

Remediating Pornography in *Game of Thrones*: Where Sex and Memory Intertwine<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** remediation, porn studies, cultural memory, historical fiction, orientalism.

**Abstract:** This paper analyses pornographic representations of sex and attitudes with respect to homosexuality in *Game of Thrones*. By relying on what Astrid Erll calls a media conscious approach to cultural memory, I hope to link the pornographic conventions used when filming sex with the memory of the civilizing mission, and the stigmatization of homosexuality with the memory of the early modern negative stereotype about the regions around the Mediterranean. In the former case I am interested in the way the film repurposes pornography in order to shed light upon the shifts in the power relations between Kahl Drogo, the Dothraki leader and Daenerys Targaryen, his wife from Westeros, while in the latter I am interested in the way homosexuality is used as a marker of difference and decadence for Doren, the extreme southern part of Westeros.

### Introduction

HBO's highly popular TV series, *Game of Thrones*, stands out among other historical fiction series due to its very high production value, entangled plot, and explicit display of sex and violence. In the present paper I wish to weigh in on the pornographic side of the film and analyse it from a media conscious cultural memory perspective. I would like to state from the very beginning that, although I am aware that *Game of Thrones* is an adaptation of George R. Martin's series of novels entitled *A Song of Fire and Ice*, my approach is neither informed by adaptation studies, nor transmedia story-telling approaches. In other words, I will not be

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\* Andrei Nae is a doctoral student and teaching associate at the University of Bucharest. His Ph.D. thesis, tentatively entitled "Immersion in New Media," tries to provide an analysis of narratives in first person and third person shooters.

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taking the novel into account in my analysis of *Game of Thrones*, which, of course, does by no means imply that such a line of criticism is not worth pursuing.

In the first part of my paper I discuss the methodology I employ. The focus is on the issue of remediation as it is used today in cultural memory studies. A rather lengthy part of this section is devoted to establishing that TV series and pornography are different media in order to vouchsafe the application of the concept of remediation. My argument relies on the three-folded definition of media elaborated by Marie-Laure Ryan, a definition that factors in the semiotic, technological, and social aspects of media. Afterwards, I dwell on the pornographic film and discuss two of its genres: hardcore and softcore. My next step is to analyse the story of Daenerys Targaryen as the wife of Khal Drogo, with the purpose of revealing the intimate connection between the remediation of pornographic film genres, power relations and the cultural memory of Enlightened absolutism. In this section I reveal how conventions of hardcore and softcore porn films are used to highlight the beginning of Daenerys' rise to political prominence. Lastly, I inspect how orientalist tropes travel from the East to the South in order to reinforce the difference of Dorne relative to King's Landing.

## **1. Methodology**

### **1.1 What Is Remediation?**

As announced, the main concept that I will be using in my analysis is that of remediation. The concept of remediation was coined by Bolter and Grusin in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, a title clearly hinting at McLuhan's seminal work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. In their book, Bolter and Grusin make an ontological statement regarding media, by claiming that media find themselves in a state of

interconnectedness. They always refer to one another through a process of imitation or incorporation, which Bolter and Grusin name “remediation” (45). The impetus behind remediation is each new medium’s claim that it can better deliver a sense of immediacy, i.e. the impression that there is no medium between the reader/viewer/user/player and the object of representation<sup>2</sup> (6): “The assumption of reform is so strong that a new medium is now expected to justify itself by improving on a predecessor” (59). A good example in this respect would be digital photography, which integrates the perspective used in painting in Albertian windows (26). The counterpoint of immediacy is hypermediacy, which is the attempt not to erase mediation, but to highlight it. The internet is considered a medium thriving on hypermediacy due to its evident incorporation of other media such as video or photos which are displayed in windows.

Nevertheless, one should not believe that it is only new media which remediate the older ones. Old media tend to do the same: “What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media” (15). A good example in this respect would be the way films incorporate computer graphics in order to achieve special effects (147).

## **1.2 What Are Media?**

If remediation is the process of a medium imitating another, then it is necessary for the two cultural products underlined to belong to different media. As a result, in order to be able to speak about TV series remediating pornography, I first have to demonstrate that TV series and pornographic films are different media. Before any such attempt can be made, I

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<sup>2</sup> Another term often used with the similar sense is that of medium transparency (Calleja 23).

must first explain what media are. Marie-Laure Ryan contends that media are to be regarded from three perspectives. First she regards them as semiotic phenomena and therefore defines media according to the “codes and semiotic channels” they use. She distinguishes between three categories: verbal, visual and aural media (18). The next step which Ryan takes is to further refine her understanding of media and to examine them from a technological perspective. Here Ryan takes into account raw materials as well as technologies, but doesn’t forget

[...] to distinguish technologies of pure reproduction, such as sound recording or xerox copying, from technologies that create new media objects and open new expressive possibilities. [...] Moreover, not all technologies that bring expressive diversity in a media family do so in a narratively significant way. In the sound category, for instance, diversity is created by the various musical instruments developed through the ages, but none of them has significantly increased the limited narrative potential of music (21).

