

ARCHIVALISM:
**DEVELOPING A NEW WAY TO INTERPRET STORIES ABOUT THE
ARCHIVE**

by

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Abstract

Archivists and archival records play integral roles as plot devices in many significant works of popular culture entertainment. In one example, George R.R. Martin's medieval-inspired book series *A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF)* and its television adaptation, HBO's *Game of Thrones (GoT)*, I have observed that records, archives, and archivists repeatedly contribute to forwarding the plot by providing critical pivot points for significant transitions in the story. Some archival scholars critique the way archivists and archival institutions are represented in pop culture contexts, citing overused stereotypes that unfairly or inaccurately represent archivists and the archival profession. Medievalist scholars have observed a similar phenomenon in popular representations of the Middle Ages. The field of medievalism studies - which examines the relationship between the historical Middle Ages and how it has been viewed, written about, and used as a backdrop in both popular and scholarly media – inspired me to consider archival representations in the same way. I call this the concept of *archivalism*, a term I coined that I define as the study of the relationship between perceptions of the archive, as expressed across a variety of media, and the real work of the archive, archivists, and archival practices.

This thesis proposes the concept of archivalism as a new approach to studying the impact and perception of the archives in the cultural mindset. Paying particular attention to language and imagery used to represent archivists and archival institutions, I employ close reading of the series *Game of Thrones* and three different corpora of literature: studies on representations of the archives in popular culture, studies on *Game of Thrones* as medievalism, and stories about the archives and archival research written by scholars from disciplines outside of archival studies. I use this research to support the argument that, just as medievalist scholars have used *Game of Thrones* and the study of medievalism as a point of entry to medieval studies, so too can the

study of archivalism be a valuable tool for educating the public about the archive, drawing more people to the field of archival studies, and inspiring interdisciplinary dialogue.

Lay Summary

Information professionals - such as archivists and librarians - are depicted in many novels, television shows, and feature-length films across popular culture entertainment. Unfortunately, these characters often reflect negative stereotypes that some archival scholars critique as unfair misrepresentations of archivists and the archival profession. In this thesis, I analyse the representations of librarian-archivists in a pop culture phenomenon, HBO's *Game of Thrones*, and compare them with stereotypes drawn from archival studies scholarship. I make the argument that, just as Medievalist scholars have benefitted from using *Game of Thrones* and other medieval-inspired entertainment to introduce medieval studies, archivists and archival scholars can use pop culture representations as tools to educate the public about the archive, inspire discussions between academic disciplines, and draw more people to the field of archival studies.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, J. L. Wood. This includes the term *archivalism*, which was coined and developed as a concept by the author during the course of this research.

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List of Abbreviations

ASOIAF – George R.R. Martin’s novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*

GoT – HBO’s *Game of Thrones* tv show

Individual show episodes are listed as S (season number) E (episode number). For example, season 8 episode 1 - “Winterfell”, will be abbreviated as S8E1

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, many people across the globe experienced significant stress and upheaval over the past eighteen months. The long-term closure of archival institutions meant that, like so many other scholars and graduate students, I had to abandon research in progress. Having to abruptly switch directions and come up with an entirely new project after months of focusing on one thing can be difficult for anyone. As a neurodivergent person, I found it exceptionally challenging. That I managed to pull off a whole new thesis during this stressful time is a massive testament to the kindness, effort, and patience of my amazing supervisor, Dr Jennifer Douglas. Without her mentorship and constant faith in my abilities, I might have given up. I am also very grateful to Dr Erik Kwakkel, who generously contributed his time serving on my committee and who provided an alternative perspective and excellent feedback on my writing.

Many dear friends supported my research efforts and contributed to my general happiness throughout the writing process. Most significantly, I would like to thank Emily Logan and Limor Tamim for their love and kindness, and Alvionne Karpinski, Dr Jennifer Abel and Dr Jessica Langer for their friendship and expert writing advice.

Life during lockdown was made infinitely better by my Stormcrow/Zoomies crew, who continue to make me laugh on a daily basis, and who put up with my various expositions on such things as the supreme greatness of Scotland, Nordic neofolk music, all things Norse and Viking, and a little show called *Game of Thrones*.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the tremendous contribution that George R.R. Martin has made to fantasy literature and popular culture. His novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its television adaptation, HBO's *Game of Thrones*, got me through many a tough time over the years and sparked many new friendships. Without Martin's stories, this thesis would not exist.

Dedication

*This work is dedicated to my dear friends,
Dr. Jessica Langer and Jason Kapalka,
two of the kindest, most generous people I know,
who, as a scholar of science fiction and a video game developer,
have mastered the “professional nerd” dream life,
and who have graciously shared that life
by opening their home to me for the past year*

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

There was something here, some truth buried in these yellow pages, if only he could see it. But what? The tome was over a century old. Scarcely a man now alive had yet been born when Malleon had compiled his dusty list of weddings, births, and deaths.

From *A Game of Thrones*, “Eddard” VI (Ch. 27)¹

1.1 Introduction

Archival records play an integral role in George R.R. Martin's viral book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (*ASOIAF*) and its television adaptation, HBO's *Game of Thrones* (*GoT*). For example, in the above quote, from the first book in the *ASOIAF* series, the reader joins one of the primary characters as he searches an old chronicle for potential answers to a mystery. The information he discovers will eventually lead to his execution and the beginning of a civil war. As a student of archival studies and a fan of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*, I am interested in the portrayal of archives, archivists, and archival sources in the show and in popular culture entertainment more broadly. It is my observation that records, archives, and archivists repeatedly play an integral role in forwarding *GoT*'s plot by providing critical pivot points for significant transitions in the story. This thesis explores how archival themes are represented to the general public in popular culture entertainment media via an examination of the portrayal of records, archivists, and archival spaces in *Game of Thrones*.

¹George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 2011 eBook, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Book 1 (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1996).

Popular culture – expressed across multiple media – is a far-reaching, influential force that has a “profound effect on people's opinions, ideas, and judgements” across the globe.² In a world of eBooks, video streaming services, and online communities, people who might never have visited an actual archive are exposed to pop culture portrayals of archives, archivists, and records in action. Archives, archivists, and archival spaces are often cast in a narrow range of stereotypical roles meant to serve as plot devices in these portrayals. For example, one of the regularly occurring stereotypes exploited in popular entertainment portrays libraries or archives as fortresses staffed with knowledgeable guard-like employees who protect information resources from the outside world. Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons* is a recognizable example. In this bestselling mystery-thriller, Dr Robert Langdon, a Harvard scholar who studies symbolism, is denied several requests to conduct research at the Vatican Archives. He barely escapes with his life when, after finally being granted access to the Archives, someone traps him inside a hermetically sealed vault.³ The film adaptation of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* provides a less life-threatening example when protagonist Harry Potter has to use his Cloak of Invisibility to sneak into the restricted section of the Hogwarts library.⁴ These stereotyped images of archives, archivists, and archival spaces are pervasive across pop culture and, as this thesis will explore, also appear in the way that some scholars discuss “the archive” in the stories that they tell about their experiences of working in or with archives. The similarities lead me to consider how fictional and non-fictional (i.e., scholarly) accounts of the archive share many attributes.⁵

² Tania Aldred, Gordon Burr, and Eun Park, “Crossing a Librarian with a Historian: The Image of Reel Archivists,” *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 58.

³ Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000).

⁴ Chris Columbus, Dir., *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2001).

⁵ The word archive(s) can be interpreted in many ways, depending on the school of thought or country of origin. To make things very simple, the word *archive(s)* refers to either a collection of records or an institution or repository that holds records and must

In this thesis, I coin a new concept that I call *archivalism* to think about how non-specialists – in pop culture and non-archival studies scholarship – convey beliefs about the archive’s role in their work. An analogy can be drawn between my concept of archivalism and its relationship to archival studies and the concept of medievalism and its relationship to medieval studies. Just as medievalism examines the epistemological relationship between “what is perceived as the historical real [Middle Ages] and its reinvention”⁶ across multiple media, so too does archivalism seek to understand the relationship between perceptions of the archive – including the nature and origins of these perceptions - and the reality of the archive, archivists, and archival practices.

The study of medievalism is the study of the *response* to the Middle Ages, meaning how it has been viewed, written about, and used as a backdrop across both popular and scholarly media since the “sense of the mediaeval” first came into being.⁷ Thus, scholars of medievalism study how the “culture, literature, and modes of thinking” of this era are interpreted.⁸ Learning from the example of medievalism studies, the study of archivalism examines responses to the archive – reflected in how the archive is portrayed across a variety of media – to try to gain a deeper understanding of how those responses might influence the general population’s knowledge and interpretation of the archive, archivists, and archival practices.

be read contextually. Using “*the archive*” in quotations signifies the trope or Derridian/Foucaultian *concept* of the archives and all its permutations presented in some humanities scholarship. This concept is explored more thoroughly in Chapter Four.

⁶ Bruce Holsinger and Stephanie Trigg, “Novel Medievalisms,” *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (June 2016): 177.

⁷ David Matthews. *Medievalism: a Critical History*. Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer Group, Limited, (2015): 1. Matthews is quoting T.A. Shippey here, thus using the British spelling of “mediaeval”.

⁸ Shiloh Carroll, *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones*, *Medievalism*, volume 12 (Cambridge ; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2018): 8.

Dietmar Schenk writes that one of the roles of archival science is to examine “the nature of archives and their role in society and culture.”⁹ In the spirit of this statement, and to more fully explicate the analogous relationship between medievalism and archivalism and identify its significance, this thesis explores the portrayal of archives, archivists, and archival spaces in the pop culture phenomenon *Game of Thrones* and a selection of archival stories in scholarship.¹⁰ Medievalist scholars from across the disciplines have come to recognize some of the possible benefits - not the least of which is access to a large audience - of the “ongoing fascination in popular culture with the Middle Ages and medievalism.”¹¹ Due to its “substantial cultural position”¹² in recent history, *A Song of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones* is often used as a vehicle for introducing discussion about medievalism and the Middle Ages to people who might not otherwise engage with medieval studies. For the past several years, medievalist professors from academic institutions worldwide have been using the popularity of the show to their advantage in the classroom. For example, a 2017 article in TIME magazine states that “[c]lasses that touch on the subject have had to add spots for more students... *Game of Thrones* is the best recruitment tool for medieval studies and humanities courses since the *Lord of the Rings* films hit theaters.” The article goes on to talk about how the reach of *GoT* “is about more than classroom attendance”; it is “energizing the entire field of medieval studies.”¹³ This thesis will argue that, just as *Game of Thrones* and the study of medievalism have been used by medievalist scholars as

⁹ Dietmar Schenk, “How to Distinguish between Manuscripts and Archival Records: A Study in Archival Theory,” in *Manuscripts and Archives*, ed. Alessandro Bausi et al., vol. 11 (De Gruyter, 2018): 3.

¹⁰ The term 'archival stories' refers to stories that scholars write about their experience working in archives and with archivists and archival records.

¹¹ KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy: From Tolkien to Game of Thrones*, Medievalism, volume XVI (Cambridge ; Rochester, NY, USA: D.S. Brewer, 2019): 4.

¹² Hilary Jane Locke. “Beyond ‘Tits and Dragons’: Medievalism, Medieval History, and Perceptions in Game of Thrones.” In *From Medievalism to Early Modernism: Adapting the English Past*, edited by Marina Gerzic and Aidan Norrie, 171–87. New York and London: Routledge, (2019): 172.

¹³ Olivia B. Waxman, “Game of Thrones Is Even Changing How Scholars Study the Real Middle Ages,” TIME, July 14, 2017, <https://time.com/4837351/game-of-thrones-real-medieval-history/>.

a point of entry to medieval studies, so too can the study of archivalism be a valuable tool for educating the public about the archive, drawing more people to the field of archival studies, and inspiring interdisciplinary dialogue amongst scholars.

1.2 Methods

This thesis explores archivalism as a new approach to studying the impact and perception of archives in the cultural mindset. Whether done out of confusion or expediency, pop culture portrayals often conflate the purposes and practices of libraries/librarians and archives/archivists, with “library/librarian” used as a catch-all for two fields that, while they both deal with written information, ultimately function in different ways.¹⁴ To avoid any potential confusion that this might cause, I use the terms “knowledge keeper” and “knowledge space” to encapsulate the work of information professionals and repositories throughout this thesis. *Knowledge keepers* include archivists, librarians, records managers, and (medieval) scribes/clerks, whose work includes tasks such as collection or records management, cataloguing, document or book preservation/transcription, document creation, and reference services. The term *knowledge space* represents repositories such as libraries, archives (both personal and institutional) and muniments rooms. To focus this exploration, I ask three questions:

- How are knowledge keepers and knowledge spaces portrayed in HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, and what is their role in the story?
- How are archival records and documents actively participating in the story?

