have information on her enemies (Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 162-163). The fifth novel highlights Daenerys’ struggle to rule, slowly takes her toward a darker path and shows clear examples of her missteps and darker choices. At the end of the novel Daenerys is seen embracing her family legacy of “Fire and blood” as she states to herself (Martin, *Dance with Dragons* 1031) suggesting her turn to a darker, more ruthless path after she has struggled to find a peaceful way to rule for the entire novel.

The show does not take as much time to show Daenerys' development into a darker path as in the novels. Throughout six seasons, it consistently portrays her more horrific acts as something that could be justified. Examples of this are when Daenerys burns alive the woman, Mirri Maz Duur, who is responsible for her husband's death, despite the Mirri Maz Duur having good reasons for taking revenge against Khal Drogo after he attacked her village where she was raped and her people murdered, as she explains to Dany (season 1, episode 10, 00:26:51-00:29:02, 00:49:32-00:51:43). Dany kills numerous slavers through the story or orders them to be killed (season 3, episode 4, 00:50:17-00:51:12; season 4, episode 4, 00:10:30-00:11:41). She burns a tent full of Dothraki khals, and when she walks out of the tent unburnt, she earns the respect of the Dothraki people that agree to follow her (season 6, episode 4, 00:56:29-00:59:27). In her article, Elwood describes this scene as: "Daenerys smiles at the khals as she sets fire to the temple in which they are all locked, burning them, their temple, and the patriarchy that they represent to the ground" (Elwood 123). Most of Daenerys' acts are shown to be positive power moves, and the deaths they lead to are usually shown to be victories since the victims are evil or at least Daenerys' enemies. Few of her deeds are framed with her as the villain or not morally correct when others question her. There is an exception to this in episode four in season four when her advisor, Ser Barristan Selmy, tells her, "Sometimes it is better to answer injustice with mercy" (00:10:49-00:11:07) when she orders the slave masters to be crucified as punishment for the crucified children. She does not listen to his advice and goes through with it. Later she must face one of the sons of the former masters she ordered to be executed and does show some regret (season 4, episode 6, 00:23:27-00:26:23). However, the audience does not have the access to Daenerys' inner monologue as readers of the novels do and are therefore not privy to any internal conflict she might have on her actions and darker thoughts. Therefore, little focus is on Daenerys' more dark actions in *GoT* until season seven.

When Daenerys arrives in Westeros to conquer the country, she faces a different reception than in Slavers Bay. She is a foreign invader in an already war-torn country (Clarke 7). Daenerys' father was also known as "the mad king", the last monarch of her family dynasty and the later part of his rule is known for his cruelty as a tyrant king where he murdered his subject in horrible ways. Therefore, she is shown in a different

light at her arrival in Westeros because her primary positive fight was to free enslaved people that celebrated her victories. However, unlike in Essos, slavery is already outlawed in Westeros, so Daenerys has few allies that celebrate her arrival to Westeros. Throughout season seven, there is some more moral questioning of Daenerys' actions. This is shown in episode four when she uses her dragon to unleash fire on an opposing army to win the battle. The horrors of this are demonstrated through Tyrion's eyes as he is present on the battlefield. The horrors of war are revealed with slower scenes, with people burning alive and ruination, focusing especially on the dragon's destruction (season 7, episode 4, 00:29:55-00:49:18; season 7, episode 5, 00:05:19-00:06:03). At the end of the battle in following episode, Daenerys cruelty is further shown when she executes the Lord Tarly and his son when they refuse to bend the knee and admit her as queen (season 7, episode 6, 00:06:22-00:11:14). Another example of how *GoT* tries to portray Daenerys' turn to madness is when she makes her dragon burn Varys (season 8, episode 5, 00:13:14-00:14:08) alive after he is caught plotting treason against her, wanting to make Jon Snow king instead of Daenerys (season 8, episode 4, 01:00:25-01:04:00; season 8, episode 5, 00:05:20-00:07:07). However, it is debatable how well those examples show Daenerys turn to a murdering tyrant, since the Tarlys are Daenerys' enemies that refuse to serve her and fought against her in battle and Varys becomes a traitor when he plots against Daenerys. The show establishes in the first episode of the first season that sometimes the ruling people in Westeros execute people when Ned Stark executes a deserter from the Night watch (season 1, episode 1, 00:12:40-00:15:37). There he is not portrayed as a cruel tyrant but as a man doing his duty. The same might be said about Daenerys and her action of executing a leader of an enemy' army when he refuses to surrender and a traitor conspiring treason. The viewers might question what else she is supposed to do with her enemies if she plans on taking over Westeros. Even in the last season, only a few episodes before Daenerys' turn to madness she is still shown trying to do what she believes to be right, temporarily abandoning her quest to conquer Westeros to help defend the North against the invasion of the White walkers.

