

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Research

Game of Thrones is one of the TV series famous for its high budget and high production value in television series level. The average cost of the *Game of Thrones* is approximately six million dollars per episode (Garofalo). *Game of Thrones* has attracted a great numbers of viewers on HBO and attained an exceptionally broad and active international fan base. *Game of Thrones* is proclaimed as HBO's most popular TV series of all time. It has shown in 170 countries and illegally downloaded more often than any other programs on the planet (Runcie).

Currently, there are several kinds of media used to tell the fantasy fiction of Westeros authored by George R. R. Martin. The main media are the novels *A Song of Ice and Fire* series written by George R. R. Martin and the TV adaptation *Game of Thrones* written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss. The secondary media for this content would be from the fan, in the form of blog posts, forum discussion, YouTube videos, and podcasts.

While people can choose to read the book, most people know this story through the show. This condition became even more contrast through how they interact to each other in the internet. As proven in the Reddit communities, the book readers Subreddit has 242.629 members and the show watcher Subreddit, has 577.030 members, accessed in February 2016. This proves that show-

watchers community consists of more than double the book-readers. This condition can give rough representations of the popularity of the TV series, which have outnumbered the novels themselves.

Despite the fact the books and the TV series tells about the same story and characters, they are different because it is pictured in the readers' mind differently compared to how they are portrayed on the screen. Even though the events are the same, they are different in the level of how the book tells the story and how the actors in the TV series perform them. The TV series and the books, although they are telling the same story, they create different experiences to the audiences, both the book-readers and the show-watchers.

This condition raises a question whether there are different interpretations between different audiences (readers and watchers). In the following discussion, the writer is going to discuss how the readers fill several different 'narrative gaps' found in the story. These gaps are the unwritten portion of the text that calls for the reader's participation. It includes the main character, Jon Snow whose death still left as a cliffhanger by the end of the fifth book and the fifth season, and his parents, which remains mystery, as well as the way the audiences interpret the story.

Based on these reasons, the writer decides to write the thesis as readers' interpretation of narrative gaps from the *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its TV adaptation *Game of Thrones*.

1.2 The Identification of the Problem

The process of the readers in creating their interpretation is interesting to examine because readers have their own roles is authorizing which meanings and interpretations are acceptable and not. Between two different communities (book-readers and show-watchers), the process of creating meaning is different based on the very fact that they are built on different medium (text and audio visual). The writer wants to find out whether there is intermixture of interpretations between the book-reader and show-watcher. These questions need to be answered because they will display the current culture of reading and watching in our society.

The research is also aimed to examine the pop culture phenomenon of the audience's anticipations to the upcoming season six of *Game of Thrones*. The fifth season ended with the cliffhanger moment where one of the main characters Jon Snow died of stabbings by his own men. The cliffhanger moment becomes relevant to the book-readers too because the latest book of the novel series also ended in the same event. Therefore, there is an equal anticipation between communities to the upcoming sixth season.

Meanwhile, one of the reasons why the story gains a massive popularity, especially the TV series is its realistic depiction of medieval society. It includes violence and nudity, which became the major selling point to the general audiences. The violence and nudity consequently bring a controversy where people argue on its necessity to the story.

1.3 Research Question

Based on the conditions above, the thesis aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the processes where the audiences create their interpretations and speculations about the TV series and the novel series?
2. What is the audiences' opinion about Jon Snow's death and his real parentage?
3. What are the audiences' opinions regarding to the violence and nudity?

1.4 The Scope of the Research

The research is limited for the readers of *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels and the watcher of the *Game of Thrones* show. For the purpose of this research, the writer defines the book-reader as someone who has read at least one of the books and has watched the TV show. While the show-watcher defined as someone, who has watched at least one season of the show and have never read the book.

The research will only discuss the reader's responses to the book series and its TV adaptation. Therefore, research will include specific topics that appear to be interesting from the novels and the shows, which are Jon Snow's death and his real parents. The writer tries to find out both the readers' and watchers' opinion regarding to those topics.