¹⁴ This phenomenon, which is discussed more in Chapter Three, has been observed by several scholars, including Karen Buckley. “‘The Truth Is in the Red Files’: An Overview of Archives in Popular Culture.” *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 98, 100.; Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 61. In this article, Aldred, Burr & Park reference Bari L. Helms, “Reel Librarians: The Stereotype and Technology” (Master’s thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006 (p.4, p. 30).

- How might these portrayals influence perceptions of the archivist's work and the experience of researching an archival institution?

I employ close reading of the series and three different corpora of literature: studies on representations of the archives in popular culture, studies on *Game of Thrones*, and scholarly literature about the archives and archival research from outside the archival discipline. In paying particular attention to language and imagery used to represent knowledge keepers and spaces, I follow some of the techniques used to explore medievalism; my focus on the representation of knowledge keepers and spaces leads me to posit the analogous concept of archivalism. In this thesis, I hope to understand how archivalism can be used as a concept and to what aims.

The first two analytical chapters of this thesis utilize themes extracted from scholarly literature to examine aspects of archival representation in *Game of Thrones*, paying particular attention to similarities in the way that the visual (in the show) and verbal language (in the show and scholarship) are used to project a way of thinking about the archives and archivists. Chapter Two focuses primarily on the 'activation' of the archival record, discussing how information from records and the records themselves are utilized to create stories that convey historical information to various audiences. In addition, the chapter includes an introduction to *Game of Thrones* and its role in the cultural mindset, and examines critical examples from the show that illustrate the significant role of records in significant plot events.

Chapter Three builds on the concept of records activation discussed in Chapter Two and applies it to the people and places that preserve and provide access to records, i.e., knowledge keepers and knowledge spaces. It begins with an exploration of scholarly literature on portrayals of

knowledge keepers and spaces in pop culture media and, using specific examples, continues with an examination of how knowledge keepers and spaces are used to move the plot forward in *Game of Thrones*.

Chapter Four transitions from focusing on fictional portrayals of archival themes to an analysis of the language used to describe the archival research experience in a selection of literature from other academic fields that utilize the archive in the course of their work. This chapter sheds light on some similarities between how knowledge keepers and spaces are represented in fiction and how they are represented in the selected scholarship. The decision to read factual (i.e., scholarly) accounts of the archival experience in the same way as fictional stories was inspired by literary historian Stephen Greenblatt's assertion about archival research, made at the beginning of his 1988 work *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Greenblatt writes

I began with the desire to speak with the dead.... It was true that I could hear only my own voice, but my own voice was the voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those voices make themselves heard in the voices of the living.¹⁵

Greenblatt's romantic depiction is an elegant but sobering statement about archival research and the nature of historical writing when he intimates that the voice given to these "textual traces" depends on a preconceived understanding of the subject matter and, ultimately, the story the author wishes to tell. From a certain perspective, perhaps the divide between scholarship, popular non-fiction, and fiction is not quite as vast as one might think, since all three share the same fundamental goal: to tell a story from a specific point of view, thereby influencing how the

¹⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics* 4 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988):1.

reader perceives a given topic. This understanding is at the heart of archivalism, which applies Greenblatt's perspective to stories about the archive.

Medievalism scholars have come to understand this perspective and how it can potentially benefit the field of medieval studies, but it seems that archival studies scholars still argue for "real" representations of the archive in pop culture and scholarship.¹⁶ Stephanie Trigg writes that "contemporary medievalism can be read as a kind of convergence culture, bringing together academic, creative, and popular modes of thinking about medieval culture."¹⁷ This thesis proposes that archivalism can be read in a similar fashion, as a type of convergence culture that brings together multiple types of archival representation to provide archival scholars with a new, holistic way to examine modes of thinking about the archives.

¹⁶ See, for example: Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 16, no. 1 (2016).; Tania Aldred, Gordon Burr, and Eun Park, "Crossing a Librarian with a Historian: The Image of Reel Archivists," *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 57–93.; or Arlene Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography," *The American Archivist* 62, no. 1 (January 1999): 24–73.

¹⁷ Stephanie Trigg, "Medievalism and Convergence Culture: Researching the Middle Ages for Fiction and Film," *Parergon* 25, no. 2 (2009): 99.

Chapter 2: Activating Recorded History

2.1 Introduction

As stated in the Introduction, the literature written by archival scholars read for this thesis showed concern for the gap between popular culture portrayals of archivists and the actual contributions of the archives professional. The concept of archivalism provides a lens through which we can examine and understand that gap. While Chapters Three and Four directly examine portrayals of archival professionals and their workspaces, this chapter focuses on the archival record itself, which Caswell writes is “the foundational concept in archival studies.”¹⁸ The beginning of the chapter defines pertinent key archival terms and concepts, such as the concept of records activation. It then discusses how people who use historical records to tell a story or argue a point – such as historians, authors, or reenactors – convey historical information to different audiences. Understanding both the conveyer of information and the audience is an integral part of the concept of archivalism.

Throughout the Introduction and the first part of this chapter, I have referenced the significant presence of *Game of Thrones* in the cultural mindset. However, though scholars have written about the show from multiple academic perspectives, it has not, to my knowledge, been analysed as a work that features archival themes. The deep dive into archival themes in *Game of Thrones* commences in the second part of this chapter, which begins with an introduction to the show’s basic plot before continuing to an examination of how records are activated in *GoT* and used as foundations for significant actions and plot twists throughout the show.

¹⁸ Caswell, “*The Archive*” is not an Archives, Para. 8.

2.2 Utilising the Archival Record

Archival records contain first-hand glimpses into the past and thus play a vital role in the writing of history; archival research is a crucial methodology employed by historians, literary scholars and other researchers writing about the past. Within the archival field, there are many ways to define the term “record.” Caroline Williams provides a simple definition of a record, calling it “information generated by organisations and individuals in their daily business and personal transactions.”¹⁹ Initially, this “information” was conveyed almost exclusively via paper (or now digital) documents. However, Shannon Faulkhead, an Indigenous Australian scholar, provides a more expansive definition of a record as anything that “preserves memory or knowledge of facts and events”, including “a document, an individual's memory, an image, or a recording. It can also be an actual person, a community, or the land itself.”²⁰ Geoffrey Yeo acknowledges the evolving definition of a record in *The Encyclopedia of Archival Science* by stating that

archival literature variously characterises records as evidence of, information about, or representations of activities, transactions, or events, or as documents made or received in the course of these phenomena. There are different understandings of what constitutes a record as well as divergent uses of terminology.²¹

In pop culture media, archival records often fall into a passive role as “dusty and forgotten documents languishing in disuse.”²² Their purpose and meaning are fixed in time at the moment of their creation. Nevertheless, some archival scholars, such as Eric Ketelaar, ascribe more to the archival record than passivity. Ketelaar writes that “every interaction, intervention, interrogation,

¹⁹ Caroline Williams, “Principles and Purposes of Records and Archives,” in *Managing Archives: Foundations, Principles, and Practice* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2006): 4.

²⁰ Shannon Faulkhead, “Connecting Through Records: Narratives of Koorie Victoria,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 37, no. 2 (2009): 67.

²¹ Geoffrey Yeo, “Record(s),” in *Encyclopedia of Archival Science*, ed. Luciana Duranti and Patricia C. Franks (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): 315.

²² Karen Buckley, “‘The Truth Is in the Red Files’: An Overview of Archives in Popular Culture,” *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 96.

and interpretation by a creator, user, and archivist, is an activation of [a] record.”²³ He continues, “every activation changes the significance of earlier activations.”²⁴ Caswell interprets this by saying that records are “dynamic objects in motion, continually shifting with each new use and contextualisation.”²⁵

Just as there are differences in how archival scholars define the record, there are differences in how records are used, depending on the purpose of the 'activator.' For example, the original creator of a record might have been making an account of his finances. In contrast, the conservator in an archival institution sees it as a physical item needing stabilisation, and the historian sees that same record as a contribution to her research on a particular topic. Each has activated the same record differently, and thus the record has a different meaning for each user. This chapter focuses on activating records to convey historical information and within the context of the plot of *GoT*.

As a repository of records, the archive is “central” to contemporary scholarship from multiple fields.²⁶ There is a well-established relationship between the writing of history and the archives; historian Michelle T. King writes that “archival research is for many modern historians the bread and butter of their professional experience.”²⁷ It is reflected in Greenblatt's writing on archival research and is explored in more depth in Chapter Four of this thesis, which examines some of the ways non-archival specialist scholars describe the process of archival research in their

²³ Eric Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meaning of Archives,” *Archival Science* 1 (2001): 137.

²⁴ Ketelaar, *Tacit Narratives*, 138.

²⁵ Caswell, “*The Archive*” *Is Not an Archives*, Para. 12.

²⁶ Michael O’Driscoll and Edward Bishop, “Archiving ‘Archiving,’” *English Studies in Canada* 30 (2004): 10.

²⁷ Michelle T. King, “Working With/In the Archives,” in *Research Methods for History*, ed. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011): 13. See also: Alexandra Chassanoff, “Historians and the Use of Primary Source Materials in the Digital Age,” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 458–80.

writing. How scholars interpret historical records significantly impacts how they construct ideas and communicate stories about the past to various audiences, regardless of the types of records used. This is true for researchers (academic or otherwise) in addition to how showrunners portray records in popular media. One could even argue that the record is the sun around which all pop media's archival representations orbit, as access to records (and their information) is often integral to moving a story's plot forward.

2.3 Activating History for the Public

David Lowenthal writes that “[t]he past is a foreign country reshaped by today, its strangeness domesticated by our own modes of caring for its vestiges.”²⁸ Like Greenblatt, Lowenthal acknowledges that the voice of the historian and the events and modes of thinking in his contemporary world influence their interpretations of the past. The method of presentation and the intended audience influence historical interpretations. Popular History is a subset within popular culture that focuses on how professional and amateur historians convey historical information to non-specialists. Popular historians strive to create 'images of the past' for general audiences through various means, including re-enactment, popular genre fiction, comics and history magazines, film, documentary television, and computer games. Korte and Paletschek write that popular history as a method of delivering historical information is

distinguished by a focus not only on contents and functions of historical work but also the modes in which history is presented and performed, as well as their production, dissemination and consumption... In all these forms, “popular history” employs—and mixes—fact and fiction, representation, performance and experience, instruction and

²⁸ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*, Revised and updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 4.

entertainment. One can argue that more people encounter history as “edutainment” now than through formal education.²⁹

George R.R. Martin commented in more than one interview that he likes to use popular histories and historical fiction as inspiration instead of purely academic sources.³⁰ Since *ASOIAF* is *inspired* by medieval events and not an attempt to recreate actual events from history, this seems sensible. Martin benefited from the collective knowledge gained by professional historians who accessed primary records in their research. He had many resources from which to draw an understanding of the history of the Wars of the Roses, the period that inspired *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Several modes of information conveyance bring British history during the Wars of the Roses to life for non-academic audiences. These include resources like the Tewkesbury Medieval Festival³¹, historian Dan Jones’ popular non-fiction book *The Hollow Crown*³², and Philippa Gregory’s Plantagenet and Tudor Novels series, which covers important events in British history (between 1430-1568) from the perspective of the queens and other women important to the crown.³³ Though the details and methods are different, these sources relate the same basic historical information in varying degrees of accuracy and creativity, providing a way for people to make a connection to a (potentially) shared past. Grever and Adriaansen write that

²⁹ Barbara Korte and Sylvia Paetschek, “Historical Edutainment: New Forms and Practices of Popular History?,” in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever, 1st ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017): 191, 201, 194-195.

³⁰ Shiloh Carroll, *Medievalism in ASOIAF & GoT*, 5-6; Lev Grossman, “George R.R. Martin’s *Dance with Dragons*: A Masterpiece Worthy of Tolkien,” *Time*, July 7, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2081774,00.html>.; George R. R. Martin in Conversation with Dan Jones, Emmanuel Centre, London. August 8, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysRorXaGbG0> Retrieved June 10, 2020.

³¹ <https://www.tewkesburymedievalfestival.org/shop>

³² Dan Jones, *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses and the Rise of the Tudors* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).