Ryan is interested in media inasmuch as they are containers of narratives. Therefore, for Ryan, two technologies are considered different media only if they have different sets of narrative affordances. This dovetails with the fact that the final narrative product is shaped by the technological affordances and limitations of the technological platform. These technological media are not clear subcategories of the verbal, visual, and aural; instead, some media use more semiotic channels and modes, while others use only one.

Lastly, Ryan looks at the social dimension of media in order to further refine these categories. Media presuppose a particular social protocol, a cultural use (23), which doesn’t take into account the semiotic or the technological side. That is to say, the same technology

can evince two media if there are two different cultural practices associated with it. “Newspapers, for instance, rely on the same semiotic channels and printing technology as books, but <<the press>> is widely regarded by sociologists as a medium in its own right [...]” (24).

Ryan’s threefold definition of media is supported by other important scholars in the field as well. Although maybe not as clearly and elaborately, Henry Jenkins also highlights the semiotic, technological and social sides of media. In his book *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*, the author contends that media have always been the same, but that the technological tools of access to them, what he calls “delivery technologies” (13), have changed. For example, “[r]ecorded sound is the medium. CDs, MP3 files, and 8-track cassettes are delivery technologies” (13). Moreover, Jenkins mentions that the social dimensions of media are independent of the technological support,

[..] a medium is a set of associated ‘protocols’ or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology. Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems. *Delivery technologies come and go all the time, but media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment stratum.* (14; emphasis mine)

Technology is therefore transitory and media often inhabit different technologies. What constitutes their identity is not a particular technological support, but rather the social protocol developed around them.

Bolter and Grusin, too, highlight the importance of the social dimension of media, but analyse the matter from a slightly different angle. Unlike Ryan and Jenkins, they look at the social dimension of the concept of immediacy. Their claim is that our experience of

something as “real” and “authentic” is culturally contingent and consequently that immediacy is a cultural construct (71). As a result, when a new medium emerges with the contention that it can provide a higher degree of immediacy, there has to appear a dominant discourse that can sanction the capacities of the new medium. This discourse must be supported by cultural institutions with discursive authority. “The appeal to authenticity of experience is what brings the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy together. This appeal is *socially constructed*, for it is clear that not only individuals, but also various social groups can vary in their definitions of the authentic.” (71; emphasis mine). The example they give is that of photography, which

provides an important example of the social debate that can surround the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy. When Niepce, Daguerre, Talbot, and others claimed immediacy for their new medium, they were seeking to control its social construction. A long and complicated debate followed, with important figures such as Baudelaire arguing in opposition, but in general the case for immediacy succeeded, and Western societies accepted the idea that a photograph truly captures the world. Digital photography is now challenging that claim to immediacy. (72)

We can clearly see at this point that there is, if not consensus, then at least a significant number of authorities in the field that sanction the understanding of media in semiotic, technologic and social terms. We can also observe that the three facets are interconnected and that the move from the semiotic to the social implies a progressive diversification of media. The question that I nevertheless wish to ask is whether this approach does not make the concept of “medium” too liquid.

Ryan and Jenkins themselves acknowledge the flexibility of the concept when they mention that semiotic channels get to be randomly used and combined by technological media, and that technologies are transitory. What brings stability to their definition of media is the social protocol, which transcends technological change. Yet, as I show in the next paragraphs, the weakness of their argument lies in the very claim that is supposed to tie in all the three facets of media.

Technological shifts often determine changes in their cultural use. Initially, watching a film implied going to the cinema. This presupposes an entire social protocol related to the very watching of the film as well as the events occurring around the watching itself. The film starts at a fixed time, you arrive at the cinema earlier in order to buy tickets. Before the film begins, you see trailers of other films, you may also be tempted to buy popcorn and soda. While the film is running, it cannot be paused so, if you have to go to the bathroom, you will inevitably miss a part of the movies.

This complex social protocol which embeds the film is dramatically changed if you choose to watch the film on your PC, for instance. This time it is you who decides when the film begins, you are not obliged to watch any trailer beforehand, you do not wait in line for any ticket, and if you want to go to the bathroom, you can simply pause the film.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the example above is that social protocols are in fact unstable and depend on technological support. Moreover, it would also be difficult to argue that, even if the technology remained the same, these social protocols wouldn't be subject to historic changes, as the whole culture they are a part of is. Bearing this in mind, let us now have a look at the two allegedly different media that concern this paper: television series and pornographic films.

