

Game of Spoilers: Adapted Works and Fan Consumption Disputes in Brazil

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Abstract

A spoiler is defined as a piece of relevant information about a narrative which is revealed prematurely. This paper offers a Brazilian case study of the repercussion of 'spoiler' tweets concerning a specific episode of the television series *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-). To this end, we implemented a case study of 207 tweets generated by conversations on Twitter on 14 June 2015. We argue that a key variable in conditioning fans' reactions to spoilers lies in the difference between original screenplays and adapted works from other media narratives. The results of the analysis showed the existence of two major conflicts in the series' fandom: the first is the clash between two different perspectives on the production and circulation of spoilers. The second concerns the fact that the show is a literary adaptation and thus provokes a clash between two distinct types of fans: those who read the book, and therefore possess prior knowledge of what will happen in the television series, and those who only watch the show. We discuss the results bearing in mind the unique place spoilers possess in the media and questioning the relationship fans have with this kind of paratext on social media. We suggest that future studies on spoiler practices should consider the distinction between adapted works and original screenplays.

Introduction

Jon Snow dies at the end of *Game of Thrones*' fifth season.

For a person who has never heard the stories of Westeros this information may not be very significant. However, for fans of the series and the books, who have been following the struggles for the Iron Throne for more than 20 years, the spoiler above may cheapen the experience of consuming the narrative. This belief has directly influenced consumer dynamics on social networks, sociability generated within fan communities and the decisions made by the show's production team. In 2016, for the first time in the show's history, HBO did not send out screeners of the first episodes to critics and journalists (Lempel 2015) in order to control potential leaks and spoilers on social media. The decision came after numerous

episodes were leaked throughout the previous seasons (Kennedy 2016). The term spoiler, despite becoming popular in recent years, is not a new invention and can be defined as 'any information that gives away essential plot details prematurely' (Rosenbaum and Johnson 2015:2).

Spoilers are produced in many different ways; in some cases, the writers of a show decide what information to leak to the press. Thus, it has become common practice for television producers to send brief summaries of the main events happening on a show to newspapers and magazines as a way to attract a bigger audience and generate curiosity and excitement in the series' fandom. Television promos shown at the end of an episode, presenting scenes from next week's instalment, also fulfil this purpose (Gray 2010). The creators and producers of the show

used to have complete control over the information transmitted to the public. However, in the current media landscape, with the internet and the popularity of social media, many producers and writers have lost control of key details of the plots of their own shows (Lachonis and Johnston 2008; Gürsimek and Drotner 2014). In addition, fans have been known to visit production sets seeking insider information and then to share the knowledge online (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013; Castellano and Meimaridis 2016a). Moreover, in 2015, two Brazilian Facebook pages, 'Synopses' and 'Spoilers', became tremendous overnight hits by posting spoilers from television shows and movies, to the disgust of many users, who ended up consuming the paratexts involuntarily (Tewksbury, Weaver and Maddex 2001).

The production and circulation of spoilers has drawn attention from various areas of study in recent years, for example, computer science (Boyd-Graber, Glasgow and Zajac 2013), behavioural psychology (Rosenbaum and Johnson 2015), and, of course, communication studies (Jenkins 2006). Obviously, this variety of areas generates analyses of the most diverse objects, from serial television narratives (Gürsimek and Drotner 2014), to comics (Hassoun 2013), and even sporting events (Nakamura and Komatsu 2012).

Although there are studies on the issue, there is also a lack of analysis dealing with spoilers from a multidimensional perspective. In other words, fan reactions to spoilers cannot be dismissed as universally negative experiences. In this regard, recently, some studies have indicated a positive engagement with this particular type of paratext (Gray and Mittel 2007; Meimaridis, Dos Santos and Oliveira 2015; Redmon 2015). Among the general multidimensional categories that influence this dynamic, this article explores a very specific phenomenon. We argue that the format of the story (whether it is an original or an adapted screenplay from another medium) is a key variable in conditioning fans' reactions to spoilers. This work seeks to test this hypothesis with an analysis of the backlash over spoilers for the *Game of Thrones* episode 'Mother's Mercy' (5:10) on Twitter. To this end, we conducted a case study of the conversations generated on the social network on 14 June 2015.

