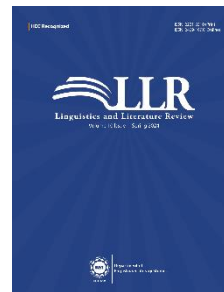



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# “Chaos Isn’t a Pit, Chaos is a Ladder”: A Metamodernist Reading of *Game of Thrones*

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## Abstract

*Game of Thrones* continues to be a global pop-cultural phenomenon even after its grand finale in 2019, and there has been a plethora of discussion regarding its chaotic and unpredictable narrative. However, its closure (or the lack thereof) is the most contested topic to date, which is why this article focuses on some of the most prominent story arcs that have been criticized for not ending according to the audience’s expectations. The current study is a textual-semiotic analysis that intends to give a more academic perspective to this discussion, where characters and storylines are discussed from a metamodernist perspective in order to provide an explanation based on philosophical underpinnings rather than merely pointing out the discrepancies when it comes to the closure of the show. The study aims to highlight the instances where the narrative of the chosen text operates through modern and postmodern tendencies without being tied down to either of the two opposing categories. Moreover, the idea of chaos from a metamodernist perspective is also employed to further investigate the inherent unpredictability of the text. The study concludes that the apparently chaotic and confounding closure of the chosen text is not necessarily a failure on the part of the writers, but rather a deliberate attempt to create a metamodern cultural artifact that exists in an a-topic metaxis, a space without boundaries that celebrates flux and chaos, which is, in itself, a reflection of our current socio-cultural ethos.

**Keywords:** a-topic metaxis, chaos, flux, metamodernism, metaxy, pop culture

## Introduction

The advancement and surge in media and its products have immensely impacted the world in which we reside today. It has affected our sensibilities and penetrated our lives so much so that it seldom happens when we are not glued to these cultural products. Moreover, the commercialization of

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popular culture in the form of streaming platforms and sites has amassed a huge number of audiences on a global level especially when it comes to “serialized storytelling” (Galbreath, [2025](#)). These serialized media products have introduced new narrative forms as well as unique ways through which they interact with the viewers which makes them worthy of being studied on an academic level. *Game of Thrones* is also one of such popular cultural artifacts which makes it a perfect candidate to be critically analyzed for making “sense out of our lives” (Brenner, [2017](#)), which is why it has been chosen for the present research.

This HBO Television series has been an adaptation of a book series called *A Song of Ice and Fire* by G. R. R. Martin, however, it has yet to see its final volume whereas, the TV series *Game of Thrones* aired its finale in 2019, which makes it an independent text when it comes to be studied on an academic level. Furthermore, the way this TV show garnered a huge amount of viewership and fame right after its premier, also makes it a significant addition in what is known as a “golden age” of television (Barker & Jane, [2016](#)). The show also holds a record for the most pirated show in the world as well as for bagging the most number of Emmy wins in the last 45 years. This is quite deserving given the way this show has become a universal phenomenon with discussions regarding its various elements still ongoing on numerous social media platforms till date (MacNeill, [2017](#)). Out of all these discussions, its climax has been one of the most popular and recurrent one which is why it has been selected for the present study.

Conventional media as well as social media platforms witnessed a huge uproar with *Game of Thrones*’ final episode of its eighth and last season. From being called “a lackluster ending to the epic series” to being termed as an “abysmal final episode”, it became evident that its audiences have been immensely disappointed with its climax (Elvy & Russell, [2024](#); Iacobucci, [2024](#)). The fans went as far as signing a petition on Change.org which demanded a remake of the last season from HBO. With some creative differences with the producers of the show, G. R. R. Martin also announced that his final book will have a different ending from the one shown on the show. This disconnect between the core text and the show has also been blamed as a reason for an unsatisfactory ending to the show among other reasons (Moura & Souza-Leão, [2022](#)). There is a view that a closure of a narrative should be such that invites its consumers “to consider the story as a whole” however, *Game of Thrones* has failed to do so through its “hurried

and inconsistent” end (Silvermint, [2019](#)).