### **1.3 Are TV Series and Pornographic Films Different Media?**

As far as semiotic channels and codes are concerned, both television series and pornographic films employ all three of them: the verbal, the visual, and the aural. Technologically, they are compatible with basically any platform with a screen, which includes the TV set and the computer and, production-wise, they use the same film grammar: scenes, cuts, camera work, decor, etc. Socially, they evince similar protocols if they are viewed on TV or on the computer. In the first instance one still has to tune in when the show begins. When dealing with the PC, we encounter the same protocol for both TV series and pornographic films, as described above. As a result, would it not be more adequate to regard television series and pornographic films as genres of the digital medium?<sup>3</sup> Especially considering that TV sets are becoming digital? Now we have smart TVs that even allow for pausing and accessing internet databases of TV channels that let the user play a particular TV show whenever the user pleases, provided that the show had already been aired.

While I do see a point in this proposal and I may even dare to predict that this may be the dominant view on media in the future, given the state of today's technology, I believe that the view endorsed by Ryan and Jenkins is still valid. In spite of the fact that I admit that social protocols are unstable, we can still distinguish dominant social protocols that transcend technological support. Additionally, one cannot ignore that, although the digital age has given cultural products the ability to travel from one technological platform to another, there are still some dominant choices when it comes to selecting the platform used for viewing and, most importantly, authors, too, design their cultural products for a particular medium. One might

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<sup>3</sup> I am using Lev Manovich's understanding of the digital. In his book, *Language of New Media*, the author defines new media according to five principles: the first two represent the core definition of digital new media, while the remaining three are deducted from the first two. Basically, Manovich claims that digital content is alpha-numerically coded (the first principle) and discontinuous, i.e. made out of smaller samples (the second principle) (49-51).

even go further and assert that the author's desired medium for reception becomes a norm buttressed on the post-romantic cultural capital of the auteur.

In light of this, let us return to television series and pornography. Are they different media after all? My contention is that indeed they are. Although both TV series and pornography make use of the same filmic language, the technological platform used by each shapes their narrative structure. In the case of TV series, for instance, script writers include narrative hooks right in the middle of the episodes for the broadcaster to be able to insert a commercial break and not lose the viewer's attention. Another characteristic of the TV series is the presence of narrative arcs that cut across episodes in order to knit them together and compel the viewer to tune in to the next episode (Mittel 165). These aspects of the narrative design are determined by the technological platform: having the TV in your home means it is easy for the viewer to watch a 100-hour visual material over the course of, say, 10 consecutive weeks. Imagine how bizarre it would be to have to go to the cinema every week in order to watch an episode. Moreover, many viewers choose to watch series on their TV sets because of their immersive qualities. Today's big flat screens provide a higher sense of immediacy than the monitor of a laptop, or a tablet. Thirdly, in terms of social protocols, TV series can be watched in the living room with other people around.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike TV series, the technological platform used to watch pornographic films has suffered significant changes in the past decades. Pornographic films have travelled from the adult theatre to the TV set, on cable network or VHS/DVD, and, of course, the internet. Although the VHS and the DVD make use of the TV set as well, the fact that the image is not aired via the cable network, but rendered by the VHS or DVD player, implies that we are dealing with another technological medium with different narrative affordances. For instance,

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<sup>4</sup> I am very aware of the fact that the technological and the social are so interconnected that it is often impossible to speak about the former without implying the latter.

if you watch a DVD, you can pause, rewind, or fast forward, whereas in the case of TV series, this is impossible. A liminal example is the pornographic cable network. Here, the serial narrative affordances of the TV set merge with pornography's demands for arousal. This has led to the proliferation of softcore, which, as I argue in the next section, is not a standalone genre and its non-explicit sexual content places it outside the X-rated adult network (Andrews 1).

In spite of the different bearings that the technological platform may have on the pornographic film, due to its purpose to sexually arouse the viewer, one of its defining traits is its necessity to present one or more sexual numbers with various degrees of explicitness depending on the genre (a more detailed account of pornographic films and their genres is provided in the following section). The importance of the sexual number downplays the narrative, leading to a narrative-number structure of the film which stresses the latter (Williams 130; Andrews 2). This means that a pornographic film has to alternate between scenes that push the story forward and scenes depicting sexual intercourse that allegedly have no diegetic contribution, with the running time allotted to the number scenes is bigger than the one allotted to the narrative scenes.

As far as the social protocols associated with the watching of pornographic films are concerned, we once again have to take into account the different platforms. Although viewing pornographic films may be a social event similar to that of going to the average cinema in the case of adult movie theatres, the watching of pornographic films requires the private, intimate context provided by the personal computer or the TV set. Due to its explicit sexual content, it is unlikely for one to watch a pornographic film while going to work on public transportation.

Therefore, although both TV series and pornography use filmic language, the structuring and nature of their content is determined by the producers' goals to have the viewer tune in regularly and arouse the viewer, respectively, as well as by the way in which

the two media use the narrative affordances and limitations of their technological platforms. As far as the social protocol is concerned, while watching TV series in public is not taboo, watching pornographic films requires intimacy.