³³ For a short synopsis of each book in this series and their proper chronological order (i.e., reading order), see: <https://offtheshelf.com/2019/08/philippa-gregory-plantagenet-tudor-series-reading-order/>

the “vast majority of representations of the past rely on a plot that makes the past meaningful to its creator and his or her audience.”³⁴

Korte and Paletschek continue in this vein by writing that popular history “requires special awareness that knowledge is shaped by the media and genres in which it is presented.”³⁵ The concept of archivalism embraces the example of popular history by acknowledging the many factors that affect the way archives are represented. These representations are enhanced or limited by the presentation format or media, the intended audience, and the ultimate end-goal of the story. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, understanding these factors can provide part of the puzzle that will fill in a gap critiqued by archival scholars, who find that representations of archives and archival professionals tend to emphasise negative stereotypes whilst downplaying (or erasing altogether) the scholarship and professional work of the archivist.

2.4 Bridging the Gap with Medievalism

Popular historians have demonstrated the importance of balancing accuracy while embracing the audience's needs for the sake of the overall message. Medievalism scholars – who are often, from a professional standpoint, primarily Medievalists who study specific aspects of the historical Middle Ages - have shown us how to look at the gaps between the “real” and the reinvention with objective curiosity instead of reproach. George R. R. Martin's work has provided plenty of fuel to stoke this curiosity. Historians and literary scholars have written extensively about *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* as examples of medievalism and in the context of the “real”

³⁴ Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, “Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited,” in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*, ed. Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever, 1st ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 78.

³⁵ Korte and Paletschek, *Historical Edutainment*, 201.

Middle Ages, referring to it as the “definition of event television set within a medieval inspired world.”³⁶ There is plenty of discussion around specific themes in *GoT* that go beyond its role in the scholarship about reinventions of the Middle Ages. For example, scholars of feminism, colonialism, military tactics, politics, knowing, and power have all found reasons to write about *Game of Thrones*.³⁷

The term “medievalism,” first recorded in the nineteenth century, was used in reference to the work of “the dilettante 'Other' of academic medieval studies,” i.e., those who did not follow the new (at the time), more “scientific” method of historical records analysis.³⁸ Medievalism studies as a field of scholarly enquiry, on the other hand, is relatively new. A May 1976 conference session entitled “The Idea of the Middle Ages in the Modern World” marks the official “establishment of medievalism as an academic subject.”³⁹ Historians Leslie J. Workman, Alice P. Kenney, and Peter Williams presented this conference session at the Tenth International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo). Workman,

³⁶ Marina Gerzic and Aidan Norrie, eds., *From Medievalism to Early-Modernism: Adapting the English Past*, Routledge Studies in Medieval Literature & Culture (New York and London: Routledge, 2019): 11.

³⁷ See, for example: **(re: Power and knowing)** Carolyne Larrington, *All Men Must Die: Power and Passion in Game of Thrones* (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).; Larissa Grollemond and Bryan C. Keene, “A Game of Thrones: Power Structures in Medievalisms, Manuscripts, and the Museum,” *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 11 (2020): 326–37.; Brian Cowlshaw, “What the Maesters Knew: Narrating Knowing,” in *Mastering the Game of Thrones: Essays of George R.R. Martin’s A Song of Ice and Fire*, ed. Jes Battis and Susan Johnston (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., Publishers, 2015), 57–70. **(re: colonialism)** Tyler Dean, “Game of Thrones’ Complex Relationship to Racism and Colonialism,” *Tor.Com*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.tor.com/2019/06/10/game-of-thrones-complex-relationship-to-racism-and-colonialism/>.; Mary Kate Hurley, “‘Scars of History’: Game of Thrones and American Origin Stories,” in *American/Medieval: Nature and Mind in Cultural Transfer*, ed. Gillian R. Overing and Ulrike Wiethaus (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2016), 131–50.; Helen Young, “Game of Thrones’ Racism Problem,” *The Public Medievalist*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.publicmedievalist.com/game-thrones-racism-problem/>. **(re: gender and feminism)** Amy Kaufman, “Muscular Medievalism,” *The Year’s Work in Medievalism*, 2016, 56–66. **(re: philosophy)** Eric J. Silverman and Robert Arp, eds., *The Ultimate Game of Thrones and Philosophy: You Think or Die*, Popular Culture and Philosophy, volume 105 (Chicago: Open Court, 2017).

³⁸ Richard Utz, “Coming to Terms with Medievalism,” *European Journal of English Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 101.

More recently, many historians have acknowledged the layers of subjectivity that began with a record’s creation, continued through its acquisition by an archival repository, and even in the way a historian interprets it. As a result, it is impossible to say definitively if an account of a historical event reflects what *actually* happened. See, for example, Richard Utz, “Coming to Terms with Medievalism,” *European Journal of English Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 101–13.

³⁹ Kathleen Verduin, “The Founding and the Founder: Medievalism and the Legacy of Leslie J. Workman,” *Studies in Medievalism* XVII (2009): 6.

considered by many to be the founder of the study of medievalism, worked tirelessly to establish it as a recognised area of academic enquiry. He distilled the definition of medievalism down to “the continuing process of creating the Middle Ages.”⁴⁰

The practice of ‘creating’ the Middle Ages as a backdrop for fictional stories goes back to almost immediately after that period ended.⁴¹ Hilary Jane Locke writes that

medievalism, or content that uses or is an adaptation of medieval culture to some extent, has a substantial cultural position in popular imagination, particularly with the blended representations of the medieval period in our public spheres.

Scholars have explored why the Middle Ages make such a rich environment for modern storytelling for many years. Holsinger and Trigg (2016) write

The dramatic alterity of medieval dress, architecture, language and sensibility, and the apparent otherness of premodern social, religious and political structures, easily account for the popularity of medieval settings, especially as an antidote to or retreat from industrial or post-industrial modernity, or as a sufficiently distant destination to make the conceptual and cultural work of time travel worthwhile.⁴²

Some scholars would argue that, while the retreat from modernity is a contributing factor to the popularity of a medieval setting, the commonalities with the present make the Middle Ages popular in storytelling. For example, in his essay “Dreaming of the Middle Ages,” Umberto Eco, medievalist scholar and author of the acclaimed novel *The Name of the Rose*, found it unsurprising that we look back to this period.⁴³ Many everyday things emerged during the Middle Ages that are still commonly used today, which is why Eco calls the Middle Ages the

⁴⁰ Quoted in: KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy: From Tolkien to Game of Thrones*, Medievalism, volume XVI (Cambridge ; Rochester, NY, USA: D.S. Brewer, 2019): 13.

⁴¹ Umberto Eco. “Dreaming of the Middle Ages” in *Travels in Hyperreality*. Trans. By William Weaver. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1986. Epub.

⁴² Holsinger and Trigg. *Novel Medievalisms*, 177.

⁴³ Eco, *Dreaming*, epub.; Umberto Eco et al., *The Name of the Rose*, First Mariner Books edition (Boston: Mariner Books, 2014).

“root of all our contemporary 'hot' problems.”⁴⁴ This connection with the everyday makes it much easier for the modern consumer to find ways to relate to characters when reading books or watching films or tv shows with a medieval setting. The Middle Ages are relatable enough for this kind of familiarity, yet far enough in the past that modern themes and problems can be explored using the safe buffer of time. *Game of Thrones* takes advantage of this ‘familiar but safely far enough away’ phenomenon in its many scenes of extreme violence, both towards women and in general. Using the excuse of ‘we know it’s wrong in today’s world, but that’s how it was back then’ allows showrunners to portray things they would not be able to in a story with a modern setting. Shiloh Carroll challenges that notion - often used to justify scenes from *GoT* - by stating that Martin’s “particular flavor of medievalism... violent, dark, brutal, and relentlessly masculine” is not reflective of day-to-day life in the Middle Ages.⁴⁵ Martin has been very clear in interviews that he never intended to portray the “real” Middle Ages when he was writing *ASOIAF*, and yet it is often cited as an authentic representation by many in the viewing public.⁴⁶

2.5 Diving Deeper into *Game of Thrones*

Carroll writes that “like most examples of medievalism and neomedievalism, Martin’s construction of Westeros reveals more about his beliefs about the historical Middle Ages and the human condition than it does about the Middle Ages themselves.”⁴⁷ One might say the same for portrayals of archivists and archival themes, which appear in a wide variety of pop culture

⁴⁴ Eco lists some examples of these “everyday things” that we still use today, including capitalist economies, modern languages, modern armies, and even eyeglasses.

⁴⁵ Shiloh Carroll, “Grimdark Fantasy in A Song of Ice and Fire,” *The Public Medievalist*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.publicmedievalist.com/grimdark-medievalism/>.

⁴⁶ George R. R. Martin, George R.R. Martin in Conversation with Dan Jones. Emmanuel Centre, London., interview by Dan Jones, YouTube Video, August 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysRorXaGbG0>. For an example of a celebrity who thinks *GoT* portrays the “real” middle ages, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-32688956>

⁴⁷ Carroll, *Medievalism in ASOIAF & GoT*, 20.

media. Some of these appearances are part of epic stories that have transcended the bounds of their original medium, resulting in a significant presence across pop culture. Book series like J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, or George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* are examples of medieval-inspired transmedia megatexts with massive fandoms. All three have also been the subject of numerous scholarly articles and books. I chose to focus on representations of archives and records in *Game of Thrones* because of its tremendous global reach, its position in medievalism studies scholarship, and because it offers multiple scenes that feature knowledge keepers, knowledge spaces, and documents in a variety of circumstances. Before diving further into the archival presence in *GoT*, it is essential to give an overall description of the plot and the impact of the show.

Showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss adapted the HBO series *Game of Thrones* from George R.R. Martin's epic fantasy novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The show, which became hugely popular across the globe, is a powerhouse of engaging storytelling, cinematic photography, outstanding direction (particularly the award-winning battle sequences), and cutting-edge special effects. Throughout its eight seasons (2011-2019), *Game of Thrones* was nominated for 738 awards and won 269, including 59 Emmy wins – the most for any drama in television history.⁴⁸ An audience of 19.3 million viewers watched the series finale, making it HBO's "most-watched broadcast ever."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_awards_and_nominations_received_by_Game_of_Thrones#Emmy_Awards; <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/22/arts/television/emmy-awards-live-updates.html>

⁴⁹ <https://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/daily-ratings/sunday-cable-ratings-may-19-2019/> Retrieved 06/16/20

The medieval-inspired stories in *GoT* take place on the two fictitious continents of Westeros and Essos, separated by the Narrow Sea. Seasonal time moves differently here, and this story begins near the tail end of a ten-years-long summer. Westeros is culturally similar to western Europe, particularly the British Isles, while Essos resembles the Near, Middle, and Far East in its geography and peoples. The show weaves together three major geographically-based plot lines that all share, in different ways, themes of the struggle for political leadership and coming into one's own identity.

The first plotline occurs primarily in the southern part of Westeros, where the land is green and fertile and political intrigue abounds. Like the United Kingdom, the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros were once separate countries united under one centralised government 300 years before the beginning of our story. This union begins to unravel after King Robert I Baratheon's (suspicious) death-via-hunting-accident,⁵⁰ resulting in a civil war for the political leadership of the Seven Kingdoms.⁵¹ The war is fought primarily between three major Houses and their supporters: the Starks from the North, who want to secede from the rest of the Seven Kingdoms; the Lannisters, a powerful family from the west who pull the strings behind the throne; and King Robert's younger brothers, Lord Stannis Baratheon of Dragonstone and Lord Renly Baratheon of Storm's End. This civil war becomes known as the War of the Five Kings. By its end, the Baratheon family is wholly eradicated,⁵² the Starks are decimated,⁵³ and the Lannisters have secured their grip on the Iron Throne.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ S1:E7, "You Win or You Die"

⁵¹ S2:E1, "The North Remembers"

⁵² S2:E9, "Blackwater"

⁵³ S3:E9, "The Rains of Castamere"

⁵⁴ S3:E10, "Mhysa"

The second plotline takes place in the North and primarily follows Jon Snow's character as he becomes a Brother of the Night's Watch.⁵⁵ The Night's Watch is an all-male military order based on the Wall, a 700-foot-tall, fortified barrier made of ice and rock that spans 300 miles across the north of Westeros.⁵⁶ Their primary mission is to defend Westeros from enemies both human and magical that live even farther north, "beyond the Wall." This arc develops Jon's character as a fierce warrior and introduces the Brothers' primary adversaries - the Night King and his lieutenants, the White Walkers, who are humanoid beings formed from magic and ice.⁵⁷ The Night King and his Walkers control the Army of the Dead, comprised of corpses resurrected by magic.