Due to this huge uproar regarding its closure, the present study has chosen the TV show, *Game of Thrones*, to be studied in isolation so that its closure can be studied and explained from an academic perspective which is what all the above mentioned researches and reactions lack. There has been an excess of the identification of the problem, however, there is a lack of such academic ventures that attempt to understand the reason behind it. In order to fill this gap, the study aims at providing an explanation for the show’s apparently chaotic ending. For that purpose, the study has employed the concept of chaos which has been discussed by Van der Merve as a continuation of metamodern thought which is originally presented by Vermeulen and Van den Akker during the last decade.

### **Metamodernism and Chaos**

With an increase in the waning of postmodern moment felt by a number of critics and philosophers in the last 20 or so years, it was believed that there was a new and unique philosophical and ideological turn that demanded new terminologies (Hutcheon, [2002](#), p. 18). This created a space for a new school of thought in cultural and literary spheres that was better suited for our current social and cultural ethos. This is why Vermeulen and Van den Akker, two German theorists, came up with Metamodernism, however, they did not believe in the irrelevance of postmodern thought entirely, rather they believed in its evolution into something new which heavily relies on it (Van der Akker & Vermeulen, [2017](#), p. 3). By moving postmodernism from its dominant position in socio-cultural and literary spaces, metamodernism creates space for a new ideology that can aid us in making sense of “our current historical moment” which also includes popular cultural texts like *Game of Thrones* (pp. 11).

In one of their initial works, these theorists introduced the term Metamodernism and mentioned that the use of prefix ‘meta’ can have different meanings like ‘with’, ‘between’, and ‘beyond’ which means that “the metamodern structure of feeling is situated with or among older and newer structure of feeling” (Vermeulen & van den Akker, [2010](#), p. 56) (Van den Akker & Vermeulen, [2017](#), p. 8). To be more precise, these theorists explained metamodernism as a philosophical moment that simultaneously moves with, between and beyond modern as well as postmodern techniques and sensibilities, thus existing with and through them (Van den Akker &

Vermeulen, [2017](#), p. 9). This meant that metamodern social, literary, and cultural products do not need to part with modern or postmodern attitudes and philosophies, rather, it allows them to somehow exist and operate through them. Here, metamodernism is also considered as a perpetual oscillation between postmodernism and its precursor. This movement or flux between two opposing poles is termed as ‘metaxy’ which renders it incapable of achieving a balanced or fixed point, making it a paradox much like the ending of the chosen media text due to which the present study looks at it as a metamodern text (p. 6). Due to its paradoxical nature and its innovativeness, metamodernism appears to be a perfect philosophical lens for examining and explaining the apparently exasperating ending of the chosen media text.

This brings the discussion to the idea of chaos that has been discussed by many theorists in various fields prior to metamodernism. However, Van der Merve ([2017](#)), in his seminal work, *Note towards a Metamodernist Aesthetic with Reference to Post-Millennial Literary Works*, extends this concept and looks at it as an extension of metamodern thought. He takes chaos theory from the field of physics and mathematics, and explores how it moves between modernist need for a transcendental truth, and the postmodernist urge for multiplicities and pluralities, and for that he takes help from Dion’s take on chaos theory. Dion talks about chaos theory in relation with Einstein’s Theory of Relativity and Quantum Theory, and looking into this is quite pertinent to the present study. Modernism believes in reality’s multiple versions, however, it does not mean that it denies the presence of a transcendental truth behind it all. Similarly, the basic belief of the theory of relativity in the multiplicity of truths does not thwart it from believing in an actual or absolute truth lurking somewhere behind this plurality, which is then connected to modernist thought by Dion ([2007](#)). In a similar manner, Dion then connects the basic philosophy behind quantum theory with postmodern thought. As quantum theory challenges the presence of some absolute truth or reality by proposing a system of infinite possibilities and probabilities, postmodernism follows the same idea with its concepts like fragmentation and erasure of boundaries, where there is freedom for complexity and chaos instead of a perpetual search for some meaning and reality (Peñas-Bermejo, [2002](#), p. 50). Drawing from this discussion, Chaos theory proposes the idea of chaos as something that results from an interplay between both these theories which creates a combination of “uncertainty and certainty into a paradoxical whole” (Dion,