#### **1.4 Memorial Remediation**

Having established that TV series and pornographic films are different media, I shall now look at remediation as it is employed in cultural memory studies. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney claim that memory texts<sup>5</sup> are not static, but rather, they travel from one medium to another and, by doing so, they fundamentally help us remember or forget the past (2). The contribution of Erll and Rigney to the field is that, unlike previous accounts, they play up the importance of the medium in shaping the memorial cultural product,

[...] media are more than merely passive and transparent conveyors of information. They play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past, in ‘mediating’ between us (as readers, viewers, listeners) and past experiences, and hence in setting the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society. (3)

Because media and memory are so intimately connected, Erll and Rigney claim that memorial cultural products are subject to the same process of remediation. There is no memorial mediation without remediation, since each representation carries the entire history of previous mediations along with the technological history of the medium (4). Therefore, remediation functions on two levels. Firstly, there is the formal/technological level where

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<sup>5</sup> When I use the word “text” I also take into account images, music, and basically all codes used for communication.

each new medium remediates previous media, and, secondly, there is the memorial level where each new memorial cultural product remediates previous representations/mediations of the same past event. Remediation is, therefore, a closed circle, not unlike Derrida's chain of signifiers. Derrida deconstructs the classical structuralist binary opposition by claiming that one can never arrive from the signifier to the signified, since the latter is always already constituted by other signifiers. Derrida concludes that there is in fact no raw signifier that transcends language (10-11). Similarly, there is no raw memorial object representation that transcends mediation, since the object of representation is always already deferred.

It is also important to mention the relevance of discourse and its relationship to memorial cultural products. Just as media depend on discourse to sanction them as capable of providing immediacy, memorial cultural products depend on discourse in order to attain validity, authenticity, and be sanctioned as accurate representations of the past. Media and memory are not only interconnected, but they are also part of a wider network of mediations that are paradoxically both in a struggle for prominence and in a quest for imitation. Bolter, Grusin, Erll, and Agney seem to contend that the way to prominence is imitation of the prominent.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. Filming Sex: Hardcore vs. Softcore**

In the previous section I argued that TV and pornography are different media, in order to show that the concept of "remediation" can be used to explain TV's attempt to imitate porn films. In this section I focus on pornographic film and two of its genres: hardcore and softcore.

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<sup>6</sup> It would be very interesting to look at this paradoxical relationship between mediations from René Girard's psychoanalytical perspective, which sheds light precisely upon the mechanisms behind envy.

According to Linda Williams and David Andrews, what defines the content of a pornographic film is its narrative-number structure. A porno film consists of a story and a series of sexual numbers (performances of sex) whose aim is to arouse the viewer (Williams 5). Both authors highlight the fact that, although in a porno the number functions as the main point of attraction, one should not downplay the importance of the framing narrative and, furthermore, that narrative and number inform one another. No narrative is devoid of sexual content aiming at arousal, while no number is of no consequence for diegesis. (Williams 130; Andrews 2)

## **2.1 Hardcore Porn Films**

While all porno films contain numbers, not all numbers are alike. Depending on the genre, the visual content of the number, as well as its production are different. In the case of hardcore porn, the number is an explicit portrayal of unstimulated sexual intercourse. Geared by male curiosity towards female pleasure (Williams 2-3), heterosexual hardcore seeks to offer a realistic representation of sexual intercourse. The realism or immediacy of the sexual intercourse and its subsequent arousal are nevertheless culturally mediated, since the representation of sex abides by conventions established by the dominant patriarchal culture (Williams 121).

To begin with, there is exaggerated explicitness of the sex act. In order to gratify the curious male gaze, the hardcore porn film must show as much as possible of the sexual act: the positions of the actors are best suited to reveal as much as possible and films abound in close-ups of the actors' genitalia. Linda Williams lists a series of scenes that are typical of hardcore porn films: female masturbation, straight-sex, lesbianism, ménage à trois, orgies, anal sex, and the sadie-max, that is, "a scene depicting sadomasochistic relations such as

whipping, spanking, or bondage, performed with or without paraphernalia” (Williams 126-7). The last and probably most relevant scene, judging by the genre’s desire to show it all, is the money shot (Williams 93). In a hardcore film, ejaculation has to be made explicit, so the film almost always finds a way to show the viewer the semen of the male actor.

In keeping with the purpose of immediacy is the use of synchronized sound. While today’s recording technology does allow for the sound of intercourse to be recorded while filming (and not added later as it was the case in the 70s and 80s), “the smack of a kiss or a slap, the slurp of fellatio and cunnilingus, the whoosh of penetration engulfment, not to mention the sounds of bedsprings” (Williams 123) are turned up to create the illusion of closeness. Yet this illusion of closeness is sometimes flaunted by the distance between the actors and the camera (Williams 122-3). In this case, porno is more than real, it is hypermedial.