The third plot primarily takes place in Essos and follows Daenerys Targaryen, the last remaining member of a Westerosi royal dynasty, as she rises from timid slave-wife of a barbarian-like Dothraki Horse Lord⁵⁸ to conqueror⁵⁹ and queen⁶⁰. Daenerys has the utter devotion of her armies and followers - many of whom were former slaves she liberated - as well as an additional leading edge: the only three living dragons in the world.⁶¹ The first to be hatched in over 150 years, these dragons mark her out as a true Targaryen ruler, as only Targaryens could be dragon riders.

Daenerys' belief in her divine right to the Iron Throne of Westeros is strengthened by the fact that she is the only Targaryen to successfully hatch dragons in many generations (from petrified

⁵⁵ Starting in S1:E2, "The Kingsroad"

⁵⁶ This Wall was inspired by Hadrian's Wall, which the Romans began building in AD 122. It spans the north of (what is now) England.

⁵⁷ Aside from a brief instance in the series pilot, the White Walkers do not appear in person until S2:10, "Valar Morghulis".

⁵⁸ S1:E1, "Winter is Coming"

⁵⁹ S3:E7, "The Bear and the Maiden Fair"

⁶⁰ S4:E4, "Oathkeeper"

⁶¹ S1:E10, "Fire and Blood"

eggs, no less). She sees her conquest and liberation of some of the major cities in Essos as training for taking back the throne that King Robert usurped from her father.

The book series is currently unfinished, so the television series has gone beyond the novels' content with the author's input.⁶² The three plotlines, currently still separated in the books, come together in the television series Seasons Seven and Eight. Queen Daenerys and her three fire-breathing dragons, accompanied by her vast army of Dothraki and Unsullied soldiers, cross the Narrow Sea to land at Dragonstone, the previously abandoned island castle which is the original Westerosi seat of the Targaryens.⁶³ She soon meets Jon Snow, now the King in the North, who journeyed to Dragonstone to ask Daenerys to ally with him in the impending fight against the Night King.⁶⁴ This partnership is the joining, in effect, of ice (Jon) and fire (Daenerys). Families that had previously fought against each other in the War of the Five Kings come together at Winterfell⁶⁵ to fight the ultimate battle: the one between the dead and the living.⁶⁶

The success of *Game of Thrones* has had implications that spread far beyond its role as an engaging source of entertainment. As a pop culture phenomenon, it has turned a fictional account of a medieval culture into an influence on many peoples' understanding of the Middle Ages. Locke has described it as showing “an imagined medieval period, one that relies on the hybridisation of varying historical periods, cultural and geographical differences, to make a society that somehow reflects something that is medieval, but also completely imaginary.”⁶⁷ This

⁶² There are two remaining novels in the series, *The Winds of Winter*, and *A Dream of Spring*, yet to be completed/written. As of 2021, fans have been waiting over ten years for Martin's continuation of the series.

⁶³ S7:E1, “Dragonstone”

⁶⁴ S7:E3, “The Queen’s Justice”

⁶⁵ S8:E2, “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms”

⁶⁶ S8:E3, “The Long Night”

⁶⁷ Locke, *Beyond Tits and Dragons*, 172.

hybridization is echoed in the way Martin portrays his “medieval” archives and archival themes in *ASOIAF*.

As a field of study, medievalism provides a unique perspective in that it examines *all* forms of representation of the Middle Ages, from the academic to the popular. Thus, it provides an excellent model on which to base the concept of archivalism. Not only does it examine the relationship between the perception of the Middle Ages and its reinvention, but it also rises above that to try and understand the Middle Ages as a symbolic entity. Similarly, the concept of archivalism seeks to explore reinventions of the archives in scholarly and popular representations and how those re-creations use the archives as a symbol for other qualities, such as stability, elitism, or reservedness. Finally, both medievalism and archivalism provide a metalevel view of some of the records or archives activation results, including the widely held association between records in archival repositories and “the truth.”⁶⁸

2.6 Activating Records in *Game of Thrones*

It is not unusual in literature and pop culture to rely on archival themes such as record keeping, research, or information organisation when telling a story.⁶⁹ In pop culture media, “records” often serve as a plot device - items used as transient evidence of some past knowledge intended to move the protagonist towards the resolution of their problem and, often, personal evolution.

⁶⁸ More on this in the following chapters

⁶⁹ For an interesting study on reading fiction “archivally,” see: Caryn Radick. “‘Complete and in Order’: Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and the Archival Profession.” *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 502–20.

To the average viewer, *Game of Thrones* is not inherently concerned with records; when viewed archivally, i.e., through a lens that focuses specifically on records and information practices, a different picture presents itself. From the first episode and throughout all eight seasons, *GoT* contains examples of how creating, preserving, or destroying documents is used to achieve, influence, or defy power. These records come in a variety of forms, including letters, edicts, histories, and diaries. Each of them contributes somehow, either directly or indirectly, to significant events and modes of thinking in *GoT*.

Our first example comes early in the first season. While lying on his deathbed after a hunting accident, King Robert dictates a letter to Ned Stark proclaiming that he, Lord Eddard Stark, will be “Regent of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm” until Robert’s son Joffrey is old enough to come into his throne. The king signs the document and affixes his royal seal without reading it over, so he does not notice that Ned has written “the heir” instead of “my son.” Ned, known by all as a highly honourable man (to a fault), does this because he learned that Joffrey is not Robert's biological son but is actually the product of the queen’s incestuous relationship with her twin brother, Ser Jaime Lannister.⁷⁰ Immediately after Robert's death, Ned takes the document to the throne room and presents it to the Council, Queen Cersei, and the now-King Joffrey I. The Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, Ser Barristan Selmy, removes the unbroken seal in front of those present as a sign that it was from the king's hand. Cersei asks to see the document and, to everyone's astonishment, rips it up in front of the council members, saying, “Is this meant to be your shield, Lord Stark? A piece of paper.” Surprised by this action, Ser

⁷⁰ Ser Jaime is known as, and often addressed as, known as the Kingslayer because he murdered Danerys’ father, the former King Aerys II Targaryen. At the same time, his father, Lord Tywin Lannister, ordered the assassination of Crown Prince Rhaegar's children and all remaining Targaryens, thus bringing Robert's Rebellion to an end. Fortunately, Targaryen allies spirited the infant Daenerys and her brother Viserys away to Essos.

Barristan exclaims, “Those were the king’s words,” to which Cersei replies, “We have a new king now.” She ignores King Robert’s final wishes and names herself the Regent.⁷¹

A significant increase in general literacy coupled with mass production and a decrease in costs of writing and printing materials contributed to the explosion in the volume of government records that came at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, this increase meant insufficient storage space would become a problem. The issue drove modern recordkeepers to develop volume management plans based on a 'life-cycle model' – a “linear representation of the stages of a record's existence, beginning with its creation... and ending with either its destruction or its permanent preservation in an archive.”⁷² Records destruction was not regularly practised in the past, though it is an essential aspect of recordkeeping today. Clanchy writes that the “situation in the Middle Ages was the reverse of the modern one: there were few literates, but a larger proportion of their writings were intended to be preserved for posterity.”⁷³ Richard Brown, writing about archival practice in 14th and 15th century Europe (the period that inspired *GoT*), states that “amidst the general turmoil of the time, many official records were deliberately or inadvertently destroyed.”⁷⁴ In some cases, government or public agents deliberately destroyed records to erase past crimes or remnants of previous regimes.⁷⁵ In this *GoT* scene, Cersei ripping up Robert’s deathbed edict aligns with Brown's claim and is a classic example of someone destroying a record to deny the truth. In her eyes, if there is no record that Robert wanted Ned to

⁷¹ S1:E7, “You Win or You Die”, at 55:05.

⁷² Glenn Dingwall, “Life Cycle and the Continuum: A View of Recordkeeping Models from the Postwar Era,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil, 1st ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010): 139, 142.

⁷³ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, electronic resource, 3rd ed (Chichester, West Sussex, UK ; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2013): 147.

⁷⁴ Richard Brown. “Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper: The Murder of Tomasso Da Tortona in Ferrara, 1385.” *Archivaria* 44 (1996): 5, 8.

⁷⁵ Brown. *Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper*, 8.

be regent, there is no evidential way to prove what is true. The fact that she does it in front of important witnesses shows her rising sense of personal power and disregard for standard notions of right and wrong.

This scene portrays the entire (short) life cycle of an archival record – from creation to storage to destruction – as well as multiple unique activations of a single document. Each activation is a contribution to the ultimate trajectory of the story. The first activation, Robert's creation of the document, signifies his wishes and his last act as a ruling king. Ned's alteration of the wording signifies what he (secretly) hopes will be a transition to the kingship of Robert's brother, Stannis Baratheon. He also performs the knowledge keeper's role in this scenario, as he is responsible for the safe (albeit short-lived) preservation of the document. Cersei's destruction of the document marks the end of its usefulness as evidence of the king's final words, thus the end of life under Robert's rule and her ascent to being the real power behind the throne.

Later in the same episode, Ned sends a letter to Lord Stannis Baratheon at Dragonstone, revealing Joffrey's real parentage.⁷⁶ Ned tells Stannis that Joffrey's illegitimate birth makes him (Stannis) the true heir to the Iron Throne as Robert's next younger brother. This letter precipitates the civil war known as the War of the Five Kings, a war fought primarily between the Houses Lannister, Stark and Baratheon.⁷⁷ After King Joffrey throws Ned in prison on trumped-up charges of treason, Queen Cersei makes the adolescent Sansa Stark write a letter to her brother Robb, now styled as the King in the North. The letter claims their father was a traitor to the

⁷⁶ In the book, Stannis never receives a letter from Ned, though he does in the show.

⁷⁷ S1:E7, "You Win or You Die"

crown and begs Robb to bend the knee to Joffrey.⁷⁸ Though he promised mercy, King Joffrey has Lord Eddard beheaded on the steps of the Great Sept of Baelor in front of a vast crowd that includes Sansa and her younger sister, Arya.

Years later, at Winterfell, the letter from Sansa to her (now-deceased) brother Robb resurfaces when Lord Petyr ‘Littlefinger’ Baelish asks the castle’s maester, Wolkan, to retrieve it for him from the castle’s archives.⁷⁹ Littlefinger tries to use this document to drive a wedge between Sansa and her sister Arya, which he *almost* succeeds in doing. However, Lady Sansa, Arya, and Bran manage to work out how Littlefinger manipulated people and events over the years (especially the Starks) with his letters and lies. Much to his surprise and shock, Sansa airs Littlefinger's evil deeds in front of the Northern lords at Winterfell, and he is summarily executed.⁸⁰

O’Toole suggests that “archivists should understand ... the mixture of practical and symbolic values in records.”⁸¹ The practical value of Sansa’s letter to Robb is in the information it contained regarding Joffrey's coronation and Lord Eddard's imprisonment. Each activation altered the symbolic significance of the letter, depending on the chronological nearness to the events recorded and the person reading it. To Robb, the letter symbolised Sansa's indoctrination into the Lannister household, while their mother, Lady Catelyn Stark, saw it as symbolic of Queen Cersei's crushing power over the Stark girls. To her, it symbolised the imprisonment of her daughter(s) in addition to the news it shared concerning her husband's (trumped-up) status as

⁷⁸ S1:E8, “The Pointy End”

⁷⁹ S7:E5, “Eastwatch”, at 49:52.

⁸⁰ The writers and directors did a fantastic job with this scene, which happens in S7:E7, “The Dragon and the Wolf”, beginning at 55:50.

⁸¹ James O’Toole, “The Symbolic Significance of Archives,” *The American Archivist* 56, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 234.

a traitor. When Littlefinger retrieved and strategically planted the Winterfell copy of the letter in Arya's way several years later, the symbolism changes again. At this point, the practical value of the letter was lost to the past. To Arya, the content of Sansa's letter symbolises a decision to choose sides against the Stark family and the Northern people. Like O'Toole, Ketelaar acknowledges that sometimes the symbolic value of records is found in the act of a record's creation. In addition to her interpretation of the letter's contents, Arya saw the act of record-making – i.e., Sansa's complying with Cersei and writing the letter at all – as significant and symbolic of her weakness and lack of fitness for rule in the North.⁸² To Sansa, the letter symbolises a period of her life when she was just a foolish child trying to appease the (adult) queen by doing what she asked.

Each of these document examples, Robert's final words and Sansa's letter to her brother, illustrate the concept of records activation and that the uses and interpretations of a record are variable and dependent on the audience. It is interesting to note that none of the record activations or audience interpretations aligned with the original creator's intent. Even so, their activations were key to significant plot development/transitions of power and thus had a lasting effect on the outcome of the show.