[2007](#), p. 233). This rejection for equilibrium in chaos theory is what makes chaos theory an extension of metamodern thought (Van der Merve, [2017](#), p. 184). The idea of chaos here works like a pendulum that stays in continuous movement between the modernist desire for order and the denial of any such reality, and the embrace of chaos by the postmodern philosophy. By uniting this “unknowable with the knowable”, this chaotic system neither claims to find absolute truth and meaning, nor does it thwart any such possibility (Dion, [2007](#), p. 233).

This entire discussion, when it comes to metamodern ideologies like metaxy and its take on the idea of chaos, proves that it consists of an inherent unpredictability that is compatible with our current social and cultural ethos. Controversial cultural texts like *Game of Thrones* are replete with paradoxical systems, hence for this analysis, such theoretical perspectives with “in-built unpredictability” need to be studied (Hawkins, [1995](#), p. 15). Thus, the present research looks at the controversial closure of *Game of Thrones* by employing metamodern ideas discussed above in order to examine and explain various tensions within the text to better understand its confusing climax.

### Methodology

The current study is qualitative in nature and the corpus to be studied includes all 8 seasons of a TV show, *Game of Thrones*, aired by HBO which consist of 73 episodes in total. Although the entire show has been watched and re-watched for the purpose of collecting data, however, the present research discusses a selected data set that is pertinent to the discussion due to the study’s limitations. As the selected work is a media text that included visual, textual as well as audio information, it is a textual-semiotic analysis that is well-suited for a more cohesive and well-rounded discussion of such a text.

The present study has been conducted based on the view that text based analysis is appropriate for works that are related to visual media (Fürsich, [2009](#)). An independent textual analysis can be employed for studying various facets such as semiotic arrangements, narrative structure as well as philosophical underpinnings of a text, and as qualitative analysis, it has the capacity to delve deeper into a text’s manifest as well as latent meaning (pp. 239–241). It is often claimed that textual analysts are only concerned about the “ideological aspects of textualization” and objective reading which

makes them ignore the methodological practices and tools, and renders their analysis shallow and unreliable (Brennen, [2017](#), p. 214, p.247). However, it is contested that instead of focusing on the text's close reading and merely focusing on methodological aspects also creates a weak analysis when it comes to media texts and their continuous battle between meaning and ideology (Fürsich, [2009](#), p. 248). Due to this, there is a vast majority that believes that visual texts can be analyzed through various ways and every interpretation is acceptable and cannot be called inauthentic.

Keeping all these perspectives as well as the multimodal nature of the chosen work, the current research has employed a textual-semiotic method for analyzing *Game of Thrones*. The selected work consists of visual as well as audio data, both of which need to be incorporated into the analysis for a more wholesome discussion. The visual data selected for analysis has been collected in the form of scenes and shots that are vital to the research. In order to study these scenes and shots, mise-en-scene analysis has been carried out which is defined as everything and anything that is there in the staging of action that takes place in front of a camera (Corrigan, [2015](#), p. 65; Butler, [2018](#), p. 199). As for the textual part of the analysis, the dialogues that are pertinent to the discussion have been selected through multiple interactions with the show. They have also been substantiated through subtitles and transcripts of the show found online in order to avoid human error. Moreover, the plot of the narrative which involves the arrangement and construction of various events in a precise order is also included in the discussion wherever necessary (Corrigan, [2015](#), p. 56).