Since Daenerys turn to madness and a cruel tyrant were ill prepared on the television show it was met with anger and frustration from the fan community. In her article after the episode aired, Dockterman argues that Daenerys turn from saviour to a



villain feels too quick and that the show fails to allow her time to develop into her madness, especially since earlier seasons spend way more time on character development on other characters (Dockterman). She goes on to discuss how there is a difference between showing Daenerys being ruthless to her enemies and murdering innocent people that have done her no harm and have surrendered (Dockterman). In her article Robinson discusses how readers of the *ASoIaF* novels were less surprised about Daenerys turn to madness since they have the access to her thoughts and motives, however, show-only watchers have less understanding of why a beloved character would turn to darkness in the second last episode (Robinson, “*Game of Thrones: Why Daenerys’s Turn Feels Like Such a Betrayal*”). The television show is not able to portray what goes on in Daenerys head as the novels can and the show fails to make up for the lack of information (Robinson. “*Game of Thrones: Why Daenerys’s Turn Feels Like Such a Betrayal*”). Robinson calls Daenerys’s villain story “a terrible gut punch” for fans that have admired her as a strong feminist symbol, a woman overcoming odds against her and surviving in this world.

Overall, there should not have been a problem with turning Daenerys into the villain of the show. However, since it was done without the proper character development after continually showing Daenerys as a heroine for over six seasons it was met with bad reception from the viewers. Failing to do the proper groundwork to portray Daenerys as the villain is a let-down of viewers’ expectations and what to expect from an established quality television series.

#### 4.1 Tyrion Lannister

Tyrion Lannister is the younger son of the feared Tywin Lannister. He is a dwarf and faces a lot of discrimination because of his disability, despite being a smart and clever person. Tyrion in the novels is a complicated character and morally grey. Yu and Tamara describe him in their article as “...one of the most level-headed leaders in *Game of Thrones* and uses his charm and intellect (e.g., human and technical skills) to push and develop people in the right direction” (Yu 152). Early on Tyrion shows his ability to play the game of thrones and does not let his disability inhibit him from taking his role as a leading political player (Tarnowski 90). Yu and Tamara discuss how despite his disability, being a dwarf in a society that is constantly discriminating against him, he manages to get people to his side and gain the respect of people around him (Yu 152).

Throughout the story, Tyrion is shown to be both capable of doing great and horrible things.