2.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explored some of the ways that presenters deliver records-based historical content to various audiences. Differences in presentation stem from the interpretation of the user, the context of the presentation, and the expected audience. Each of these 'activations' ultimately

⁸² O'Toole, *Symbolic Significance of Archives*, 238.; Eric Ketelaar, "Cultivating Archives: Meanings and Identities," *Archival Science* 12, no. 1 (March 2012): 19.

leads to the point of the desired message. Korte and Paletscheck write that “a popular novel or fiction film may be carefully researched but aim, first of all, to tell an engaging story with intriguing characters. It transports historical knowledge as a side effect of entertainment and aesthetic pleasure.”⁸³ Throughout the show, there are several instances where the showrunners⁸⁴ elected to portray - either due to ignorance, expediency, or artistic license - historically inaccurate archival record handling; for example, the improper use of seals or unrealistic medieval scribal practice.⁸⁵ Can purposeful misrepresentation (as opposed to ignorance) also be applied to portrayals of knowledge keepers and spaces in pop culture and this show specifically? Just as medievalism helps us understand the importance of looking at the whole context of a work of medieval representation, so too does the concept of archivalism encourage us to examine portrayals of the archive from multiple viewpoints. Archival scholars who have written about the archivist's professional image in popular culture discuss what they consider as inaccurate, stereotyped representations that stem from a lack of knowledge of the actual work of the archivist. Nevertheless, these portrayals could also have as much to do with setting aside accuracy in favour of an “engaging story with intriguing characters” and “entertainment and aesthetic pleasure.” Thus, understanding why authors or showrunners portray knowledge keepers and spaces in a certain way has tremendous value within the context of archivalism that goes beyond the discussion of accuracy. This idea is explored further in the following two chapters; Chapter Three examines representations of knowledge keepers and spaces in fictional accounts, while Chapter Four focuses on the same thing in scholarly accounts.

⁸³ Korte and Paletscheck, *Historical Edutainment*, 195.

⁸⁴ Though Weiss and Benioff officially hold the title/ position of “showrunners”, I use the term throughout this thesis to represent all the roles that make important production decisions on a tv show.

⁸⁵ This is a very long discussion for those of us who study book history or archival diplomatics. For more on these issues as they relate to Game of Thrones, see Giacomo Giudici, “By Whisper and Raven: Information and Communication in Game of Thrones,” in *Game of Thrones versus History: Written in Blood*, ed. Brian A. Pavlac (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

Chapter 3: Portraying Knowledge Keepers and Knowledge Spaces in *Game of Thrones*

Thus did I come to know and love the Citadel and the knights of the mind who guarded its precious wisdom.

Maester Yandel⁸⁶

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the concept of records activation and discussed ways that different people activate records for various audiences, including the viewers of *Game of Thrones*. This chapter shifts the focus from the record itself to the people and places that preserve archival records and acknowledges the impact of popular culture on public perceptions. This analysis is explored in the context of literature by library and archival studies scholars on representations of knowledge keepers and spaces in pop culture, paying particular attention to popular stereotypes associated with these portrayals. I highlight specific scenes from the show in my examination of the way that knowledge keepers and knowledge spaces are ‘activated’ in *Game of Thrones*, making sure to address the questions posed in the thesis Introduction; namely, how are knowledge keepers and spaces portrayed, what are the roles they play in the story, and how might those portrayals influence a viewer’s perception of the work of the archivist or the experience of conducting research in an archival institution?

⁸⁶ George R. R. Martin, Elio Garcia, and Linda Antonsson, *The World of Ice & Fire: The Untold History of Westeros and the Game of Thrones*, A Song of Ice and Fire (New York: Bantam Books, 2014): Preface.

2.2 Pop Culture and Its Influence on Public Perception

The terms “knowledge keeper” and “knowledge space” were introduced at the beginning of this thesis as an all-encompassing way to describe various roles and spaces represented in movies, tv shows, and novels. As Buckley and other archival and library and information studies (LIS) scholars have noted, pop culture entertainment often conflates the professions of archivist and librarian, with “librarian” (or library) used as a catch-all for two fields that, while they both deal with written information, ultimately function in different ways.⁸⁷ According to the Society of American Archivists (SAA), archivists have “expertise in the management of records of enduring value,” whereas librarians are “responsible for acquiring, providing access to, and managing collections of published materials.”⁸⁸ These are simplified definitions of the two professions, but they highlight one of the primary differences often overlooked in pop entertainment, namely, the types of textual materials accessed by the main characters. George R.R. Martin skirts this issue by using neither term to describe knowledge keepers in *A Song of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones*; instead, he calls them “maesters.” Regardless, the scenes that include maesters are often visually representative of the library and archival professions and show them performing tasks such as recordkeeping or arranging and managing information resources (for example, journals or books).

In *Game of Thrones*, the Order of Maesters supplies the professional knowledge keepers in Westeros. It makes sense that Martin would choose a different title for his knowledge keepers in *ASOIAF*, as the role of the maester covers several disparate roles. In Westeros, maesters embody

⁸⁷ Buckley, *Red Files*, 98, 100.; Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 61. In this article, Aldred, Burr and Park reference Bari L. Helms, “Reel Librarians: The Stereotype and Technology” (Master’s thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006 (p.4, p. 30)

⁸⁸ <https://dictionary.archivists.org>

an amalgamation of the archivists, librarians, monks, university dons, historians, scientists, and healers of the Middle Ages.⁸⁹ Though Martin does not explicitly refer to maesters as archivists, some of the work that maesters perform can be understood or compared to archival work; specifically, the cataloguing, preservation, research, and retrieval of important documents related to day-to-day activities, both personal and professional.

In acknowledgement of the ways that boundaries blur between professions and roles in pop culture in general, I use the term *knowledge keeper* to refer generally to individuals whose job is to preserve textual information, such as librarians, archivists, or recordkeepers. Similarly, the term *knowledge space* represents libraries, archives, or any other version of a repository that holds textual materials. I use both these terms in my discussion of the scholarship on information professionals and repositories in pop culture and in my analysis of *GoT*, in addition to the title of maester where it is applicable. The need to challenge these blurred lines and distinguish differences in the work of the archivist versus the work of the librarian is essential, especially when considering the role that popular culture plays in informing public perception.

There are many variations in how people understand the term “popular culture.” Ray Browne, credited with coining the term *pop culture*, defines it as

the voice of the people — their likes and dislikes — that form the lifeblood of daily existence, of a way of life. ... It is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, and diversions. It is our heroes, icons, rituals, everyday actions, psychology, and religion — our total life picture.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Kris Swank, “I Shall Take No Wife,” in *Game of Thrones versus History*, ed. Brian A. Pavlac (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017): 217.

⁹⁰ “Conversations with Scholars of American Popular Culture: Professor Ray Browne,” *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture 1900 to Present*, Fall 2002, https://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall_2002/browne.htm.

Pop culture permeates the everyday lives of a large and diverse population that crosses the boundaries of race, class, age, or gender; thus, it has a way of shaping the image of a great many things, from history to religion and everything in between, including ideas about the archives. Oliver and Daniel write that “archivists are depicted in various forms of media, and these representations influence how the world perceives the profession.”⁹¹ There is a belief amongst some scholars, such as Aldred, Burr, and Park, that Hollywood shows a “lack of concern” for accuracy in their archival representations and that this might affect the public’s perception of the archives.⁹² They write that

one way the public forms judgements and opinions about people, is through media (e.g., film, television, advertising, and literature); the media portrays groups of people in certain ways, stereotyping them, and thus influencing the public’s perception. ... After reading a book or watching a film, the layperson will not take the extra time to discover whether or not the portrayal of an archivist in the book or film was accurate; instead, they will adopt the perspective of what they have read and seen.⁹³

Though Aldred, Burr, and Park might overgeneralise the disinterest of the layperson, the spirit of their argument holds. Most of the archival studies/LIS literature read for this thesis, relating specifically to either pop culture portrayals or scholarly depictions of the archival profession, discuss the issue of how incomplete or inaccurate representations can have a variety of adverse effects on factors such as the public reputation of the archives, patron experiences, and institutional funding.⁹⁴ If this correlation is accurate, researching how the profession is represented to the public by entities outside of the field is an integral part of keeping our repositories open and functioning. Arlene Schmuland’s assertion made in 1999 that the “issue of

⁹¹ Amanda Oliver and Anne Daniel, “The Identity Complex: The Portrayals of Archivists in Film,” *Archival Issues* 37, no. 1 (2015): 48.

⁹² Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 58.

⁹³ Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 58, 63.

⁹⁴ For more on the impact of public perception on funding, see the study: Sidney J. Levy and Albert G. Robles, “The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocators’ Perceptions,” Study Findings (Chicago: Society of American Archivists Task Force on Archives and Society, by Social Research, Inc, 1984).

professional image is perpetually popular in archival literature,”⁹⁵ is still a relevant topic for today’s archival professionals.

Compared to the extensive corpus of academic literature written by medievalists about how the Middle Ages are imagined in popular culture (i.e., medievalism), there is little work by information scholars that examines the image of the library or archives in pop culture. The available literature shares a common theme: a focus on the *stereotypes* associated with libraries, archives, librarians, and archivists. Merriam-Webster defines *stereotype* as “a standardised mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgement.”⁹⁶ While stereotypes are not always appreciated by the people being stereotyped, they serve a function in literature, film, and television as a tool for quick and efficient character description.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, this “descriptive shorthand” can unfairly categorise whole groups and professions. The remainder of this chapter extracts the stereotypes most commonly associated with knowledge keepers and spaces in pop culture from the literature and then analyses these stereotypes in the context of scenes from *Game of Thrones*. The scenes described take place at the Order of Maesters’ headquarters, the Citadel, which houses the Great Library - a repository for treatises on science and history and the records of the significant historical players of Westeros.

⁹⁵ Some archivists have opted to examine misconceptions of the archival profession with comedy and sass. Look up ‘Archivist Memes’ for some fun examples: <https://twitter.com/archivistmemes>

⁹⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype>

⁹⁷ Schmuland, *The Archival Image*, 34.

3.2 The Stereotypes of the Authoritarian Gatekeeper and the Fortress of Knowledge in *Game of Thrones*

Several common stereotypes emerge from the literature on pop cultural portrayals of archivists or librarians concerning the attitudes, behaviour, and even (in some cases) the physical attributes of knowledge keepers. These common stereotypes include portraying knowledge keepers as the authoritarian gatekeeper, i.e., someone who is territorial when it comes to outsiders entering their archives/knowledge space.⁹⁸ The gatekeeper stereotype goes hand-in-hand with one of the most significant stereotypes commonly used in pop culture representations of the knowledge space, which paint these repositories as fortresses and barriers to knowledge.⁹⁹

These fortress-like institutions are places of “rules and regulations, sites of surveillance with the need for documented permissions.”¹⁰⁰ They are “dusty and musty,”¹⁰¹ and “vast, filled with not just information, but hidden gems of knowledge ... that only a few select people know about.”¹⁰²

The gatekeeper of the fortress mentality no doubt stems from the assumption that knowledge keepers in pop culture productions see themselves as the guards of ‘hidden gems of knowledge,’ and ultimately the “Protectors of Truth.”¹⁰³ The notion of needing to protect knowledge from others frequently arises in pop culture representations of knowledge keepers. Scholars describe characters who conform to this stereotype as “territorial and possessive,” and as “obstructionist

⁹⁸ For example: Kornelia Tancheva. “The Sign of the Library in Popular Culture” *Libraries & Culture* 40 no. 4 (Fall, 2005): 530, 534.; Aldred, Burr, & Park, *Reel Archivists*, 65.; Oliver and Daniel, *Identity Complex*, 48-49, 57.

⁹⁹ Refer to previous note.

¹⁰⁰ Buckley, *Red Files*, 106.

¹⁰¹ Schmuland, *The Archival Image*, 25.

¹⁰² Christopher Shaffer & Olga Casey. “Behind the Glasses and Beneath the Bun: Portrayals of Librarians in Popular Cinema and a Guide for Developing a Collection.” *Collection Building* 32, no. 2 (2013): 41.