### **The Prince who was Promised (or not?)**

It has been vastly accepted that Jon Snow's character "fared the worst" as the show ended with him being banished to the Wall instead of becoming the King of the entire Westeros as was expected of him (Elvy, [2024](#)). Although initially Melisandre declares Stannis Baratheon as the "prince that was promised", in season 6, she soon transfers this title to Jon Snow as he is brought back to life by her after he gets killed (Benioff & Weiss, [2016a](#), "Oathbreaker", 0:04:10-0:04:18). She also mentions to Sir Davos in the very next episode that she now serves Jon because "he's the prince that was promised" which again strengthens the audiences' hopes that he will ultimately ascend the Iron Throne (Benioff & Weiss, [2016b](#), "Book of the Stranger", 00:07:42). Moreover, from the beginning of the show, he has been portrayed as an outcast, an underdog, who is just, honorable, and brave

due to which he is viewed as a protagonist by the viewers throughout the show’s narrative (Hartinger, [2012](#), p. 155).

Another thing that solidifies Jon’s claim as the true owner of the Iron Throne is the story behind his actual heritage. Shown as an illegitimate child of Ned Stark from the beginning of the show, he has been treated unjustly, and the reason behind him being sent to the Wall has also been his illegitimacy. However, as the narrative progresses and after he is named as the prince who was promised, Brandon Stark starts getting visions from the past where he can see Ned Stark with his sister, Lyanna Stark, who has clearly given birth and is soaked in her blood (ep.10, 00:54:46-00:57:29). This is where she makes him promise that he would take care of her son and just as he holds the baby in his arms, the scene abruptly cuts to a close-up shot of Jon’s face. This foreshadows the fact that he might be the baby in the previous scene, thus challenging his illegitimacy.

The actual confirmation about him being a prince is not created through one scene rather via a series of such moments where half-truths are revealed, and the rest is left to be understood by the audience, however, when in season 7, Bran finally reveals to Sam, “He’s the son of Rhaegar Targaryen and my aunt, Lyanna Stark”, the camera starts panning closer to his face and a vigorous music score can be heard in the background, further highlighting the significance of the moment (Benioff et al., [2017](#), 1:08:53-1:10:55). Sam further reveals that both Jon’s parents were married in a secret wedding ceremony as the music in the background intensifies and the scene finally cuts to a sigil of the Targaryen house on a door, and as the camera pans to the left revealing Jon’s face right in front of it, the shot becomes extremely poignant as it marks the moment where his true lineage is revealed (See Figure 1).

This shot places Jon adjacent to the House Targaryen sigil and as Daenerys’s opens the door and Jon enters it, it is actually Jon’s symbolic entrance into Targaryen House. This is coupled with the revelation of his real name as Aegon Targaryen and Bran’s voiceover, “He’s the heir to the Iron Throne”, hence, Jon’s claim on the throne further solidifies in viewers’ eyes (1:11:13) (1:11:51). Given this development, coupled with Jon’s character arc as a protagonist who comes back to life and fights for what is right, the audiences are stunned beyond belief when he kills Daenerys and is then banished to the Wall without any honor or glory.

**Figure 1**

*A Shot Juxtaposing Jon with House Targaryen's Sigil*



*Note.* From *The Dragon and the Wolf* (Season 7, Episode 7) of *Game of Thrones*, 2017 (01:10:21).

**Figure 2**

*Jon (Aegon Targaryen) Kneeling in Front of King Brandon Stark*



*Note.* From *The Iron Throne* (Season 8, Episode 6) of *Game of Thrones*, 2019 (1:02:40).

This is where the metamodernist nature of the text is revealed where chaos is employed as a mode of resistance so that “complexity and indeterminism of reality” can be highlighted (Van der Merve, [2017](#), p. 146). Just as metamodernism challenges the idealized version of events, the ending of *Game of Thrones* follows suit where Bran is elected as the King of the entire Westeros instead of Jon whose story development and narrative arc both favored him for this role. The scene where he meets his siblings before leaving for the Wall in the end says it all as he kneels in front of his king, Brandon Stark (See Figure. 2).