1.5 The Objective of the Research

This research will find out readers' interpretation on the narrative gaps. Their interpretations are based on the open-to-interpretation information in the text and how the readers come up with such interpretations into a comprehensive meaning.

The research will also try to correlate between the narrative gaps of the story, the way the story is presented, and its audiences based on their preferences to get through the story. The community of the reader in this context is the book reader and the show watcher. The thesis aims to understand and then relate the specific elements to each of the community of the reader.

1.6 The Review of Related Studies

A number of research have been conducted in the reader response/reception theory, which focuses in several different directions. One of the directions examines the discourse aspect of the text-reader relationship that also incorporates the position of the author of the text. An article published in *Continuum*, a journal of Media and Culture, titled "Statements and silence: fanfic paratext for ASOIAF/Game of Thrones" points out the discursive negotiation of the concepts of authorship and ownership taking place between authors, owners and fans. Fic author's notes and disclaimers serve as paratexts that actively re-structure these concepts. The other article discusses it in the same context titled "Steering the Author Discourse: The Construction of Authorship in Quality TV, and The Case of Game of Thrones". The article argues that the fact that the

authorship of the series is discursively constructed as an indicator of quality in the marketing of US cable network HBO's TV series '*Game of Thrones*'.

There are also articles that generally center on education purposes. So Jung Kim (2012) found that literature with references to social justice has the potential to help young bilingual children reduce their biased attitudes toward a certain racial group, and open their minds to people who have different skin colors from them. While So Jung Kim conducted his research to preschool students, Steve Paas (1992) found that if seventh grade students understand the theory behind the reader-response orientation, then teachers could teach the materials much easier. Lois P. Tucker (2000) also talks about the reader response activity to raise student's interest in reading literature. Her article highlights the fact that Reader-response approaches to teaching literature can assist in making the literary experience of introductory literature students more meaningful and enjoyable. In 2011, Sarvenaz Khatib tried to investigate this theory to the second language speaker in his article, "Applying the Reader-response Approach in Teaching English Short Stories to EFL Students". The findings revealed that students directed with the reader-response approach could give aesthetic responses to literature without impairing their comprehension of the literary text.

Both directions of analysis of reader responses are compelling. However, discourse analysis of readers, text, and other elements surrounding them did not really take into account of the basic demographic of the reader and the substantive the reader's interpretations of the text. Meanwhile, from the educational point of view, testing students to be the reader of the text only demonstrates the arbitrary

frameworks of the student reading the text because they have to, which then they provide their interpretation.

For this research, the writer wants to analyze the reader's interpretation outside the constraint of educational framework. The writer also wants to analyze the tendency of the readers who interact and discuss the story in the internet and how it affects their interpretation in general. This is the aspect of the reader's response that this research is going to be based on.

1.7 The Theoretical Framework

This research is going to use two approaches of literary theories to study the process of interpretation of the books and the TV show. The first is the intrinsic approach, which analyzes the text as it is. After that, the writer is going to use the extrinsic approach, which study from the readers' perspective. The extrinsic approach is using several theories from the readers' response theories.

In particular, the reader response theories used in this thesis will be Jauss' horizon of expectation. It is used to establish the process of the readers create some form of anticipation of the show and the books. The second one is Wolfgang Iser's narrative gap. This is relevant considering that the *Game of Thrones* has a number of narrative gaps in which very open to interpretation. The other theory used for this research is Louise Rosenblatt's Transactional theory to examine the relation between the readers and the text. Lastly, Stanley Fish's interpretive community will be relevant to this research because there is different community who has different way of experiencing the story. The variables within this

research show there is an instituted interpretive communities based on how they get through the story.

1.7.1 Wolfgang Iser's Narrative Gap

Wolfgang Iser stated in his book *The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach* (1972) meaning is not an object to be found within a text, but is an event of construction that occurs somewhere between the text and the reader. Specifically, a reader comes to the text, which is a fixed world, but meaning is realized through the act of reading and how a reader connects the structures of the text to his/her own experience.