Another important characteristic of hardcore porn is the way number inflects narrative. According to Linda Williams, in hardcore porn, diegesis is not an excuse for the sexual number, but rather the two work together in leading the story to a resolution (130). Like any narrative, a hardcore porn film needs to feature a disequilibrium of its storyworld, which is caused by an inciting incident (131). Hardcore porn’s inciting incident is an “eruptio[n] of (hetero)sexual desire into an already established social order” (Neale qtd. in Williams 131). The ensuing conflict revolves around the desire to achieve sexual fulfilment in spite of the obstacles posed throughout the film (Williams 133-4, 147). The main obstruction of thorough sexual gratification is the gender opposition, male vs. female, which is accompanied by secondary oppositions predicated on ethnic, racial or class difference. A feature-length hardcore porn film will try to work out these differences and achieve a utopian mediation between the primary and secondary oppositions (Williams 134-6). Consequently, the initial sex scene is tedious, lacking in passion and spontaneity, and consequently, not leading to a

thorough sexual fulfilment, due to the oppositions between the sex partners. By contrast, after a negotiation between the primary and secondary oppositions in the rising action, the resolution of conflict is represented by a sex scene that is pleasurable to both participants. Often, this last scene presents a mediation between the sexual desires of the two partners involved and brings along the resolution of the secondary oppositions as well (Williams 144-6).

One final aspect of hardcore porn films that can be regarded as a defining trait is their treatment of female pleasure. The film's apparently transparent, "neutral" interest in female pleasure is in fact an ideologically geared one. Women in hardcore porn films express their pleasure according to patriarchal norms that are suited to please the gaze of the male viewer (Williams 4, 138).

## **2.2 Softcore Porn Films**

Unlike hardcore porn, softcore is more loosely defined. According to David Andrews, it "refers to any feature length narrative whose diegesis is punctuated by periodic moments (typically between eight and twelve, though more is not exceptional) of simulated, nonexplicit sexual spectacle," the softcore equivalent of hardcore's number (2). Softcore is a genre that is almost remediated by other TV genres (1). While this remarkable adaptability has ensured its survival in the age of cable TV, it has also granted it a hybrid status (23). A softcore film has to negotiate between its pornographic impetus to trigger the sexual arousal of the audience and its cinematic impetus to aesthetically please the audience through its story (21).

While heterosexual hardcore porn is a genre whose suitability for the male gaze which restrains female pleasure within the patriarchal code and reifies women has brought about the accusation of misogyny, especially from anti-porn feminists, softcore, in its departure from its

previous form (known as sexploitation), has undergone a process of “feminization” which makes it palatable to a female audience and provides a (nevertheless) weak defence against feminist criticism (11). Even though softcore is still interested in female pleasure and arguably offers the same kind of voyeuristic spectacle by laying stress on female nudity and masturbatory scenes (male masturbation is still a taboo in softcore), the genre has appropriated some important tenets of feminist ideology and refashioned them to fit commercially viable norms. As a result, the reification of women is compensated by an assertion of agency, choice, and self-respect. Women in softcore films have a complex psychological and moral profile (14), they express their sexual desire, without it being castigated as in softcore’s forefather, the sexploitation film (15). Moreover, as a sort of compensation for the reification that women undergo in their sexual spectacles, softcore films evince misandry in their depictions of men (13).

### **3. Sexual Pedagogy and Civilizing the Dothraki: Remediating the Cultural Memory of the Enlightened Monarch**

After exposing the methodology and highlighting the differences between the ways in which sex is filmed in the two media, it is time to finally refer to *Game of Thrones*. In this section I will focus on the story of Daenerys Targaryen, originally from Westeros, who, as wife of Kahl Drogo, makes her way up the social ladder to a politically powerful position in Essos.

Before properly referring to Daenerys’ position, we must first have a look at the Dothraki. The portrayal of the Dothraki community tunes in very well with the Western conception of pre-modern peoples. They are nomad, barbaric and underdeveloped, organised in clans centred on one leader, the khalasar, who also has to be the most reputed warrior. Their

social order is highly patriarchal and based on a very stark warrior prestige, which revolves around the length of each warrior's braid. It is custom that once a Dothraki warrior is defeated, his braid is cut off, therefore, the longer the braid, the longer the winning streak. Another trait of pre-modernity is the use of oral culture to pass down knowledge from one generation to another. Whenever one mentions a fact about the world, it is preceded by "It is known." Their barbaric state is also suggested by the way the Dothraki undergo sexual intercourse. There is only one admitted sexual position, namely the one presupposing penetration from behind in an animal-like fashion. It is to this patriarchal and hierarchical social order that Daenerys is introduced by her brother, who forces her to marry Kahl Drogo, hoping that the latter would help him accede to the iron throne. Matt Hardy claims that the depiction of the nomadic Dothraki pays tribute to Western orientalist depictions of the Mongols (415).