It is a long shot, where Jon, whose real identity is Aegon Targaryen, is seen kneeling in front of his king, Brandon Stark. A ship in the background can be seen waiting to take him away to the Wall where he is to spend his entire life as a punishment for killing his queen, Daenerys. The placement of Arya Stark and Sansa Stark alongside their brother is a strategic choice where Jon can be taken as a stand-in for House Targaryen, bending its knee to House Stark. Here, the idea of metaxy can be seen where the narrative is moving between a “utopic syntaxis”, an imaginary place where everything makes sense and “dystopic parataxis”, a place filled with ambiguity, fragmentation and chaos (Vermeulen & Akker, [2017](#), p. 62). This flux creates a space called a-topic metaxis, where there are no boundaries, thus, creating a state of being “simultaneously here, there and nowhere” (p. 62). Applying this idea to the above mentioned shot, it can be seen that the narrative first gave the idea that Jon is supposed to be the king, which was the ideal outcome, however, suddenly in the end, the tables are turned, and out of nowhere, Bran is made a king while Jon kneels before him in spite of having all the claim to the throne. This seems like a dystopic parataxis where the expected protagonist is left to suffer. However, given the House Stark’s sufferings and righteousness, Bran being the king also seems like a well-deserved decision but this take is also controversial, thus making this ending of “the prince who was promised” a perfectly metamodern one, as it seems to be moving between various extremes at the same time, never caring to take a single position. Its both-neither dynamic is chaotic and paradoxical which is why the audiences are unable to make sense of this narrative arc, however, this is indeed a fresh perspective when it comes to our contemporary world as it rejects any form of order in favor of chaos. In other words, it favors a mixture of “uncertainty and certainty into a paradoxical whole” (Van der Merve, [2017](#), p. 233). This defiance of any form of equilibrium is what makes this ending, as confusing as it may be, a

metamodern one.

### Daenerys: A ‘Mhysa’ or a Mass Murderer?

As one of the most beloved characters, Daenerys Targaryen’s descent into a ruthless ‘Mad Queen’ and her murder at Jon’s hands became the most controversial event as the show reached its finale, especially in the last two episodes. Her “jarring rapid transition” towards villainy was seen as a “betrayal of everything she stood for” since the beginning of the show, and her death was deemed as an unfair one by a vast majority of the viewers (Jones, [2019](#)). Given these reactions, and in order to make sense of this chaotic ending of her character arc, it needs to be analyzed in depth.

In the beginning of the show, Daenerys is introduced as a meek and powerless girl whose reins are in her brother, Viserys’ hands, and her worth is nothing more than a bargaining chip to be used where necessary. It can be witnessed in their very first interaction where he asks her in a threatening tone, “You will not wake the dragon, will you?” and she can barely mumble a scared, “No” (Benioff et al., [2011](#), 0:34:54-0:34:59).

#### Figure 3

*Back Angle Shot of Viserys Towering Over a Scared Daenerys*



**Note.** From *Winter Is Coming* (Season 1, Episode 1) of *Game of Thrones*, 2011 (00:33:11).

The camera angles employed in the entire scene speak a lot about the power dynamics at play here that can be seen in figures 3 and 4. The first

frame is a medium shot that shows Daenerys cowering under Viserys’ dominant torso, whose back is visible in the left side of the frame as he towers over her (See Figure. 3). Her facial expressions here also depicting fearfulness as she looks at him with her wide and wary eyes. The second frame is a front angle shot of the same moment where Viserys’ torso is still placed above Daenerys, as the lower placement of a little part of her head in the right corner makes it clear (See Figure. 4). This scene also sets the stage for Daenerys’s character as it evokes sympathy in the audiences’ mind for her which soon turns into admiration as she grows out of this pitiful girl into a strong woman who makes her place in a Dothraki clan as their chief in the coming episodes.

#### **Figure 4**

*Front Angle Shot of Viserys Towering Over a Scared Daenerys*



*Note.* From *Winter Is Coming* (Season 1, Episode 1) of *Game of Thrones*, 2011 (00:34:54).

Her mercy becomes her defining quality when she sees brutality, even if she has to stand up to her husband. She even speaks up against the Dothraki custom where the defeated party is to be killed, as she says, “I will not let you slaughter them” (Martin & Minahan, [2011](#), 0:42:23). She becomes a perfect modern protagonist as she dons the role of a leader who is compassionate and speaks for the downtrodden in the coming seasons. The audience starts loving her and rooting for her, just like the masses beginning to adore her in the narrative.