We collected 207 tweets and filtered them to explore the controversies surrounding the narrative format. The present analysis does not aspire to make generalizations about the consumption of spoilers by Brazilian fans. Instead, we use tweets as a way of empirically observing how *Game of Thrones*' fans disseminated spoilers for a particular episode on social media.

The first section of this paper presents a brief review of the literature on spoilers, indicating the main issues surrounding the consumption of this kind of paratext and pointing out remaining gaps in the field. Then, based on Sarah Thornton's (1995) theory of subcultural capital, we present the current context of the circulation of TV spoilers, considering many disputes among fans and media producers. Next, we explain the methodological design applied, in which we used data mining followed by a qualitative analysis of tweets. After that, we present the selected case study and analyse the tweets, keeping in mind the disputes within this fandom.

The results of the analysis showed the existence of two major conflicts: the first is the clash between two different perspectives on the production and circulation of spoilers. The second concerns the issue of *Game of Thrones*' origin as a literary saga that was later adapted for television. Because of this, it provokes a dispute between two types of fans: those who read the books and therefore possess prior knowledge about what will happen in the television series, and those who only consume the TV series. We discuss the results, questioning the relationship fans have with this kind of paratext on social media. We suggest that future studies concerning fan reactions to spoilers should consider the distinction between adapted works and original screenplays.

Spoiler Alert!

Spoilers are often discussed on social media. It is common to find news reports regarding how fans reacted to the dissemination of key information from a TV series' script online (Baym 2000; Harrington 2014). Even the mass media have already approached the subject: in January 2016, the Brazilian sketch comedy *Tá no Ar: A Tv na TV* (Globo) showed a parody clip of Lorde's song 'Royals'. This version, sung by Marcelo Adnet, a famous Brazilian comedian, and

titled 'Lorde of the Ends – Spoiler', reveals important information about movies, reality shows and TV fiction. From *Star Wars* and *The Sixth Sense* (Dir. M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), to *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010) and *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2007-2013), the singer reveals countless plot twists, whilst also reciting a long list of characters who have died in the first five seasons of *Game of Thrones* (Globoplay 2016).

In academic circles, the subject of spoilers has attracted the attention of researchers working on the convergence between television, serial fiction, fan culture and the internet (Brozek 2013; Schirra, Sun and Bentley 2014; Perks and McElrath-Hart 2016). However, the theoretical framework and empirical research concerning spoilers are still in their early stages. Mostly, theoretical perspectives on the subject are concerned with answering a key question: do spoilers really spoil the consumer experience or can they deepen viewers' engagement?

However, we believe that this focus has hidden various aspects of the problem. The process of attributing significance during reception is extremely complex and conditioned by social and subjective factors (Baym 2000). Thus, these analyses can hardly be universalised. In this article, we address the subject from a different perspective: we use tweets to try to understand the relationship between fan culture and spoilers for adapted works. The argumentative power of our approach lies in the understanding that, from analysing spoilers, we can develop a theoretical contribution able to investigate specific fan practices and dynamics, like the differences between reception times and the many disputes within a given fandom. We will briefly review the current literature on the subject to present our argument.

From its etymological origin, the word 'spoiler' carries a negative connotation. Its quickest definition is something that spoils the experience and/or enjoyment of a text before its reception. Hence, there is a well-established premise that spoilers have a negative effect on narrative consumption. However, systematic observations have showed the existence of fans who like spoilers for the most diverse reasons (Gray and Mittell 2007). As a result, the negative reception of spoilers and their function as a sort of 'killjoy' for consumers has turned from a premise

into a question.

In one of the first studies to approach the topic, Jonathan Gray and Jason Mittell (2007) argue that fans of the TV show *Lost* could relate in different ways to this kind of paratext. Some clearly avoided contact with spoilers, while others actively looked for clues about future events in the series. The authors point out that some of these fans read spoilers intentionally, so that they could pay more attention while watching an episode (Gray and Mittell 2007: 12). Thus, spoilers can have a preparatory function, briefing spectators and facilitating reflection on the text. Likewise, Jonathan D. Leavitt and Nicholas J.S. Christenfeld (2011) conducted psychological experiments to test reactions to spoilers for three kinds of stories: mysteries, ironic plot-twist stories, and short stories. Their results indicate that individuals who consume spoilers devote a greater degree of attention to the show, as they 'know' in advance what will happen, but not 'how' this information will play out (Leavitt and Christenfeld 2011).