### **3.1 The Marriage Bed: The First Political Battleground**

The conflict of the narrative arc of the first season is based on the opposition between the Dothraki's rigid patriarchal social order and Daenerys, who wishes to climb up the social ladder to a central political position. The political conflict of the narrative arc is then instantiated into conflicts that are resolved at the end of each episode, which together contribute to the resolution of the greater conflict of the narrative arc, Daenerys' acceding to power. One such conflict is presented in the second episode of the first season, "The Kingsroad." Here, Daenerys' struggle with the Dothraki social order is in its incipient stage. Before the heroine can assert herself politically in the community, she must first impose her will in the marriage bed.

In order to represent the political conflict between Kahl Drogo and Daenerys Targaryan in “The Kingsroad,” the TV series remediates pornography by employing a number-narrative structuring of the content, as well as hardcore and softcore generic conventions. The first number is preceded by a scene featuring Kahl Drogo drinking with his men. All of a sudden, he stands up and goes into his tent to have sex with Daenerys. This is a typical hardcore pornographic inciting moment representing a spontaneous outburst of (hetero)sexual desire. What ensues is once again in keeping with the conventional unfolding of number-narrative structure of hardcore porn films. The first number is a banal (judging by Dothraki standards) penetration from behind lacking passion and excitement, which doesn’t lead to complete gratification. Kahl Drogo does not show signs of great enjoyment, while Daenerys is in pain.

An opposition arises between Kahl Drogo’s desire to achieve sexual fulfilment and Daenerys’ reluctance against her imposed husband. This primary sexual opposition between the two characters is also informed by secondary oppositions based on cultural identity and social status. Firstly, because she is from Westeros, in Essos Daenerys is a cultural other who not only is unaccustomed to the Dothraki ways, but, according to her Western vista, also finds their ways repulsive. As a result, it should come as no surprise that the Dothraki way of having sex is met with unwillingness on Daenerys’ part. Secondly, the sexual position adopted presupposes an active male role and passive female role, thus reflecting the Dothraki patriarchal social order where women are supposed to lack agency. Furthermore, while the sexual number abides by softcore filmic conventions, according to which sex is simulated and the genitalia of the characters are not to be shown, the TV series provides the audience with the whole aural spectrum of a rough sex act in keeping with hardcore porn conventions. The TV series, then, repurposes these latter conventions in order to highlight male dominance in the sex act and, metonymically, in the Dothraki society.

Another noteworthy element here is the misandristic attitude evinced by the episode. In softcore, female protagonists are either emancipated women, or women in process of becoming emancipated who have to deal with base men whom they more often than not scorn (David 149). In *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys is a woman who is gradually becoming politically emancipated in a hostile “savage” world. By encouraging the audience to empathize with Daenerys, whose agony during the sex act is highlighted by the close shot on her crying face, Kahl Drogo is perceived in a negative light as an abusive husband. Because he is the leader of the Dothraki, therefore the most representative member of the community, the audience’s resentment is projected from Kahl Drogo onto the entire community and their rigid patriarchal social order.

Taking all this into account, the first sex number overtly presents sexual gratification as the problem, while covertly indicating the political struggle of a woman seeking to overcome the Dothraki social order. Similarly to pornographic films, the episode provides a resolution to these conflicts in yet another sex number. If in the previous number Daenerys submitted to Kahl Drogo’s desire, this time she intends to be in control. So when Kahl Drogo manifests his intentions to have sex with her in the traditional Dothraki way, Daenerys refuses and convinces her husband to adopt a sexual position that allows her to sit on top. Although Kahl Drogo never really lies down, Daenerys, who is now half-clad, finds herself in a more authoritative position, while still not having full control. This time the rhythm is slower and the extradiegetic music more noticeable. The mediation between the two positions desired by each of the partners seems to work in favour of both of them, since now, the previous unfulfilling experience is replaced by thorough sexual gratification on both sides.

The resolution of the overt sexual conflicts signals a resolution of the political conflict as well. By sitting on top, the female figure begins to overturn the power relations in her favour. If the previous position rendered the female passive and the male active, now, with the

female on top, the roles are reversed, although Kahl Drogo's not completely lying down suggests that he is yet to pass on his entire authority. We can see how the sexual mediation that resolves the sexual conflict based on the opposition between the male's need for sexual fulfilment and the female's reluctance is paralleled by a mediation of the political conflict predicated on male agency and female passivity. As far as the cultural gap determined by their different cultural identities is concerned, the mediation is suggested by Kahl Drogo's acceptance to depart from his Dothraki way of conceiving sexual intercourse and Daenerys overcoming her reluctance to have sex with her husband, the leader of a community that she regards as barbaric.