**Figure 5**  
*Daenerys on the Freed People's Shoulders*



**Note.** From *Mhysa* (Season 3, Episode 10) of *Game of Thrones*, 2013 (01:00:45).

The frame added here is from the scene where she sets the slaves of Yunkai and Astapor free, and as a gesture of their devotion and gratitude, they pick her up on their shoulders (See Figure 5). As it is visible in the added shot, the slaves around her have their hands raised towards her with her placed in the center of the frame as they surround her in the form of a circle. Their devotion is visible on their faces as they give her the title of “Mhysa” that means mother in their local tongue. A vibrant music score intensifies in the background as the camera pans farther and farther away from her until an aerial shot is shown where she is just a speck in the middle of a huge crowd which gives a cult-like feeling where she is the queen chosen by those she has saved. She then proceeds to liberate other slaves from various cities, earning numerous titles like Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Breaker of Chains, Queen of Meereen, The Unburnt, Queen of the Andals and the First Men in addition to the Mother of Dragons before she reaches Westeros. As a viewer of the show, one couldn’t help but rejoice as she comes to aid Jon and helps everyone win a war against the White Walkers, even losing one of her dragons in the process.

All the above discussion confirms her as a protagonist of the show and the audiences root for her to ascend the Iron Throne alongside Jon.

However, the last season sees the most shocking shift in her personality which can be viewed from a metamodernist perspective which discusses “simmering tensions...and frightening developments” (Van den Akker & Vermeulen, [2017](#), p. 5). The queen who liberates slaves and says, “They are free to choose. To live as they see fit” suddenly changes her perspective when she states, “I don’t have love here. I only have fear” and “Let it be fear” near the end of the show, confusing the audience immensely (Cogman & Sakharov, [2014](#), 0:34:04-0:34:07) (Benioff et al., [2019b](#), 0:16:14-0:16:23, 0:17:34). This confusion soon transforms into horror when the attack on King’s Landing begins and Daenerys enters the sky riding one of her Dragons, Drogon (Benioff et al., [2019b](#), 0:42:06-0:42:45). The bells start ringing in the background, signaling that the city has surrendered before her, however, as the camera starts panning closer and closer to her face, transitioning from a medium shot to a close up of her face, her immense rage becomes clearly visible from her facial expressions as she looks at Cersei who is standing in the Red Keep (0:45:10-0:45:31).

### **Figure 6**

#### *Daenerys' Furious Face Before Burning King's Landing*



**Note.** From *The Bells* (Season 8, Episode 5) of *Game of Thrones*, 2019 (00:45:32).

The frame added here shows her face right before she decides to burn the city despite the fact that it had already surrendered which marks the

moment where her character becomes irredeemable (See Figure 6). Her lips are curled back, revealing her teeth, her eyes are mad with fury, her nostrils are flared and her entire face is tense exhibiting hatred and a thirst for revenge. This frame, when compared with the first one added in this discussion, shows a great contrast as this deranged person seems to be a far cry from a meek and kind girl who stood up for what was right. This is the exact moment where she was expected to spare the people of the city as she has clearly won, however, right after this frame was taken, she wreaks havoc on the city as she burns it to the ground through her fire breathing dragon until there is nothing left but ashes, leaving her companions in the narrative, as well as the audiences, in utter shock.