On the other hand, Nancy K. Baym's (2000) research into the online practices of soap opera fans indicates the opposite logic. According to one fan who was interviewed by the author: 'If there is a spoiler and I already know what's going to happen, I feel more free to do chores while I'm "watching"' (2000: 88). In fact, the results of empirical research on this subject are either inconclusive or conflicting. We believe that this is due to the complex nature of the phenomenon and the methods used to evaluate it.

According to Benjamin K. Johnson and Judith E. Rosenbaum (2014), the conflict is due to differences in the theoretical tools used to analyse and explain the phenomena. For the authors, this perspective is guided by a 'comprehension paradigm', which suggests that spoilers have an instructive function; that is, they increase appreciation by guiding the viewer through a storyline. Conversely, the 'excitation-transfer' theory suggests that spoilers harm uncertainty and suspense, essential qualities for audience enjoyment. On the other hand, Allen H. Redmon (2015) criticises studies that focus only on the consumer experience. For Redmon, the very premise that the disruption of the narrative order tarnishes the work bears three questionable assumptions: (1) about the

appeal of the work; (2) about the purpose of adaptations; and (3) about the creative potential of the audience. In short, his concern is based on the understanding that texts satisfy functions that go beyond surprising their audiences with shocking revelations and twists in the script.

The main problem with these studies concerning the enjoyment of spoilers is their scope. In practical terms, they focus too much on a specific point, namely, how audiences engage with a narrative after receiving advance plot information. However, we understand that the debate needs to be framed in broader terms, based on approaches developed by research on fan culture, in order to explore other facets of this phenomenon. Therefore, we investigated fan dynamics concerning the consumption of spoilers in adapted works, from a specific case study, shedding light on topics that haven't been specifically explored by the specialised literature in the area, such as fandom disputes and reception temporalities. Thus, we believe that spoilers are the starting point to accomplishing more robust theoretical examinations.

Dispute, Temporality and Hierarchy of Media

Fan communities are particularly prone to contentions over legitimacy. Loyal consumers of the most diverse cultural artefacts are constantly involved in squabbles over subcultural capital, a term coined by Thornton (1995). The concept appears to be aligned with the idea of cultural capital, proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984)¹, but it focuses on the issues of distinction that occur within juvenile subcultures: more specifically, in Thornton's case, subcultures in British clubs during the 1990s, which were divided between clubbers and ravers. Cultural capital is acquired through the accumulation of knowledge through a good education and by being surrounded by valued cultural elements since childhood. Subcultural capital, according to Thornton (1995), works in a similar way; however, knowledge does not come from familiarity with the great literary works, with renowned artistic movements or classical music. The possession of subcultural capital is directly related to a person's clothing, haircut, dance moves and vocabulary (the use or not of current slang in a particular subculture). All these elements are closely linked to cultural

objects, as well as to the manner in which they are consumed.

Although they are not described exactly as subcultures, fandoms of cultural products, artists, music styles, etc. adopt, quite regularly, what we believe to be subcultural practices and motivations. Thus, it has become common to use the term 'subcultural capital' in the analysis of sociability within these communities (Campanella 2012; Castellano 2011, 2012). When dealing with fans of television series, as we do in this paper, we have found that disputes over legitimacy can arise from several issues. They can come from detailed knowledge concerning the production, the narrative and all of the discursive material associated with the series, as well as from specific issues related to this type of product, for example, reception temporalities.

When analysing the consumption of a television series in the current media landscape, we must deal with the fact that, within a single community of fans, people will adopt very different consumption practices. In *Game of Thrones*' case, taking into account only the fans that are currently up to date with the show, you can find some that watch the episodes during the official global broadcast by HBO, while others depend on online pirated streaming links. Others wait a couple of hours or even days to download the video file in HD. The contemporary television environment, however, is even more complex. Given that in 2015 alone more than 400 series were produced for American television or for streaming services, many viewers, immersed in the so-called 'TV Serial Culture' (Silva 2014), deal with the difficulty of keeping up with all of their favourite shows, following the official television broadcast.