A literary work, which for Iser is created when a reader and a text converge, consists of two "poles": the artistic (the object, the text created by the author) and the aesthetic (the realization accomplished by the reader). Both of these poles contribute to the two central points of Iser's theory: the concept of "implied reader" and narrative "gaps." (279)

This is a part of the reading process where there is interaction between the two sides. For Iser, a literary work is composed of both written and unwritten portions of a text. As a reader begins the reading process, the sentences that make up a work not only inform the reader of the literary movement, but also produce certain expectations within the mind of the reader.

1.7.2 Jauss' Horizon of Expectation

Devised in *New Literary History* (1970) the phrase "Horizons of Expectation" is a term fundamental to German academic Hans Robert Jauss's Reception theory. It is the structure by which a person comprehends, decodes, and appraises any text based on cultural codes and conventions particular to their time in history. These horizons are therefore historically flexible meaning readers may interpret and value a text differently from a previous generation. It emphasizes the reader as an important element in the processing of texts.

According to Jauss, the reader approaches a text armed with the knowledge and experience gained from interactions with other texts. These earlier texts arouse familiarity for the reader based on expectations and rules of genre and style. Jauss describes it this way, "a literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period" (194). Thus, reading is not an autonomous, free and individual experience but rather a collection of mutual concepts fitting a period or a people.

1.7.3 Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory

In her influential texts *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978) Louise Rosenblatt argues that the act of reading literature involves a transaction between the reader and the text. Each "transaction" is a unique experience in which the reader and text continuously act and are acted upon by each other. A written work (often referred to as a "poem" in her writing) does not have the same

meaning for everyone, as each reader brings individual background knowledge, beliefs, and context into the reading act.

Additionally, she distinguishes between different kinds of reading with her defined "stances". Rosenblatt placed all reading transactions on a continuum between "aesthetic" -and reading for pleasure, experiencing the poem-and "efferent" -or reading to gain meaning. Rosenblatt maintained that the act of reading was a dynamic "transaction" between the reader and the text.

1.7.4 Stanley Fish's interpretive community

According to Stanley Fish in his book *Is There a Text in This Class* (1980), what we take to be our individual subjective responses to literature are product of the interpretive community to which we belong. Interpretive communities are a theoretical concept stemming from reader-response criticism and invented by Stanley Fish. Fish's theory states that a text does not have meaning outside of a set of cultural assumptions regarding both what the characters mean and how they should be interpreted. This cultural context often includes authorial intent, though it is not limited to it. Fish claims that we as individuals interpret texts because each of us is part of an interpretive community that gives us a particular way of reading a text (147).

Stanley Fish notes that interpretations will always be controlled by the relatively limited repertoire of interpretive strategies available at any given point in history (170). By understanding the principle of this, we can become more aware of what it is we are doing when we interpret a text.

1.8 Research Method

In order to get the understanding of how the audiences compose their interpretations, the writer is going to conduct a survey where they would express their opinion about several controlled subjects within this research. The subjects focused in this research includes the audience's prediction of what is going to happen towards Jon Snow, the audience's manner of getting the information, and their opinion about nudity and violence in the show.

1.8.1 The Survey

To measure the comparison between the two audiences, the writer will conduct a survey in the form of questionnaires, which are distributed on late March to April 2016 through the social media and online forums. The questionnaire will be an online questionnaire using SurveyMonkey service. Potential participants will be found using the means of social media in which discussions about *Game of Thrones* are widespread. The participants chosen are appropriate for this research because it represents the audience of the show and books. They are the group of people who participate in a show or encounter either the TV show or the books. They participate in different ways such as commenting, sharing, and criticizing, which is expressed through the social media.

The survey will be conducted through questionnaire. It is designed to focus on three main ideas, first the audience's opinion about Jon Snow's character, second about their behavior related to the shows and books and third their opinion about the nudity and violence in the show.