This flux in Daenerys' character is indeed confusing, however, it is quite understandable if it is viewed through a metamodernist lens where complexity and flux are celebrated through the ideas of chaos theory (Van der Merve, 2017, p. 178). Just as this theory keeps fluctuating between a "higher, absolute truth" and an impossibility of any such reality, Daenerys' narrative arc follows a similar pattern where she is established throughout the entire narrative as a just queen who deserves to ascend the Iron Throne, only to thwart any such closure by making her the most destructive villain of the entire show (p. 184). As Merve states that in this new age, where the possibility of an answer is not denied as it is done by postmodernism, however, it is also not provided, leaving everything is a state of perpetual flux (p. 242). As pointed by Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010), whenever a metamodern system "sways towards apathy, gravity pulls it back towards enthusiasm", similarly Daenerys' transformation from a protagonist to a mad and ruthless queen is countered by her death before she can commit any more atrocities, which can be viewed as some form of order in the otherwise chaotic situation (p. 61). This way it can be said that metamodernism is actually a celebration of nature's unpredictability which is how Daenerys' descent into madness, and ultimately her death, can be explained. The narrative, instead of giving a predictable, or more desirable, closure to her story, challenges it by celebrating its inherent unpredictability, which is why it is still a topic of discussion even after so many years have passed since the show's finale.

### **The Future of Westeros: A Monarchy Once Again?**

As expected from the last episode of such an immensely popular TV show, *Game of Throne's* season finale had to be "both emotionally and

narratively satisfying”, according to the viewers (Higson, [2020](#)). And after the entire unexpected turn of events in the second last episode as discussed earlier, the future of Westeros became the main focus for the audiences so that they could finally have some semblance of closure. On the contrary, this storyline also faced a huge backlash after the finale as most of the viewers and critics of the show felt that the way the show dealt with it was “logically strained and emotionally thin” as various things felt rushed or lacked a proper or a satisfactory closure (Beck, [2019](#)). Thus, the present study deems it significant to look at various narrative elements and scenes pertaining to the future of the realm so that the alleged lack of closure can be studied and explained in an adequate manner.

As it has been seen during the previous discussion, the Iron Throne and who ascends it has been one of the central elements to the show’s narrative, as evident from the name of the show as well. It is quite justified to expect a moment of *dénouement* after Daenerys is killed by Jon and all the important characters gather around to decide who is to rule the entire Seven Kingdoms (Benioff & Weiss, [2019a](#), 0:43:46-0:55:10). This is where, prompted by Tyrion, a discussion takes place regarding the future of the realm and Sam presents his idea of a modern democratic state which lets its people decide who the ruler should be. Unfortunately, his suggestion is initially met by absolute silence and the camera cuts to various shots of all the lords and ladies in attendance one by one, who can be seen supporting comically bewildered expressions before abruptly breaking into laughter as if they hadn’t heard a more absurd idea in their entire lives. To highlight the absurdity of his suggestion, they make jokes like, “Maybe we should give the dogs a vote as well” and, “I’ll ask my horse” which shows that even after seeing everything, the idea of subjects deciding their fates is still a joke to those who hold power which breaks the audiences’ expectations for a better system (0:49:05, 0:49:08).

The second most shocking moment arrives when the viewers are “stunned by the hollowness” of Tyrion’s speech where he states that it is neither armies or flags nor is it the gold that unites people rather it is stories that do so, and due to this reason Bran the Broken is the most obvious choice for the King of Westeros (Berman, [2019](#)). As he says this, the camera pans towards Bran and puts him in sharp focus as the frame zooms in on him and Tyrion’s silhouette is blurred out (Benioff & Weiss, [2019a](#), 0:49:33-0:50:46). This technique is used to highlight the point where Bran, who has

never been a prospect for Kingship, suddenly comes into focus out of nowhere, shocking the viewers as well. Although it may seem like an unfair and least expected turn of events, however, it fits the metamodernist deliberate search for a transcendental truth or reality while acknowledging its unattainability as it can be seen in Tyrion’s reply to Sansa’s critique about Bran’s inability to father children (Van der Merve, 2017, pp. 91–92). When he replies, “That is the wheel our queen wanted to break”, which is exactly what Daniel Kwan meant while talking about metamodern films being an entity that “transcends out of the ashes and rubble of irony” (Benioff & Weiss, 2019a, 0:51:48). On one hand, the choice of a highborn person from a powerful family is a huge blow to the expectations of the viewers, on the other hand, him not being able to transfer his kingship to his children is a hope in the otherwise dark end.