Therefore, in the current media landscape, in which what might be called 'file-TV' is an increasingly common reality (Mittell 2008),² and which allows for countless consumption practices, a single fandom can have people who access that universe at different times and, consequently, have different experiences associated with following that narrative. Add to this the fact that *Game of Thrones* is an adapted work, and we have a recipe for constant controversy over spoilers.

The topic of subcultural capital within the

Game of Thrones fan community gains an even more problematic feature in Brazil, once it stumbles into issues of capital beyond the symbolic field. Although pay television services have experienced significant growth in the country in recent decades, they are still restricted to a relatively small portion of the population. According to data published by Obitel (Ibero-American Television Fiction Observatory) in 2015, the number of people with pay television only reached 20 million that year, in a country with a population of over 200 million. The explanations for the low uptake of pay-TV in Brazil revolve around the great importance that the free-to-air television networks still have in the country, and the fact that, according to Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lópes and Guillermo Orozco Gómez (2015), Brazil has one of the most expensive pay television services in the world.

As in the United States, HBO is included in only the premium pay-TV packages in Brazil, thus the most expensive ones, which reach an even smaller portion of the population. *Game of Thrones*, although shown by HBO, has garnered many fans in Brazil. The series' page on Facebook, for example, has almost 800,000 members. Many of the people watching the series in the country do so through unofficial means, such as on pirated streaming sites and through illegal downloads. This mode of consumption often means not being able to keep up with the series at the same time as the official HBO broadcast, which further complicates the spoiler circulation conundrum.

Attentive to this situation, the pay-TV company Sky, which offers a satellite service in the country, released a post on its official Facebook page with an image from the infamous 'Battle of The Bastards' scene in *Game of Thrones*' sixth season. In the scene, Ramsey Bolton (Iwan Rheon) and his army surround Jon Snow (Kit Harrington) and his men. In the middle of the picture, Jon's men are identified as 'Me' and the surrounding crowd as 'Spoilers'. The picture's caption explains: 'This is how your timeline will be later if you don't watch. *Game of Thrones*, season finale, Sunday at 10pm on HBO'. The idea, of course, was to stimulate fans to watch on HBO, which involves paying for the TV service. It is interesting, in this sense, how the

disputes concerning spoilers in Brazil, specifically those for *Game of Thrones*, are surrounded by issues related to subcultural capital, pertaining to simple questions like, 'Who knows the stories best' or 'Who has the finest theories on the development of the narrative', but also, more directly, to the purchasing power of the series' fans.

Methodology

Social media are spaces of sociability and bonding where fans can debate online and create content about television series in real time (Deller 2011). Specifically, Twitter reconfigures the spectatorship dynamics associated with TV because of 'the opportunities the platform affords users for connecting with other viewers in real time, and engaging in a live, effectively unmediated, communal discussion of television programs' (Harrington, 2014: 240). Along the same lines, Melanie Brozek shows how fans participate in open conversational networks on Twitter, strategically using hashtags as a way to give visibility and 'searchability' to debates (2013: 32). 'Fans strive to be a part of a community that discusses the show and do not want to be left out of the live discussions, taking part using network-generated hashtags' (Brozek 2013: 32).

According to the academic research on the subject, Twitter is quite a friendly and straightforward platform for retrieving and analysing large-scale behavioural data. Gaffney and Puschmann point out that a great amount of data can be collected from Twitter for different research objectives (2014: 64). Nevertheless, many works have developed rather standardised metrics-driven approaches, which have little explanatory strength. 'An ideal study should be well grounded in a specific set of research questions and query the data in accordance with them' (Gaffney and Puschmann 2014: 64).

Thus, we used the data mining add-in for Microsoft Excel NodeXL to collect tweets produced in real time while the tenth episode of the fifth season of *Game of Thrones*, 'Mother's Mercy', aired, and in the following hours, on the night of 11 June 2015. The NodeXL add-in uses Twitter's Search Application Programming Interface (API).³ The database used in this paper was initially created by searching for Brazilian Portuguese tweets which mentioned simultaneously

the keywords ‘Game of Thrones’ or ‘#GOT’ and ‘spoiler’. Then we filtered the sample by tweets that mentioned spoilers and reading or books, resulting in a database of 207 tweets.