¹⁰³ For example: Buckley, *Red Files*, 103.

fossils”¹⁰⁴ who exhibit attributes such as “power, rudeness, and unethical behavior,”¹⁰⁵ and thus “hav[e] difficulty relating to the outside world and are not in touch with society.”¹⁰⁶ Physically, knowledge keepers in pop culture entertainment often are cast as middle-aged or elderly loners who have a hard time interacting with others.¹⁰⁷ Their manner of dress is either frumpy or severe. Often, knowledge keepers wear glasses, which represents a bit of a double-edged sword; one side equates glasses with intelligence and knowledge gained from many hours spent reading. The other side implies that wearing glasses (as opposed to wearing modern contact lenses) suggests a level of old fashioned-ness, i.e., a stuck-ness in the past.¹⁰⁸

These stereotypes gleaned from the literature on the image of knowledge keepers and spaces in pop culture entertainment – the knowledge keeper as an authoritarian gatekeeper and the knowledge space as an impenetrable fortress - are exploited in *Game of Thrones*. The following scenes illustrate how Martin and the showrunners used two opposing archetypes that writers and directors seem to rely on when portraying knowledge keepers in pop media: the authoritarian gatekeeper and the nerdy hero.¹⁰⁹

Jon Snow, Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, sends Samwell Tarly to the Citadel to be trained as a maester. Upon arriving at the Citadel for the first time, Sam encounters a man hunched over a massive stone desk. The man is using a pair of medieval spectacles to examine a

¹⁰⁴ Buckley, *Red Files*, 102.

¹⁰⁵ Oliver and Daniel, *Identity Complex*, 49.

¹⁰⁶ Aldred, Burr and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 68.

¹⁰⁷ For example: Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 68.; Oliver and Daniel, *Identity Complex*, 60.; Schmuland, *The Archival Image*, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Schmuland, *The Archival Image*, 34. Also: Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 64.; Shaffer and Casey, *Behind the Glasses*, 34-35.

¹⁰⁹ The Nerdy Hero is discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

manuscript at close range. The spatial arrangement in this scene gives the impression of a library reception or reference desk area, but the man standing behind it is anything but welcoming. After several awkward moments of being persistently ignored, the affable Sam offers the man a cheerful greeting, much to the man's irritation at the interruption. Sam attempts to hand him a sealed letter of introduction from Castle Black, but when the man does not extend his arm to receive the letter, Sam must lean over the big desk (and a pile of books) to put it in his open hand. After reading the letter, the man opens a book of records that contains information on the leadership of the Night's Watch. He has an incredulous look on his face when he tells Sam that his arrival without forewarning is "irregular," implying that this transgression reflects poorly on Sam as a person. After much awkwardness, the man invites Sam to wait in the library for the Archmaester, who will sort out this "irregularity." When Gilly and Little Sam try to follow, the man is quick to snap, "No women or children!"¹¹⁰ Sam eventually gains admittance to the library and is permitted to begin maester training.

The man at the desk is the caricature of the authoritarian gatekeeper stereotype, which is, unfortunately, the most frequent depiction of knowledge keepers in movies, tv shows, and novels. Kornelia Tancheva describes this type of character as the "Nazi librarian who guards the books he or she is entrusted with to the point of absurdity and whose sole purpose in life is the humiliation of the main (sympathetic) character."¹¹¹ We see this "absurd" stereotype play out in the scene above, which describes Sam's first encounter with a maester upon his arrival at the Citadel.¹¹² Firstly, the man stands behind a huge desk that is a literal barrier between the library

¹¹⁰ S6:E10, "The Winds of Winter", at 28:14.

¹¹¹ Kornelia Tancheva, "Recasting the Debate: The Sign of the Library in Popular Culture," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 40, no. 4 (2005): 531.

¹¹² S6:E10, "The Winds of Winter", at 28:43.

and the outside world. His physical appearance implies a level of ridiculousness – supremely illustrated by the man's giant 'owl eyes' seen through the pair of sizeable medieval reading glasses - that matches his condescending interactions with Sam.¹¹³ This man, who plays into the stereotypes of knowledge keepers set out in the literature to a comedic level, is the first point of contact between viewers and the maesters within the Citadel. Presumably, this initial activation (or interpretation) of these stereotypes sets a level of expectation for the appearance and behaviour of other characters residing there at the maesters' headquarters.

The self-important superiority displayed by the man at the desk is unsurprising. As the most highly educated people in a predominately illiterate world, the maesters are both the knowledge keepers *and* the knowledge generators of Westeros. Like knowledge keepers in pop culture, they are “devoted to their duties as *guardians* or *gatekeepers* of history” (emphasis is mine).¹¹⁴ Maesters are considered the final authority on the truth, which is convenient, as they create the science and record the histories. Unfortunately, this spiral of information creation and guardianship places them in what Carolyne Larrington calls the “worst kind of ivory tower,” with maesters that are “irredeemably turned in on themselves.”¹¹⁵ As one might imagine, this power to influence breeds a certain amount of smugly righteous elitism at the top of Westeros' intellectual food chain. Archmaester Ebrose perfectly illustrates this in the scene where he says to Sam

¹¹³ For a great image of this man using the spectacles, see: <https://townsquare.media/site/442/files/2016/06/got-credits-maester-pic.png?w=697&h=404&q=75>

¹¹⁴ Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 68.

¹¹⁵ Larrington, *All Men Must Die*, 107.

We're not like the people south of the Twins. And we're not like the people north of the Twins. In the Citadel we lead different lives, for different reasons. We are this world's memory, Samwell Tarly. Without us, men would be little better than dogs.¹¹⁶

This statement gives Sam pause and only adds to his growing disillusionment with the Order of Maesters as an institution (the maesters at the Citadel, at least).

By calling the space that supposedly contains all knowledge 'The Citadel' – a word that literally denotes a fortress - George R.R. Martin perpetuates the trope of the library or archives as a stronghold designed to protect its inhabitants (be they human or information/record) while keeping everyone else out.¹¹⁷ In the discussion on archive buildings of medieval Western Europe in his *History of Archival Practice* (2018), Paul Delsalle writes that towers “have often been the preferred structure for housing archives” because they are “inherently well-protected.”¹¹⁸

Clanchy tells us that the “first medieval archives were... special places... where valuables of all sorts were kept.”¹¹⁹ In addition to deeds, decrees, and other documents of importance, the ‘valuables’ Clanchy refers to included books ornamented with gold and gems and other precious items that might be kept in a secure vault even today. Since *GoT* is medieval in setting, it is possible that the showrunners decided to replicate the look and feel of archival repositories from that period in history. However, it is improbable that the vast majority of *GoT's* audience has enough knowledge of medieval and archives history to connect the purpose of the building and

¹¹⁶ S7:E1, “Dragonstone” at 31:33. The Twins are two fortified castles joined by a stone bridge over the Green Fork of the River Trident. They are the seat of House Frey and serve as the only crossing point for hundreds of miles. Longitudinally speaking, they are (approximately) located in the centre of Westeros.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/citadel>

¹¹⁸ Paul Delsalle, *A History of Archival Practice*, trans. Margaret Procter (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018): 90.

¹¹⁹ M. T. Clanchy, “‘Tenacious Letters’: Archives and Memory in the Middle Ages,” *Archivaria* 11, no. Winter (1980): 121.

the medieval period. Instead, the building as a barrier to information and truth is a more probable association.

The intellectual barrier between the Citadel and the outside world is replicated within the walls as well. The rules restricting the novices' access to specific collections illustrate this separation, as does the ornate locking gate between the books in this section and Sam. Though not fully explained, it is implied that the knowledge contained in these areas could be dangerous in uninitiated hands. References to “restricted records” occur regularly in popular entertainment.¹²⁰

Oliver and Daniel write

Whether arbitrary or legitimate, the idea of restrictions in archives reinforces the sense of inaccessibility. Restrictions may perpetuate the misconception that archivists deliberately hide or withhold information from researchers without any valid reason. Restrictions also add mystery to the archives. Does the archives contain secrets? Is the archivist trying to keep the researcher from the records? If so, why?¹²¹

The Citadel's inaccessibility creates a certain air of mystery for those who live outside its walls. As it supposedly houses “all the knowledge of the world,” one could assume that there must be many secrets guarded within its walls.¹²² Logically, the people who *are* allowed access must have somehow proved their worthiness to reside behind the gates and thus earned the right to keep those secrets.

A quest to uncover secret truths in a knowledge space is a common way for authors or showrunners to introduce drama into a story and elevate a character from plain nerd to nerdy

¹²⁰ Oliver and Daniel, *Identity Complex*, 58.

¹²¹ Oliver and Daniel, *Identity Complex*, 59.

¹²² Carolyne Larrington, *Winter Is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones* (London New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016): 13.

hero status. In an informal study of more than sixty movies and tv shows that feature libraries and archives, archivist Karen Buckley observed four repeating themes:

- “protection of the record is equated to protection of the truth”;
- “archives are closed spaces and the archival experience is an interior one for characters”;
- “records are lost and buried in archives”;
- and the information sought in the records “invariably centres around the search for self or truth.”¹²³

I find the phrases “protection of the truth,” “closed spaces,” and “lost and buried” to be a poignant commentary on the archival experience because they perpetuate the image of the archive as inaccessible. Buckley is not alone in these observations; variations on these same themes are reflected in the research of others in the library and archives fields, including Schmuland, Oliver & Daniel, and Aldred, Burr, & Park.¹²⁴ Portraying an inaccessible knowledge space aligns perfectly with representing knowledge keepers as authoritarian gatekeepers. There is, however, another stereotypical portrayal of knowledge keepers in pop culture represented in *GoT*, a character whose arc reflects all the themes that Buckley describes. This stereotype, called the 'nerdy hero,' is antithetical to the superior, authoritarian gatekeeper and is the primary focus of the next section of this chapter.

¹²³ Buckley, *Red Files*, 95.

¹²⁴ Amanda Oliver and Anne Daniel, “The Identity Complex: The Portrayals of Archivists in Film,” *Archival Issues* 37, no. 1 (2015): 48–70.; Arlene Schmuland, “The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography,” *The American Archivist* 62, no. 1 (January 1999): 24-73.; Tania Aldred, Gordon Burr, and Eun Park, “Crossing a Librarian with a Historian: The Image of Reel Archivists,” *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 57–93.

3.3 Samwell Tarly: *Game of Thrones*' Master Researcher and Nerdy Hero

The first two sections of this chapter focus on negative stereotypes associated with knowledge keepers and spaces in *GoT*. Sam embodies the 'nerdy hero' character who is *also* a "keeper of truth," proving that attributes perceived as unfavourable in one context are positive in another. Here, the word 'keeper' denotes a character who is more of a champion of truth than the barrier to accessing truth suggested earlier.¹²⁵ This character is "intelligent and nerdy.... with a secret life of mystery, intrigue, and adventure."¹²⁶ Shafer and Casey suggest that "it is relatively simple to change the nerdy librarian into an action hero."¹²⁷ It might be simple for a pop culture audience to see that nerdy librarian as a hero, but as a character, Sam's transformation to heroism is anything but easy.

Samwell Tarly, one of the primary characters of an ensemble cast, starts Season One as a cowardly, nerdy book lover. As the seasons progress, he slowly transforms into the nerdy action-hero who slays a White Walker and ultimately defies the authoritarian maesters, all while keeping his kind and cheerful personality. Aldred, Burr, and Park write that knowledge keepers "who were main characters were portrayed in an over-all positive light ... [t]hey were the heroes of the film, solving mysteries, fighting [adversaries], and trying to help those in need. They were educated individuals with distinct personalities."¹²⁸ This is certainly true in Sam's case. Through the adventures and trials that Sam endures during his time in the Night's Watch – and how he faces them – Sam begins to manifest his own particular brand of courage and determination based on quick wit, kindness, and the desire to help others. As he becomes more secure in his

¹²⁵ Buckley, *Red Files*, 102.

¹²⁶ Shaffer and Casey, *Behind the Glasses*, 44.

¹²⁷ Shaffer and Casey, *Behind the Glasses*, 41.

¹²⁸ Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 84.

convictions and more confident in himself, he begins to transform from the stereotype of a cowering nerd to a character that uses brains over brawn to achieve heroic ends.

The first scene in this chapter examines Sam's initial encounter with a maester upon arriving at the Citadel. Sam's purpose for leaving Castle Black and travelling south to the Citadel is two-fold; yes, he is there to train as a maester, but he is also there to conduct research in the Great Library. Pop culture often portrays libraries as places that "represent history" and "reveal the truth."¹²⁹ It is evident that Sam's expectation of the Citadel as a repository mirrors this image. Buckley states that popular culture "perpetuates the stereotype that information is not only hidden in the archives, but is 'lost.' The finding or retrieval of 'lost' information implies that the protagonist has accomplished some extraordinary feat of detection in bringing these records to the light of day."¹³⁰ Sam, considered the show's "greatest reader," hopes to uncover as much long-lost information as he can find that will help in the impending war with the Night King.¹³¹ In this, Sam's story echoes the discussion in Chapter Two by conforming to the well-used plot device in pop culture entertainment, namely, the search for "something – be it an artefact, person, or information"¹³² - that ultimately works as a catalyst for a plot twist and new action.