The sexual agreement reached by the two partners is reflected in the generic orientations of the number. If the previous scene that stated the sexual conflict featured a mixture of hardcore, as well as of softcore conventions, this time the elements of hardcore are done away with and what is left is a "pure" softcore number. The sexual act is still simulated and the genitalia are still not shown, yet this time the loud sounds of the sexual intercourse are elided.

To sum up our discussion so far, the resolution reached at the end the second episode's narrative is the first milestone in Daenerys' political ascension. The episode remediates pornographic conventions to highlight the power relations between the two genders in the Dothraki community and the heroine's struggle to overturn these power relations in the private context of the marriage bed. In what follows I look at how the remediation of pornography yields the remediation of the cultural memory of the Enlightened monarch.

### **3.2 The Memory of the Enlightened Monarch**

Civilizing the barbaric other is thematically prominent in the narrative arc of the first season and is also pursued later on, in the subsequent seasons. The issue is touched upon even

in the episode discussed above, with the help of symbols such as the clothes and the roughness of the sex act. Daenerys' growth in political power brings along a gradual civilization of her husband and the Dothraki. In the two sex scenes, the roughness of the former and smoothness of the latter, the fact that Daenerys is naked in the first, but half clothed in the second, as well as the shift from penetration from behind to the girl-on-top position suggest a civilization of the sex act. It seems, therefore, that the content of the numbers anticipates Daenerys' civilizing mission.

By the end of the fifth season, Daenerys will have ruled over a faction of the Dothraki and the cities of Quarth, Astapor, Meereen, and Yunkai. These cities are all remediations of the dominant Western memory of the Orient. Located in the desert, they are cities of slave merchants and cruel despotic rulers. The continent of Essos is in keeping with the orientalist tradition of depicting the East. According to Matt Hardy, its representation pays tribute to what Europeans imagined the Orient to be like when reading reports about the Ottoman Empire and seeing the works of painters such as Jean-Léon Gérôme. Consequently, Essos is an amalgamation of orientalist tropes ranging from greedy opulent magnates that are eager to punish their servants and obese merchants carried on palanquins by dozens of slaves, to harems of young men and women trained to pleasure their owners, and the loyal, but dehumanised Unsullied who, like the Ottoman Janissaries, are trained from very young, castrated and have to kill a baby of their slave mothers to complete their training (415).

Daenerys Targaryen is adamant to change the ways of the barbaric Essos and create a political regime that is based on enlightened egalitarian principles. The measures taken by Daenerys are in keeping with the policies endorsed by enlightened monarch in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

An enlightened monarch of the 18th century enjoyed the same privileges of any absolutist monarch, yet unlike the latter, his legitimacy did not stem from divine right, but

rather is was based on natural law. Although natural law was still provided by God, this differentiation led to a secularization of the political institution of the monarch, which in itself led to a separation between state and church. If political power is detached from religion, what ensues is a tolerant attitude with respect to the various religions of the state's citizens.

Although concerned with strengthening state power, enlightened monarchs evinced an egalitarian approach to politics. During their rule, their reforms targeted domains such as taxation, law, and slavery. Regarding taxation policies, enlightened monarchs in Europe widened the tax base so as to include social classes which had hitherto been exempt from taxation (Wilson 3-4). As far as the law was concerned, they aimed for an equitable judicial system that would institute the rule of the law. In 1804, Napoleon introduces the French Civil Code, based entirely on natural law, which then quickly spread across Europe. Six years later, the penal code is revised with major implications for the form of punishment, which now sought to "reform the convict in mind and soul" (Wilson 315-6). In keeping with egalitarian principles was also the abolition movement. The 18th and 19th century saw the abolition of slavery in many states such as France and the United States (Wilson 556-7).

As ruler of the Dothraki and later of Quarth, Astapor, and Mereen, Daenerys' behaviour as a political leader resembles to a great extent the traits of enlightened absolutism. Daenerys' rule is marked on the one hand, by an attempt to secure her position, and, on the other, to free the slaves of Slaver's Bay from bondage. With the help of her dragons and by gaining the allegiance of the Unsullied and of the Second Sons, she consolidates her political power and increases the military capacities of her cities. The massive coercive forces at her disposal allow her to reform the social order in the communities she rules, the most important reform being the abolition of slavery. From early on, as the wife of Kahl Drogo, she protests against the way slaves are treated by the Dothraki. After Kahl Drogo successfully invades the lands of the Lhazar, Daenerys urges her husband to prohibit the raping of slave women, much to the

discontent of some of the Dothraki. In Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen, Daenerys abolishes slavery and, in the case of those slaves who wish to work for their former masters, she has them enter a contract of labour. As far as the hierarchical relation to her soldiers is concerned, she stresses from the very beginning that they are not in any way coerced to pledge allegiance to her. After taking command of the Unsullied, the eunuch elite slave warriors of Astapor, she tells them that from that point onward they are to consider themselves free men and that those who do not want to serve her are free to go.