Tyrion is one of the main characters most changed from the novels in *GoT*. Tyrion is often described as ugly and struggling with his physical repercussions in the novels, while Peter Dinklage is a much more handsome and striking figure than his book counterpart (Tarnowski 96). Tyrion in the novels is also a more morally grey character than on the television show. In the novels he often does things excluded from the television show. Examples of this are when he is ruling as the hand of the king in the second novel, *A Clash of Kings*, where he makes more morally questionable choices than when he serves the same role in *GoT*. He, for example, poisons his sister so she cannot sit an important meeting where he does not want her (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 400). Furthermore, he orders a singer that knows about his secret mistress, to be murdered and suggest that he could be cooked into a soup (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 432). In their article Kovács states that Tyrion uses both hard and soft power to rule, and he uses “monstrosity” to get his way when he uses his power to harm those in his way (4-5). An example that shows the stark contrast between Tyrion in the novels and the television show is the scene where he goes to find his father after Tywin has ordered his execution for a murder Tyrion is innocent of. This takes place at the end of the third novel, *A Storm of Swords*. There Tyrion finds his former mistress, Shae, in his father’s bed (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 1070) In the novel he murders her in cold blood, angry at her betrayal (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 1071). However, in the television show, he kills her more in self-defence after Shae reaches for a knife when she realises it is Tyrion that has entered the room (season 4, episode 10, 00:56:28-00:58:44). This shows how the show’s creators are unwilling to portray Tyrion in a bad light and prefer to have him as a more traditional hero instead of the morally grey character he appears as in the novels.

This becomes evident in later seasons when Tyrion’s journey becomes less and less like Tyrion’s development in the novels. Kovács argue that often Tyrion has a noble goal in mind in the second novel, *A Clash of Kings*, such as protecting the capital and he uses his power for justice, therefore Tyrion in the novels is an example of a complicated character with both shameless monstrosity and morality within him (6). Later in his journey in the novels Tyrion’s path darkens. Tyrion spends most of the fifth

novel, *A Dance with Dragons*, in a dark place after he has murdered Shae and his father and flees Westeros. His main ambition in life is to rape and murder his sister Cersei to get revenge against her, as he states himself (Martin, *A Dance with Dragon* 405). He also rapes a young girl that is in sex slavery (Martin, *A Dance with Dragon* 318). The show does not take Tyrion on the dark path he goes on in the fifth novel and instead focuses on his ambition to do good for Westeros and his belief that Daenerys will make a good ruler (season 5, episode 8, 00:04:00-00:08:05, 00:21:36-00:26:44).

However, the main problem with Tyrion's development in *GoT* is not that he is not a perfect replication of his novel counterpart. The problem is that Tyrion in the later seasons is not the same clever character he has been established to be in earlier seasons. The first seasons have many examples of how he can talk people into doing his bidding and outsmarts both his allies and enemies. For instance when he talks the mountain clans in the Vale into serving him instead of killing him and Bron (season 1, episode 8, 00:22:03-00:24:24), when he tricks his advisors into reviling who is betraying him to his sister (season 2, episode 3, 00:26:03-00:30:00, 00:35:19-00:36:39, 00:38:37-00:41:37) and how he plans the defence of Kingslanding and holds the city until his father comes to his rescue (season 2, episode 9 00:24:18-00:28:26, 00:33:08-00:33:37, 00:41:21-00:46:01, 00:49:50-00:51:47). It is worth noting that all those instances are adaptations of scenes from the novels. However, in later seasons Tyrion makes a series of errors and almost all the council and advice he gives to Daenerys turns out to be wrong. Examples of this are how he is unable to keep the peace and prevent the attack on Meereen when Daenerys is away after he makes a deal with their enemies (season 6, episode 4, 00:14:47-00:18:24; season 6, episode 8, 00:32:05-00:32:05, season 6, episode 9, 00:03:33-00:06:16). After their return to Westeros Tyrion's bad advice becomes even more problematic, when his advice leads Daenerys to lose many of the strongholds of their allies as he advises Daenerys against using her dragons and showing her full force which leads to more unnecessary deaths of their allies (season 7, episode 2, 00:04:28-00:05:02; 00:21:15-00:23:57, 00:51:22-00:58:04; season 7, episode 3, 00:51:20-01:02:36; season 7, episode 4, 00:26:01-00:27:25). Tyrion also advises Daenerys and her allies to have talks with Cersei (season 7, episode 5, 00:24:46-00:26:27), after Cersei has shown that she is untrustworthy and has never wanted to help anyone that does not serve her personal interests. Cersei than goes and betrays

them, showing that Tyrion's council is incorrect (season 7, episode 7, 01:00:55-01:06:03). In her article, Dockterman even goes as far as blaming Tyrion and Daenerys's other advisors for her turn to madness since their repeated bad council which leads her to losing two of her dragons, her allies and a large part of her army (Dockterman). This makes the viewers question how clever Tyrion actually is and how much his council is worth to Daenerys and is a stark change from how Tyrion was portrayed in earlier seasons and even further from his portrayal in the novels.