Buckley writes that

The nature of research... plays a significant role. Scenes where characters are involved in research are frequently inserted as necessary but ultimately minor elements. While in real life archival research takes time, popular culture requires a quick discovery of information in order to move the plot forward.¹³³

¹²⁹ Buckley, *Red Files*, 103., quoting Schmuland, *The Archival Image*, 33.

¹³⁰ Buckley, *Red Files*, 109.

¹³¹ Larrington, *All Men Must Die*, 104.

¹³² Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 83-84.

¹³³ Buckley, *Red Files*, 99.

In many examples from pop culture entertainment, the *only* reason a protagonist enters a knowledge space is to retrieve a vital piece of information. There is often some adverse element that needs to be overcome before the character can succeed in acquiring said information. This element is usually a combination of intimidating knowledge keeper and imposing building. Knowledge keepers who are not busy playing the authoritarian gatekeeper are often portrayed only in their capacity as a provider of reference services, which is but a single aspect of the work of the librarian or archivist. Aldred, Burr, and Park designate reference service as a “professional rather than technical function.”¹³⁴

Sam’s second purpose for heading to the Citadel – to find obscure information as quickly as possible - is both common to many pop culture portrayals and also totally unique because he is going with the intention of training to be a maester himself. This allows him the luxury of spending a significant amount of time with multiple knowledge keepers in a single knowledge space. His participation in the behind-the-scenes of the Citadel and his research process provides the viewer with more than the “quick discovery of information” that Buckley references. Naturally, some of the information that Sam seeks is located behind the restricted section's locked gate, conforming to yet another stereotype of the archives as inaccessible. The following scene illustrates how Sam's two purposes for being at the Citadel – to train with the maesters and to find vital information - come into conflict. The scene also illustrates some of the actions that protagonists in pop culture must take to overcome the barriers erected by stereotypical knowledge keepers.

¹³⁴ Aldred, Burr, and Park, *Reel Archivists*, 83.

This scene opens with Sam sitting at a table amidst a mountain of old, decaying scrolls manuscripts that he must transcribe for preservation purposes. This night, Sam is helping Gilly (his female companion) with her reading practice during yet another mindless transcription session. He is frustrated because he feels his time at the Citadel is wasted on his assigned menial tasks and busy work when he could be researching information to help Jon prepare for the inevitable confrontation with the Night King. While asking questions about her reading, Gilly unknowingly uncovers a record containing information of great significance.

Gilly: “Do you know how many steps there are in the Citadel?”

Sam: “...no...”

Gilly: “15,782.” (Sam looks up with a half-smile as she pauses) “Guess how many windows are in the Great Sept of Baelor.”

Sam: “None anymore.”¹³⁵

Gilly: “That’s true...”

This High Septon Maynard recorded everything. He even recorded his own bowel movements.”... (another pause)

Gilly: “What does “an-nulment mean?”

Sam: “It’s when a man sets aside his lawful wife.”

Gilly: “Maynard says here that he issues an annulment for a Prince ‘Rag-ger’ and remarried him to someone else at the same time in a secret ceremony in Dorne. Is that a common thing in the south, or...”

¹³⁵ This is because the Great Sept (which functioned as a cathedral) was blown up by order of Queen Cersei in S6:E10, “The Winds of Winter”.

Sam (interrupting): “These maesters... they set me to the task of preserving that man’s window counting and annulments and bowel movements for all eternity, while the secret to defeating the Night King is probably sitting on some dusty shelf somewhere, completely ignored. But that’s alright, isn’t it? We can all become slaving, murderous imbeciles in thrall to evil incarnate as long as we can have access to the full records of High Septon Maynard’s 15,782 shits!”

Gilly: “Steps... That number was steps.”¹³⁶

At this, the frustrated Sam puts down the quill he uses to copy texts, gets up, and walks out of the room. Soon after, we see him sneaking into the library's restricted section and putting manuscripts and scrolls into a shoulder bag. As he is about to leave the Citadel to head north to help Jon, he looks back at the library and the life he is leaving behind.

This scene reflects several of the stereotypes associated with both knowledge keepers and knowledge spaces. For example, Sam feels that the maesters are creating a barrier to the information he so desperately seeks via a series of seemingly menial tasks and forbidding access to particular texts. He describes the archival record he needs, which contains “secret” information vital to moving the story forward, as dusty and ignored. At this point, Sam does not realize that the information in the diary Gilly reads will have significant impact on the future of Westeros. He ends up subverting the authority of the access-denying maesters and steals what he needs before escaping the premises. It is interesting to note that the theft of books or documents from a fortress-like knowledge space is frequent in pop culture entertainment.¹³⁷ Deceiving the

¹³⁶ S7:E5, "Eastwatch," at 45:20.

¹³⁷ Oliver and Daniel, *Identity Complex*, 56. Many other examples of entertainment media exhibit this behaviour, including, for example, *Angels & Demons* (2009), where the protagonist rips a page out of a Galileo manuscript and then sneaks it out of the Vatican Archive; and *National Treasure* (2004), where the protagonist manages to steal the U.S. Declaration of Independence from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Interestingly enough, the desire to steal records is even mentioned in the

stereotypical authoritarian knowledge keeper is often the first step towards the “liberation” of textual materials in movies, tv shows, or novels. Inevitably, the protagonist also needs to escape the repository building, which often has its own mechanisms for blocking entrance or ensuring that materials remain inside. The showrunners elected to turn it into a comedic moment when, upon arriving at Winterfell, he asks an amused Queen Daenerys to pardon him for the crime of “borrowing” manuscripts from the Great Library.¹³⁸ Like Daenerys - who liberated many enslaved people during her time in Essos - Sam is also a “breaker of chains” – literally, when he removes (chained) books from the locked restricted section at the Citadel.¹³⁹

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

Building on research by archival scholars that considers portrayals of knowledge keepers in pop culture entertainment, this chapter has primarily focused on determining how knowledge keepers and spaces are portrayed in *Game of Thrones*, comparing them to the stereotypes presented in the literature. With only slight variation, the literature read for this thesis shared consistent findings and opinions. Recurring themes included knowledge keepers portrayed as authoritarians/barriers to information access, as loners who have difficulty interacting with others, and as people who are out of step with the modern world. Knowledge spaces are represented as forbidding fortresses. Archival scholars identify the negative connotations of these stereotypes and express frustration for being misunderstood and unacknowledged as a profession. Looking at these stereotypical portrayals through the lens of archivalism suggests new ways of thinking about

scholarly literature on archival research. See: Antoinette M. Burton, “Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories,” in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005): 9.

¹³⁸ S8:E2, “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms”

¹³⁹ One of Daenerys’ very long list of titles is “Breaker of Chains.” She is formally styled as “Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals and the First Men, Protector of the Seven Kingdoms, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Unburnt, Breaker of Chains, and Mother of Dragons.” It is a mouthful.

issues of representation in popular media. Chapter Two concluded that records-based historical content can be presented in many ways, depending on the interpretation of the user, the context of the presentation, and the expected audience. These factors shift the focus from how knowledge keepers and spaces are portrayed to *why* they are presented in a particular way. I propose that applying these same considerations to knowledge keepers and spaces in the story adds another dimension to understanding the gap or differences between how archivists are portrayed in pop culture and how they function in real life. Understanding the gap is the concept of archivalism's primary focus.

Upon initial examination, we can see that *Game of Thrones* perpetuates many stereotypes of knowledge keepers and spaces prevalent in popular culture. The maesters personify most of the negative stereotypes, which makes sense, as they are the primary knowledge keepers in *GoT*. The stereotypes are exploited to the point of ridiculousness in the man Sam encountered at the reception desk. He bars Sam's access to the library, humiliates him, and generally oozes intellectual elitism; he employs facial expressions and body language that turn the encounter with this knowledge keeper into something comedic for the viewer.¹⁴⁰ We find the other maesters encountered in the Citadel exhibiting the same traits, to varying degrees. These themes continue in the second scene discussed when Sam ends up having to steal the resources he needs and then leaves under cover of darkness.

Projecting the idea that knowledge keepers are unapproachable and unhelpful (and maybe a little bit scary) to millions of people via pop culture entertainment signals potentially problematic

¹⁴⁰ A clip of this scene is posted here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nP4nGTxiqWE>

modes of thinking about archival professionals. As some archival scholars noted, these portrayals are potentially damaging to the livelihood of an institution and a profession in the real world because they might unduly prejudice opinions of patrons and funding administrators.¹⁴¹

Acknowledging this concern, the concept of archivalism emphasises the importance of studying *all* portrayals of knowledge keepers and spaces and going beyond labelling them as good or bad, correct or incorrect representations, to look at their deeper significance of *why* those stereotypes exist.

One might be inclined to show leniency towards potentially negative representations of knowledge keepers and knowledge spaces in popular culture. These portrayals (or ‘activations’) serve a real purpose as plot devices that create tension for the protagonist whilst simultaneously providing them with information that moves the story forward. The practice of using stereotyped accounts of knowledge keepers and spaces as plot devices is not necessarily confined to the realm of fiction. As previously stated, the concept of archivalism acknowledges the importance of studying all representations of the archive. The next chapter shifts the focus from pop culture portrayals to an exploration of how scholarly researchers portray knowledge keepers and spaces in the stories they tell about their own research processes.

¹⁴¹ In addition to the sources previously cited, please also see Sidney J. Levy and Albert G. Robles, “*The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocators’ Perceptions*,” Study Findings (Chicago: Society of American Archivists Task Force on Archives and Society, by Social Research, Inc, 1984).

Chapter 4: Portraying Archivists and Archival Spaces in Archive Stories

“Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’.”¹⁴²

Jacques Derrida (1996)

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter One, stereotyped portrayals of archivists appear not only in pop culture representations but also in more 'serious' writing, such as scholarly work on the archive and archive stories. In this chapter, I will explore how some humanities scholars have perpetuated the pop culture tropes about the archives, archivists, and archival spaces discussed in Chapter Three when writing stories about their own work. In addition to promoting stereotypes, pop culture entertainments often used knowledge keepers, knowledge spaces, and documents as plot devices to help the character and story move forward. I want to propose that the “archive” can be read in the same way – as a plot device - in some scholarship. In this chapter, I analyse the descriptive language used to describe archivists and archival themes in a selection of humanities scholarship and consider how this language might contribute to the overall “stories” that scholars tell in their writing. This kind of analysis is significant because it illuminates how scholars from disciplines other than archival and information studies might think about the archive and portray these thoughts to a broader audience, drawing attention to the close similarity between the way the archive is represented and used as a plot device in fiction and scholarship. I include scenes from *Game of Thrones* in my analysis to illustrate this comparison.

¹⁴² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 90.

Just as with pop culture representations, some archival scholars argue that these portrayals can negatively influence thinking about the archive by misrepresenting or even ‘erasing’ the real work of the archivist, impacting things like patronage and funding.¹⁴³ As previously mentioned, the concept of archivalism situates itself in the gap between the reinventions of the archive and the reality of the archive and archival work. This concept includes looking objectively at writing on the archive by both non-specialists *and* archival scholars. The analysis in this chapter sets up the thesis conclusion, which introduces some of the more practical benefits of applying the concept of archivalism to the issues around the professional image presented in archival studies scholarship, including paving the way for more open dialogue between archival scholars, non-specialists, and the public.

4.2 ‘The Archive is Not an Archives’: How Non-Archivist Scholars Understand and Write about the Archive

It is essential to set the stage for this chapter by noting the evolving interests in archives from other disciplines, labelled as “archival turns” in the *Encyclopedia of Archival Science*.¹⁴⁴ In an excellent book chapter on studies of the archive (in *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, 2017), Eric Ketelaar describes several field-specific “archivologies” that stem from “archival turns,” or new concepts of the archive embraced by various disciplines.¹⁴⁵ He stresses the importance of engaging with “disciplines who have made the archival turn but who rarely recognise what archival practice can contribute to their discourse.”¹⁴⁶ Lack of recognition is mentioned

¹⁴³ This view(?) of the ‘erasure’ of the work of the archivists, brought to our attention by Caswell and other archival scholars, is discussed further later in this chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Luciana Duranti and Patricia C. Franks, eds., *Encyclopedia of Archival Science* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): 85.

¹⁴⁵ Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Turns and Returns: Studies of the Archive,” in *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, ed. Anne J Gilliland, Sue McKennish, and Andrew J Lau (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 228.