Daenerys does not want her rule to be arbitrary and, therefore, attempts to institute the rule of law. When a Son of the Harpy kills an Unsullied, Daenerys, despite the advice of Mossador, her former slave counsellor, decides not to have him killed on the spot, but rather have a fair trial to establish his punishment. Mossador is incapable of accepting Daenerys' decision and kills the suspect. As a result, Daenerys sentences Mossador to death in spite of her loss of popularity among the former slaves.

Lastly, Daenerys' rule over the Dothraki in Quarth, Astapor, and Meereen is characterized by religious tolerance. In spite of the fact that not all communities share the same religion, Daenerys does not find this aspect problematic and takes no measure against cases of religious difference. After inspecting Eastern otherness, I now turn my attention to other regions of the *Game of Thrones* world that are constructed as different from the norm.

#### **4. From East to South: Thickening Difference**

In this final section I focus on how difference is constituted in the southern part of the world of the TV series. In order to speak about the cultural map of the south, we must first identify the place which represents the cultural centre or the norm on the map of the *Game of Thrones* storyworld. I have already mentioned that the map is in tune with the Eurocentric

assumption that the West is the norm in opposition to which difference is defined and, consequently, designates Westeros as the cultural centre of the storyworld. True as this may be, this section requires a closer look at the map and a more precise delimitation of the hegemonic centre. My contention is that, rather than speaking of Westeros as if it were a homogeneous cultural space, we should locate the cultural centre in King's Landing and look at the rest of the continent as instances of difference. Matt Hardy's arguments in favour of King's Landing's hegemonic status revolve around the issue of moral conduct. While King's Landing is just as filled with corruption, deceit, assassination and treachery as Essos, the TV series either finds excuses or presents these deeds as necessary compromises for the greater good if the perpetrators are from King's Landing. If, however, the perpetrators are from Essos, the TV series frames their deeds as closer to the cultural norm (416-417).

To the claim that the hegemonic centre should be considered King's Landing I would like to add the following arguments. To begin with, as Dragoş Manea has pointed out, people in King's Landing speak Standard English. The language spoken north of King's Landing has a northern English accent, while to the south one recognizes a strong Spanish accent. Visually, King's Landing is pictured in moderate contrast and brightness. In the case of Winterfell, we have lower contrast and brightness, while Dorn is pictured with high contrast and brightness. From a cultural perspective, King's Landing presents itself to its Western audience as the cultural norm because it fosters a rational understanding of the world. They have medicine, science and dismiss white walkers as pure mythology. In contrast to King's Landing, people in the north, especially in the extreme north, strongly believe in white walkers and magic. Moreover, the geographical position of King's Landing in the middle of Westeros further highlights its hegemonic status.

Having established King's Landing as the norm, we can now look at the north and south of Westeros as instances of cultural difference by focusing on the way homosexuality is

represented and dealt with in these regions. In the north there are very few instances of homosexuality. In King's Landing, one does encounter homosexuals in all social strata, be it the brothel or the court, yet homosexuality is stigmatized and homosexuals always try to hide their sexual orientation. In opposition to the north and King's Landing, in Dorne, homosexuals are not coerced to conceal their sexual orientation, quite on the contrary, they take pride in it. When Prince Oberyn arrives in King's Landing he is surprised by the rigid laws that govern sexual relations between fellow human beings, and boasts about his freedom to sleep with whomever he wishes, be they male or female. It is then interesting how the Dorne, a region which remediate Moorish Spain and Palestine (414) attracts the orientalist stereotype of unrestrained sexuality that stresses the region's exoticism relative to King's Landing.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I tried to focus on instances of the remediation of pornography in *Game of Thrones*. I firstly made a distinction between remediation in its new media understanding, which focuses on the way media try to imitate each other's narrative affordances, and in its cultural memory understanding, which explains the way memorial content travels across media. Crucial for the argument of this paper was the demonstration that TV series and pornography are different media, which vouchsafed the application of the concept of remediation in its new media geared sense. After looking at the generic conventions of hardcore and softcore porn films, I analyse the two sex scenes of the second episode of the first season in order to highlight how, by remediating pornography, the TV series conveys Daenerys' first political endeavours. In the next section I look at the heroine's greater narrative arc and argue that Daenerys Targaryen is a remediation of the cultural memory of the

enlightened monarch who is out to civilize a barbaric and fallen Orient according to modern egalitarian principles. Lastly, I analyse the issue of difference in the *Game of Thrones* world and highlight how orientalist tropes travel from the East to the South in order to reinforce difference.

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