First, the respondents are asked about their opinion about the main character Jon Snow. The specific question such as ‘do you think Jon Snow really dead?’ follows the main cliffhanger moment in both the show and the books. This question is important because the character Jon Snow is one of the most popular characters, which created an equal anticipation for the audiences. The second question in that page is the audience’s opinion and assumption about his parents, which is something that is not revealed in the shows and the book.

The second part is about the respondents’ behavior related to the shows and the book. This part includes whether or not they follow teasers and spoilers before the show airs, the places they usually keep themselves updated to the show’s information, and their favorite speculation related to the show and the books. Their behavior would reveal their preferences in enjoying the show and their activities related to the show.

The last part is the respondents are asked to rate the importance of nudity and violence in the scale from one to five. Nudity and violence was one of the most famous elements of the TV show. This part would examine their opinion about how important that is for their experience enjoying the show.

Links to the online survey will be posted to several communities. The communities included in this survey are the Indonesia’s Game of Thrones Line group, the Facebook group Game of Thrones Indonesia, and Andalas University students who watch *Game of Thrones* or read *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

The time of the survey is from 21 March 2016 until 24 April 2016. This period deemed suitable to conduct this research because this time is exactly before

the premiere of the next season of *Game of Thrones*. The time specifically picked because it is right before *Game of Thrones* season 6 released in 24 April 2016; therefore, it created a big anticipation for the fan, both the show-watchers and the book readers.

1.8.2 Population

The researcher will seek a voluntary (convenience) sample of people, who are known to the researcher as a book reader or show watchers. Participants will complete an online questionnaire that should take approximately 5 minutes. The respondents targeted are going to be Indonesian people who are actively participated in the discussion of either the book or the show. They are mainly people who use social media and active in online forums. This preference based to the writer's objective to obtain responses in a more casual manner. As result of that, the outcome of this research is going to illustrate the reader's reaction in the context of Indonesian people.

Demographics such as gender, age, education and race are not variables of this study. These variables are deemed irrelevant to the research considering to the fact that the TV show and the books are open to any kind of demographics. This would suggest that different demographics would not affect the result of the research. The variables that is important for this research is whether they identify themselves as a book reader or show watcher. This variable would show whether they have the similar behavior.

The researcher is affiliated with an estimated population of 20 people who meet the criteria for this research study and anticipates a population pool of 30-50 potential participants. Small participant research (also known as small research) is the expected norm in qualitative research. Such small studies enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of participant experience and to develop a thick, rich description of that experience (Creswell, 2009).

1.8.3 Data Analysis Strategy

Qualitative data analysis searches to describe general statements about relationships and themes present on the data. Wolcott (1994) states the term analysis is a generic term that embraces the three basic categories when analyzing data: description, analysis and interpretation. He suggests these categories are not exclusive; neither visibly separated by a line, yet identifying and distinguishing each one may be useful to organize and present the data.

This study analyzed the first coding process through initial coding. This type of coding was chosen to examine, compare and search for similarities and differences throughout the data, and as Charmaz contextualizes "...to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data." (2006, p.46). After the respondents filled the questionnaires, the data first would be categorized into their demographics. The first is their backgrounds and the links that they got into the survey. In this research, it is based on the communities they belong in this research. The book-readers will be assembled into one unit and the show watchers will be assembled into the other unit.

The second level coding chosen, was Pattern coding. Pattern coding gave to this study the basis to explain major themes underneath the segments of the data; patterns in human relationships, the search for causes and explanations to the possible phenomenon, and finally, the platform to construct frameworks and processes. In this part, the data of the two units are compared and categorized into three main themes, first the audience's opinion about Jon Snow's character, second about their behavior related to the shows and books and third their opinion about the nudity and violence in the show.

Lastly, the analysis of the data is going to triangulate the major themes of the responses and the narrative gaps present in the story. To conclude, a Triangulation of the patterns and themes creates new levels of understanding the existing knowledge by reviewing the interviews in a comparative analysis with the previous two levels of coding (Saldaña, 2009).