We emphasise that the analysis conducted in this article does not intend to make generalisations about how Brazilian fans debate spoilers for television shows on social media. We took into account previous Brazilian work attempting to understand the conversations about TV spoilers on Twitter (Meimaridis, Dos Santos and Oliveira 2015), and then proposed a methodological design that seeks to answer more specific questions. Our goal is to elucidate how *Game of Thrones*’ viewers discuss the differences between the book and television formats.

In order to question the existing theoretical framework and to empirically illustrate different fan disputes on social media, we analysed this database qualitatively. We developed an analysis that focuses on the diffusion of conversations about the episode on Twitter. We analysed the database according to the following questions: (1) how do fans discuss *Game of Thrones* spoilers on Twitter? (2) Which disputes concerning the relationship between time/space and spoilers are present in the fandom? (3) Which conflicts arise regarding the consumption of spoilers?

Game of Spoilers

The television show *Game of Thrones* is based on the series of novels *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996 –), written by George R.R. Martin. The story chronicles the bloody dispute for possession of the Iron Throne in the Seven Kingdoms. The television production was developed by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss in 2011 for the premium cable channel HBO, and has won great prestige from critics and fans worldwide. Since 2015, the show has been screened in the United States and around the world simultaneously, thanks to a strategic arrangement by the channel and its subsidiaries developed as a way of dealing with the fact that the show has become the most pirated TV series currently on air (Friedlander 2015). As we have already commented, the situation is particularly problematic in Brazil, which boasts the controversial title of country with the highest number of illegal downloads of the series in the world (Alves 2015).

Because the story involves constant war between kingdoms, the series has become notorious for killing important characters, a quality also found in Martin’s books. In June 2015, the show shocked its fans by capping off the season finale, entitled ‘Mother’s Mercy’, with Jon Snow, one of the lead characters, being stabbed. Although Jon’s apparent death was a shock to many, some perceptive viewers were already speculating about his death after four images of the episode were leaked online just days before the official broadcast. One of the images showed Jon Snow lying on the ground in a pool of blood, while another revealed the character in the same position but with lifeless eyes.

Because of the leaked images, even before the episode aired on television, it had already motivated debates within the fandom, since, for fans of the series, the information concerning Jon’s possible death was considered a massive spoiler for the finale. However, this information was not necessarily a spoiler for fans who had read Martin’s fifth book, published in 2011, which ends in the same way. Thus, Jon Snow’s possible demise was not new information for these fans.

Through a qualitative analysis of the collected tweets on 14 June 2015, we mapped two major discussions within the fandom. The first concerns the clash between two different perspectives—a spatial one and a temporal one—on the production and circulation of spoilers. Fans who advocate that there are suitable places for the production and circulation of spoilers use the spatial criteria. On the other hand, fans who use the temporal perspective seek to stipulate a ‘grace period’ to wait before posting spoilers; after this time, spoilers could be freely circulated. The second discussion involves the conflict between two types of fans: those who read the book, and therefore possess prior knowledge of what will happen in the television series, and those who only watch the show.

1) Temporal vs. Spatial Perspectives

Given the specificities of the present television landscape, where current and former television productions are accessible and numerous technologies allow the consumption of TV series at any given

time, what Todd M. Sodano calls the ‘time-shifting paradigm’ (2012), the issue of the free circulation of spoilers has generated heated debates within various fandoms. These debates are guided by efforts from the audience as well as by critics that try to stipulate an etiquette for producing spoilers. A simple Google search reveals numerous articles on the subject, such as ‘Spoilers: The Official *Vulture* Statutes of Limitations’ (Kois 2008), or ‘Are you a *Game of Thrones* blabbermouth? The 10 rules of spoiler etiquette’ (Richards and Virtue 2016). In general, these rules can be separated according to two distinct criteria: time and space.