Tyrion is far from the only character perceived to be intelligent and clever and makes many unforgivable mistakes in later seasons. Littlefinger and Varys also suffer from this. As already discussed in Sansa's chapter, Littlefinger sells Sansa in season five to the Bolton family as a part of a convoluted plan to make Cersei think that the Boltons have betrayed her (season 5, episode 6, 00:25:06-00:28:59). However, this leads Littlefinger to lose Sansa's trust and to his eventual demise when he is executed on orders of the three Stark siblings after the all-knowing Bran reveals to his sisters that Littlefinger betrayed their father in season one (season 7, episode 7, 00:55:06-01:00:44). This is a strange death for one of the most clever and capable players of the game of thrones, which is largely responsible for orchestrating the events that lead to the wars in earlier seasons. Varys is yet another example of a character who is a clever and capable player of the game of thrones and makes a series of strange errors in later seasons. The most grievous is that he openly discusses treason against Daenerys with Jon Snow and Tyrion Lannister (season 8, episode 4, 01:00:25-01:04:00; season 8, episode 5, 00:05:20-00:07:07). This is after Daenerys warns him that she will have him executed if he betrays her (season 7, episode 7, 00:05:02-00:08:26). After she finds out, she has her dragon burn him alive, as discussed in Daenerys' chapter earlier. Tyrion, Littlefinger and Varys are all examples of clever characters that start to suffer from lack of source material in later seasons of *GoT* and lose their core characteristics and become shadows of their former selves from earlier seasons.

Tyrion's character change in the television series from his portrayal in the novels is not a problem even though some might not agree with the choice and would argue that Tyrion should stay the morally grey character that often can be found in narratively complex television shows. The issue with Tyrion's character portrayal in later seasons is that by failing to show Tyrion as the clever and smart person he used to

be in earlier seasons, the show is failing to live up to established viewers' expectations as a quality television show it had established itself to be. This development starts with Tyrion long before the final season although it lasts through the end of the show. The troubles of Tyrion's illogical decision making has its roots when the show's creators drift further away from the character's journey in the novels.

## 5. Conclusion

*GoT* was, in many aspects, a successful television show that received much praise and awards for its success. However, the final season received a lot of criticism for the ending and left many fans of the series disheartened and unsatisfied. The showrunners seem to have lost sight on their way to the conclusion on what made the show popular and appealing to fans. The first seasons followed the format of a complex series narrative. Therefore, they created expectations for fans who expected more of the series, both as an adaptation from the novels and a successful show that left much of the logical plot from earlier series behind and valued shock factor more over a logical conclusion. Many characters lose their main character traits in later seasons; for example, Tyrion stops making good strategic decisions when he has been known as one of the cleverest characters of the series. Sansa loses her kindness and becomes a shell of herself while being portrayed as the “strong woman” after suffering horrible violence. Daenerys becomes mad in the second last episode after little build-up. Those are just three of many characters that *GoT* fails to do justice. The failings and bad receptions of the final seasons were built upon the shaky foundations of the latter half of the show’s run when the showrunners stopped following the novels on which the show is based. The diversion from the novels was not the problem, but the diversions from the previously established character traits and plot logic within the show led to this conclusion. It did not comply with fans’ expectations and therefore led to loud criticism of the show. Therefore, it could be said that *GoT* started as an excellent adaptation of the *ASoIaF* novels from season one to four and a failed original television show from season five to eight.

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