### Figure 7

*The Small Council Looking at Bran*



**Note.** From *The Iron Throne* (Season 8, Episode 6) of *Game of Thrones*, 2019 (01:08:45).

Another moment where the narrative seems to be in flux between irony and sincerity is when the Small Council meets for the first time after Bran’s election as the King. When Tyrion enters the room, a medium shot appears on screen where the chairs around the council table are shown in disarray, and noticing this, he realigns each and every one of them that can be seen as a symbolic representation of his intent to bring some form of order to an otherwise chaotic and corrupt system as the Hand of the King (1:06:20-

1:06:55). However, just as any metamodern text would do, this hope is thwarted as soon as the other members enter the room and again misalign all the chairs, much to Tyrion’s frustration, foreshadowing that the council isn’t going to be as ideal as the audiences may have expected. This is soon made clear when upon Bran’s arrival, the camera shifts to the council members (See Figure 8).

The frame shows a point of view shot of this moment, where all the council members are seated around the table, their faces and bodies tilted towards the camera which means that it is Bran’s point of view as he looks at his council looking at him with expectant faces, waiting for him to speak. The way Bran has been put behind the camera coupled with an absence of any diegetic or non-diegetic sound, the scene highlights the audiences’ high expectations from Bran that can be seen being mirrored in the council members’ expectant facial expressions.

However, it is rendered quite anti-climactic when he fails to discuss anything worthwhile and just makes mundane inquiries about the vacancy of certain positions on the council. After he leaves, the council bickers in a comical manner making it an extremely underwhelming end to the entire show. However, this is perfectly in line with metamodernism where the ultimate goal is not about having “blind faith in some ultimate utopia”, rather it is about presenting a version of reality that is well-suited for our contemporary complicated world (Van der Merve, [2017](#), p. 101). The silence, the bickering and the lack of interest exhibited by Bran may seem ironic and chaotic however, it also has some hope in the form of Tyrion who is trying to bring some form of order to it. Moreover, Bran’s psychic abilities also present hope that may help him in being an effective ruler. By possessing “qualities of both order and chaos” while never stopping at one point in favor of the other, this ending proves to be a perfect one from a metamodern perspective (Romesburg, [2004](#), p. 200).

### Conclusion

By looking at multiple narrative arcs and their allegedly unsatisfactory endings in *Game of Thrones*, the study has highlighted its metamodern nature characterized “by oscillation rather than synthesis, harmony, reconciliation” of the text. This actually mirrors our current socio-cultural ethos (Van der Akker & Vermeulen, [2017](#), p. 6). The discussion reveals how the chosen work employs the idea of chaos as a continuation of

metamodern thought, and embraces complexity and flux not as something destructive rather as “the kind of disorder out of which order can emerge” (Van der Merve, 2017, p. 176). The detailed analysis has shown that it is by no accident that the chosen text constructs Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen as potential candidates for the Iron Throne. They are further shown as perfectly modern protagonists throughout the major part of the narrative, only to turn them into a pitiable creature and a villain, respectively, at the end. This rejection of an “ultimate utopia” in favor of an inherent unpredictability is actually a mode of resistance employed in order to present a reality that is better suited for the chaotic world we live in (p. 101). However, it does not stop at a dystopian extreme as it moves towards a hopeful future where a king is chosen who will not be able to pass on his crown to his children. Tyrion’s presence as the Hand of the king is also a hopeful thing, however, staying true to its metamodern nature, the text does not stay at any one extreme, thus creating an a-topic metaxis, a place without boundaries, in a state of perpetual flux. By rejecting an ideal or happy ending, the chosen text basically mirrors the nonlinearity of human condition, especially in the present era that keeps fluctuating between extinction of grand narratives and a quest for some form of order behind the chaotic postmodern nihilism, simultaneously. Thus, the apparently chaotic events at the end of the chosen work can be seen as moments of ironic sincerity which replicate our current socio-cultural sensibilities in multiple ways.

#### **Author Contribution**

**Maryam Raashid:** data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing-original draft.  
**Mohammad Safer Awan:** conceptualization, resources, supervision, validation, writing- review and editing.

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The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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