Fans and critics who advocate the temporal perspective believe there’s a period of time considered ‘respectful’, during which no fan should produce spoilers, so as not to detract from the experience of other fans, who should have the opportunity to consume the narrative without having contact with important plot revelations. After this time, fans could produce and circulate spoilers at will, with a clear conscience. This logic can be noticed in the following tweets:

@loricaaa – ‘@flaviaguterres I agree! I freak when people who see the new episode on cable start posting spoilers, fuck that, it’s not even online yet’⁴

@morgandexter – ‘I want to make several comments about the season finale, but I don’t want to give a spoiler, so I’ll wait a couple of days’

Although the criterion is clear, there is still difficulty in stipulating an exact length of time. After the sixth season of *Game of Thrones* aired in June, journalists at Vox and the Morning Consult conducted a poll asking Americans several questions concerning the consumption and production of spoilers. Among the questions asked was: what is the proper amount of time to wait after the release of a TV show before discussing it? Surprisingly, 34% of the interviewees consider it fair game to post spoilers right after the show has finished airing. Another 22% advocate a 24-hour ban before posting spoilers. However, 12% consider a week the appropriate time and 3% believe a month is more respectful (Abad-Santos and

Zarracina 2016). In this regard, there are many factors that must be taken into account, for example, the difference between domestic and worldwide release dates for a show, or if the program is still on the air, among other variables. While there is no consensus among fans, spatial logic advocates criticise the difficulty of determining an ‘acceptable’ period for the free circulation of spoilers. An example can be seen in the tweet ‘Come on the bible’s 2000 years old, if I say Jesus dies is that a spoiler?...’ (Setin Joaquim, @tatsumarusan), which satirises the temporal logic. In view of the criticisms of this approach and the difficulty of establishing what would be the ideal time to wait between the release of an episode/text and the production of spoilers, the spatial logic has gained traction in the debate.

Fans and critics who claim there are ‘appropriate places’ for the production of spoilers use the spatial perspective. They contend that posting a spoiler on a Facebook group for *Game of Thrones* fans may be appropriate, but posting on Twitter, where anyone can have access to that content, is unacceptable. The proposal is to restrict these paratexts to certain spaces where fans have the option to consume them, thereby eliminating the risk of coming across them accidentally on social networks such as Facebook, Tumblr or Twitter. The issue of the ‘free circulation’ of spoilers is so important that users often avoid social networks, for fear of running into unwanted spoilers, as can be seen in the following tweets:

@rafamoromizato – After 10pm I won’t log in to avoid the risk of reading spoilers for the *Game of Thrones* finale

@ollgawn – @its_cherrycola GET OUTTA HERE YOU CAN’T SEE SPOILERS

@arrowtario – In a little while Got’s gonna start and I’ll have to leave twitter cause I don’t want spoilers

@jaureguyo – when got’s season finale starts I’m leaving cause it’s gonna rain spoilers

The Brazilian case, with its specificities concerning

time and space even more complex. Although HBO shows *Game of Thrones* at the same time around the world, a sizeable portion of Brazilian fans only watch the episode after it's made available on illegal streaming sites or via download. Meanwhile, the links to access these sites circulate in fan communities on social media, like Facebook, and, as we have argued, these communities are often seen as a territory where spoilers can flow freely. Therefore, to obtain quick access to the episodes, right after the official HBO airing, Brazilian fans need to manoeuvre in a minefield packed with spoilers.

The question of the coexistence of different temporalities within the same fandom, however, is a global issue. In order to 'protect' fans while they surf online, many browsers and platforms are developing extensions and plug-ins, such as Declutter (Twitter) or Proxlet (Chrome), to block unwanted spoilers without depriving the user of access to social networks. In 2015, Google bought a patent for an 'anti-spoiler filter' that hides information containing spoilers so the user can access any website. While such mechanisms do not work fully, communities and sites that unite Brazilian fans of the television series seek alternatives, such as establishing clear spoiler-posting policies, ranging from total prohibition to full freedom, always using HBO's official airing schedule as a parameter. On the Facebook group 'Game of Thrones Brasil', there is an indication of specific places on the page where spoilers are welcome, such as in comments on selected posts, and more elaborate rules such as a ban on screengrabs from important moments or the requirement to post the unfailing warning 'spoiler alert' at the beginning of text.

2) Fanboys & Book Whores – Media Disputes

There is no denying the importance the internet, and especially social networking sites, have on the articulation of various fan groups. However, while it helps to shape the community, social networks also destabilises these groups by gathering individuals who do not share the same expectations and practices concerning complex issues such as spoilers. The confusion generated on Twitter the day the episode 'Mother's Mercy' aired makes this perfectly clear.

Although *Game of Thrones* is known for killing beloved characters, Jon Snow's death still came as a surprise for many fans. The problem here is that for some people this information only became known on 14 June 2015, but many fans of Martin's novels had already known about Jon's death since 2011, the year the author released his fifth book *A Dance with Dragons*. The main confusion over the issue revolves around precisely this question: can a revelation about a story that was already available to the public four years before airing be considered a spoiler? For a significant part of the series' fandom the answer is yes:

@shootmeagain: 'Don't want spoilers, go read the books' If you keep giving me spoilers I'll give you a spoiler of what's going to be written on your tombstone, you jackass.

@Tatsumarusan: Oh but the book was written fifty years ago, it's not a spoiler. Spoiling is when you tell the story to someone who does not know it, DONE!

@isafreirec: Seriously, if there's something I hate, it's people who've read the book and spread spoilers for the show, ok? Go fuck yourself.

@polarouti: People who give out spoilers, for TV series, movies or books: hopefully you'll die in the cruellest and slowest possible way.

Frequently, fans who are bothered by revelations from the books are accessing the narrative universe of *Game of Thrones* only through the television series. However it is possible to see a certain 'spoiler etiquette' even among those who have read the books: 'I would love to give GoT spoilers for those who have not read the books, but NBAA ethical principles (not being an asshole) prevent me' (@writer_peter).

In light of the competition for legitimacy within *Game of Thrones*' fandom, it is noticeable that fans of the books claim a privileged position. They claim possession of specific types of subcultural capital to justify their privilege. First, they use the fact that the first book, *A Game of Thrones*, was launched in 1996, which is 15 years before the HBO series'

debut. Although many fans only read the books after having contact with the television saga, those who came to them before the series launched can demand credit since they have been following the story for a longer period. Second, until the sixth season, all of the books were released (well) before the corresponding seasons aired. Consequently, fans who read the books first acquired knowledge of the plot before those who only watched the series, which in itself would guarantee extra points in the dispute for subcultural capital. Third, perhaps the most prolific argument is the fact that the book as a cultural artefact is linked to the notion of the fine arts, boasting a higher cultural value than the television product. With this in mind, the fan that accesses *Game of Thrones*' narrative through literature would have greater legitimacy within the fandom, because the book would be seen as more important than the series. It is not only a chronological issue, but also one pertaining to the very nature of the medium.

Although today television has a greater cultural legitimacy than it did in the past, even in academic circles, the medium still does not enjoy the same prestige as other media, notably cinema and literature. In this way, important agents in the television market have tried to distinguish themselves using discourses that aim at distancing themselves from the typical characteristics of the medium. A symptomatic example is the slogan that HBO itself has used for a long time: 'It's not TV. It's HBO' (Leverette, Ott and Buckley 2008; Schwaab 2013; Castellano and Meimaridis 2016b).

Besides killing Jon Snow, the fifth season of *Game of Thrones* also altered many plot points in relation to the fifth book; this caused a deterioration in the relationship between the two types of fans (those who had or had not read the literary version). For the first time, control over the narrative was not in the hands of those who had read the books, pejoratively called 'fanboys' in a clear association with the traditional image of the male 'nerd' fan (Monteiro 2005).

@devanil - HOLY SHIT, there are Game of Thrones spoilers here. And I READ ONE THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN IN THE BOOK!!!

@betty_it: bitches, book spoilers I've seen many, but the series is so different so CAN YOU GUYS STOP SHITTING GOT SPOILERS YOU ASS-HOLES!?

@marcolan - @Ellem_ this may be the biggest spoiler that HBO has given to those who only read the books :S

This situation has been pushed to its breaking point in the sixth season because, in an unprecedented manner, the season was released before the corresponding book, due to a delay from the author, who failed to finish the manuscript on time. Although the tweets analysed concerned the fifth season, we did notice that, in 2015, fans had already started to comment on, and take advantage of, the forthcoming situation:

@goulartmarcus - 'Producers confirm the surprise in episode 9 of 'Game of Thrones' is a spoiler for the book.' The tables have turned, book Whores.

@fellipekyle - I wanted to see up close the faces of Got's readers getting spoilers from a book that hasn't even been published, LOOKS LIKE THE TABLES HAVE TURNED

@RenanFragala - @porraquelpq yeah now it's gonna be awesome cause those who read all the books won't be able to spread spoilers for the following seasons, nifty.

Conclusion

The sixth season of *Game of Thrones* was a milestone for the series' fandom. For the first time, the television production was ahead of the literary narrative. On the one hand, viewers celebrated, on the other, fans of Martin's saga lamented the fact that future episodes of the series were going to anticipate events from the books. The constant production and circulation of spoilers on social networks has generated heated debate inside and outside academic circles. Despite the controversy around the subject, we argue that the debate remains overly focused on defining the possible reactions from spectators who consume this type of paratext. We argue that this focus has

limited the topic, which has many nuances in addition to issues of reception, as for example disputes among fans, originality of the narrative and the temporality of reception. It is important to note that our collected tweets pertain to the release of the last episode of the fifth season. For this reason, the debates over the sixth season are only speculative. In this way, we could not assess the impact of that season on the clashes between fans, which can be done in future works.

With this in mind, we suggest that the debate needs to be framed in broader terms, to enable greater questioning. For this, we performed quantitative analysis of tweets involving the last episode of the fifth season of *Game of Thrones*. From the analysis, we conclude that because it is an adaptation of a literary work, the series provokes a constant clash between the fans who read the books and those who only consume the television narrative. In this dispute, it was possible to identify deeper and symbolic discussions that call into question a hierarchy of media systems, particularly between literature and television.

This situation exposes the complexity of dealing with spoilers from adapted works. If, as we have seen, spoilers are a controversial theme in all forms of fan interaction, it becomes even more complicated when there are parallel versions of the same story. In this way, this study reveals that the originality of the narrative needs to be taken into account when debating spoilers. At the same time, the specificities pertaining to access to the fictional work should also be analysed in each individual case studied, since television shows, in spite of their global consumption, are still influenced by television programming schedules. On the other hand, a division between a spatial and a temporal perspective is also present in this fandom. This division is not specific to *Game of Thrones* fans, but has continuously influenced discussions about television series, and can be noticed in the 2016 video 'Got spoiled? It's your problem' by the Brazilian fan website *Série Maníacos*. In the video, Michel Arouca defends the existence of a 'validity period for spoilers' and asks fans to respect a one-week grace period before commenting on any series online; this interval is called 'the fair spoiler window'. While there is no official etiquette manual for spoilers, which have to

be examined taking into the consideration the global reach of social networks, we argue that new perspectives are needed to deepen and broaden the debate on their production and circulation.

By the way, Jon Snow is alive.

Notes

¹ In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), Pierre Bourdieu developed a complex theory that emphasises the centrality of consumption in social practices, based on data collected by empirical research into consumption patterns in France during the 1960s and 1970s. Bourdieu relativises the importance of material properties and identifies the possession of symbolic (cultural) capital as the main distinguishing factor within society. Thus, consumption plays a central role in creating and maintaining social relations of domination and submission, and it is precisely this struggle for power and status—which occurs both within classes as well as within the overall population—in which the French author is interested.

² For years, television has been characterised in relation to the principle of flow, proposed by Raymond Williams (1974), in which there is a constant content playback independent from the viewer, in a regular and unidirectional flow. However, media forms such as the internet are organised by files, the content of which only appears when the user demands it. Streaming services like Netflix and other online practices such as downloading episodes are good examples of the new order in television, one determined by the logic of files not flow (Mittell 2008).

³ It is important to point out a limitation of the data samples collected from social media sites. It is common that in Twitter's Search API 'data loosely falls off of the search system within a week of being posted, and no reliable information is available on its completeness' (Gaffney and Puschmann 2014: 60).

⁴ The authors translated the tweets from Portuguese to English.

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