¹⁴⁶ Ketelaar, *Archival Turns*, 229.

frequently in the archival studies scholarship read for this thesis. In her influential 2016 article “‘The Archive’ Is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies,” Michelle Caswell writes that

The two discussions - of “the archive” by humanities scholars, and of archives by archival studies scholars (located in library and information studies departments and schools of information) - are happening on parallel tracks in which scholars in both disciplines are largely not taking part in the same conversations, not speaking the same conceptual languages, and not benefiting from each other's insights.¹⁴⁷

The work of two French philosophers - Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault - greatly inspired this separation of the archives from the real into a concept now frequently employed in scholarship from humanities disciplines.

Jacques Derrida's book *Archive Fever* is touted as having “influenced much of the archival discourse” in other (non-archival studies) fields. Michel Foucault's book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, also plays a major part in discussions about “the archive.”¹⁴⁸ Marlene Manoff writes that

Even those who are not sympathetic to the archival theories of Derrida and Foucault might acknowledge that their work has inspired and authorised a huge body of archival discourse that follows and cites them. Their work has spawned theories and counter theories of the archive; it has pointed the way toward adopting archival theory as a way to explore a variety of problems and issues in contemporary scholarship; and it has contributed to explorations of the function of the archive in both democratic and totalitarian societies. At the very least, archive theory, as formulated by Derrida and Foucault, has introduced a strategic shift in the winds of intellectual fashion and induced scholars in many fields to join the evolving conversation.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Caswell, “*The Archive*” Is Not an Archives, Para. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Marlene Manoff, “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines,” *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 11; 18.

¹⁴⁹ Manoff, *Theories of the Archive*, 19.

Both philosophers are important, not just because of their shared impact on contemporary archives-related scholarship (even though neither one of them came from an archival professional/studies background), but also because of the *way* they talk about “the archive” in their work. In their own, slightly different way, each diffuses the notion of “the archive” - transmogrifying it from its people-inhabited reality until it resembles more of a representative idea of power than the actual profession and theoretical discipline. In this sense, “the archive” is used as a “way of seeing, or a way of knowing”; a “symbol or form of power.”¹⁵⁰ Those who follow Derrida and Foucault's example are not writing about the actual archives but about how power operates to influence representation (by an acquisition policy, for example) with either empowering or disempowering consequences. This diffusion of the archives to an “abstract,” “curiously depopulated place” makes “the archives” a simplistic, one-dimensional trope, opening the doors to a wide variety of representations that use the archives or archivists as vehicles for commentary on power and discourse and not records.¹⁵¹ In a way, some fiction authors and showrunners continue Derrida and Foucault's commentary on power when they perpetuate the authoritarian gatekeeper and archive-as-fortress tropes in popular culture.

4.3 Creating Our “Known World”: Using the Archive as Plot Device in Scholarly

Writing

In his 1973 opus *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, historian Hayden White calls historical work a “verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose

¹⁵⁰ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001): 2.

¹⁵¹ Bridget Whearty, “Invisible in ‘The Archive’: Librarians, Archivists, and the Caswell Test” (Performance Script, International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, Mich, May 11, 2018): 3; 4.

discourse.”¹⁵² Regardless of the ultimate purpose of a piece of writing, both fiction and scholarly writers are telling their stories. Both often use the archives as plot devices in the story of their quest for knowledge and understanding, with the description of each experience tailored to contribute to the story's mood. Sometimes “the archive” in these stories is bright and helpful, sometimes it is oppressive and hindering; either way, the archive takes on its own character in the story. In *GoT*, Samwell Tarly's experience of the Citadel is flavoured with the increasing urgency of his research needs. The viewer's experience and understanding of the Citadel shifts as Sam's does; accompanying him as he transitions from excitement at his arrival in this “Wonderland” of knowledge, to disillusionment with the system, to frustration with its constraints, and ultimately, rebellion via justified theft and a midnight escape. In the literal sense, the Citadel is unchanging as a knowledge space. As a plot device, the Citadel has a variety of personas, each one brought out to serve the purpose of moving the story forward. Some scholars have similarly used the “archive” in writing, and, just as Sam is one of the heroes in *GoT*, the scholar situates him or herself as the main character and hero of their research story.

In her book *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (2003), literary scholar Suzanne Keen writes

The romance of the archive dares to be different; it hazards the casting of characters in the unprepossessing roles of researchers, readers, and thinkers. It makes an adventure out of an intellectual quest. Who better to carry out that quest, one might assume, than characters officially qualified to do research, already insiders of the academic world – the professors?¹⁵³

¹⁵² Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973): ix.

¹⁵³ Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction*, Repr. in paperback (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2003): 30.

Keen continues, though, to suggest that generally, “an academic outsider makes a better truth-finder than a 'qualified' researcher [i.e., a professional academic] in romances of the archive.”¹⁵⁴ Keen's point is illustrated in *GoT*. Sam, who at the outset aspires to become a maester, ends up becoming a much more effective researcher as someone coming from outside Westeros' academic establishment. Like Sam, the scholars featured in this chapter initially entered the archive in a search for truth. The archive takes on its own persona in these stories. Whether archivists and the archive are a helpful companion and “wonderland,” or minions in the realm of a villain overlord, depends entirely on the story the author wishes to tell.

When George R.R. Martin dreamed up *ASOIAF*'s Known World, he laid the geographic ground to support multiple simultaneously occurring stories. Shiloh Carroll writes that “like most examples of medievalism and neomedievalism, Martin's construction of Westeros reveals more about his beliefs about the historical Middle Ages and the human condition than it does about the Middle Ages themselves.”¹⁵⁵ The real peoples and places that inspired Martin's world are recognisable to those interested in history, but he presents them in ways that are different enough, *in theory*, to allow for innumerable possibilities.¹⁵⁶ Like the modifications Martin made with his Known World, representations of the archive in some humanities scholarship create a space that serves the purposes of the scholar's story. While there is always a certain amount of (warranted) effort affixed to research stories, the language used to describe that effort is tied to

¹⁵⁴ Keen, *Romances of the Archive*, 30.

¹⁵⁵ Carroll, *Medievalism in ASOIAF & GoT*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the phrase “the more things change, the more they stay the same” can be applied to *GoT*. For more on this, see: Tyler Dean, “*Game of Thrones*' Complex Relationship to Racism and Colonialism,” *Tor.Com*, June 10, 2019, <https://www.tor.com/2019/06/10/game-of-thrones-complex-relationship-to-racism-and-colonialism/>; Annalee Newitz, “The Trouble with Race in *Game of Thrones* Can Be Traced To Tolkien,” *Gizmodo*, April 2, 2012, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/the-trouble-with-race-in-game-of-thrones-can-be-traced-5898311>; Helen Young, “*Game of Thrones*' Racism Problem,” *The Public Medievalist*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.publicmedievalist.com/game-thrones-racism-problem/>.

the experience of the archive. If the scholar writes “the archive” as a “hypothetical wonderland,” the research process is likened to a treasure hunt.¹⁵⁷ In this situation, the emphasis often lies in the ideas of unintentional discovery and a connection to the past via physical interaction with the material record.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, if the scholar describes the archive like a “prison,” emphasis is placed on the “struggle” of archival research, or feelings of being under surveillance.¹⁵⁹ The first research narrative focuses more on the physical, and the second focuses more on the conceptual.

One of the “romances of the archive” I have observed in my reading (and personal experience) is a sense of excited awe when in proximity to the physical record. In these stories, interacting with a historical record is seen as a direct and physical connection to the past. When this occurs, the archive becomes a wonderland, and the archival record is a treasured portal to what came before. Archivist Ala Rekrut explores how “records in their original forms can powerfully communicate meaning between generations and cultures, offering researchers a personal and direct sensory engagement with the past.”¹⁶⁰ Marlene Manoff continues this line of thinking when she writes that “part of the attraction of the archive is this contact with objects that have survived to bear witness to the pastness of the past. The pleasures of the archive ... are a function of this intimate and literal contact.”¹⁶¹ Similarly, in *The Allure of the Archive*, Arlette Farge talks about feeling “as if proof of what the past was like finally lay there before you, definitive and close. As if, in

¹⁵⁷ Caswell, “*The Archive*” *Is Not an Archives*, para. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Archivists find the idea of someone making a “discovery” in the archives amusing. Since archival records are only accessible after an archivist arranges and describes them, researchers writing that they made a “discovery” is just one of the ways that the work of the archivist is “erased” in scholarship. For a cheeky response to one such case, see: <https://twitter.com/MacResColls/status/913738441686384640>

¹⁵⁹ Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 221–38.

¹⁶⁰ Ala Rekrut, “Material Literacy: Reading Records as Material Culture,” *Archivaria*, no. 60 (Fall 2005): 11.

¹⁶¹ Manoff, *Theories of the Archive*, 18.

unfolding the document, you gain the privilege of ‘touching the real’.”¹⁶² Words and phrases like “sensory engagement,” “attraction,” or the “pleasures of the archive” all telegraph particular messages that anthropomorphise the archive. Using words that conjure an inevitable end to a love affair, Farge goes on to say that these feelings “never last”; that they are like “mirages in the desert.”¹⁶³ Uncertainty has set in for the researcher, and the honeymoon phase of archival research is over.

The thrill of feeling a direct connection with the past is a large part of what drove me to archival studies, so I appreciate the romantic image these scholars have created in describing their contact with historical records. Romantic notions aside, studying a record's materiality emphasises a more literal 'touching the real' past. Contextual information gleaned from the materiality of the record can be as significant as – and sometimes more significant than - the words on the page. For example, an inadvertent fingerprint left behind leaves clues to what the creator was doing or what his or her environment was like at the time of the record's creation.¹⁶⁴ Scientists and scholars have been working together to extract DNA from the parchment and binding adhesives of medieval manuscripts, a process that can provide information about such things as where that animal was from, what they ate, and whether or not it was a drought year at the time of slaughter.¹⁶⁵ Interaction with a physical record more than just *feels* like interacting with the past; it provides an opportunity for *literal*, physical interaction with the past.

¹⁶² Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton, Lewis Walpole Series in Eighteenth-Century Culture and History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013): 11.

¹⁶³ Farge, *Allure of the Archives*, 11.

¹⁶⁴ This refers to a personal observation in my previous research.

¹⁶⁵ For example, see Timothy L. Stinson, “Knowledge of the Flesh: Using DNA Analysis to Unlock Bibliographical Secrets of Medieval Parchment,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 103, no. 4 (December 2009): 435–453.; M. D. Teasdale et al., “Paging through History: Parchment as a Reservoir of Ancient DNA for next Generation Sequencing,”

Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences 370, no. 1660 (December 8, 2014): <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2013.0379>.

The story that scholars tell when writing about the physical archive is not always romantic. In an article entitled “Archival Perils: An Historian’s Complaint,” David Lowenthal writes that “before they became tediously cerebral, archives were stigmatised as dirty, disease-ridden, death-inducing.”¹⁶⁶ Lowenthal is not the only scholar to make the association between archives and disease. For example, Carolyn Steedman's book *Dust* discusses “archive fever” much more literally than Derrida's concept. Here, she talks about the genuine “dust” of the animals and plants that form the materials of archival documents, the dust of the factory workers who made the materials, and the illness caused by poor factory conditions during the industrial revolution.¹⁶⁷ In *Dust*, in this context, the archive houses the records of injustices perpetrated by those who held power over others. This is the “malignant, eternal dust of the archive.”¹⁶⁸ Some represent the archive as both a repository for records of people with power and a tool for keeping those people in power and, as Derrida and Foucault suggest, a symbol of power itself.

Some scholars reflect in the language used in their writing the kind of powerlessness and negativity that portrays archives and archivists as creators of obstacles and tension, making the archive more of a prison or tool from an oppressive regime than a wonderland. In *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, editor Antoinette Burton portrays a negative image of the archives in the very first sentence of the Acknowledgements. She writes, “this book is the result of many people's willingness – their eagerness – to tell me their archive stories.... what it is like to encounter the archive, struggle in and with and against it, and even abandon it

¹⁶⁶ David Lowenthal, “Archival Perils: An Historian’s Complaint,” *Archives: The Journal of the British Records Association* 31, no. 114 (April 2006): 74.

¹⁶⁷ Steedman, *Dust*, 152.

¹⁶⁸ Steedman, *Dust*, 57.

all together.”¹⁶⁹ Before she reached the Introduction, Burton sets up a very particular, subjective lens that guides the reader to a particular view of the archive as a place of toil and struggle. Lowenthal remarks that “the word ‘archive’ now conjures up confusion, conspiracy, exclusivity.”¹⁷⁰

Burton and Lowenthal are not the only scholars who describe the archival research experience in ways that suggest oppression by a tyrannical regime. Many of the studies read for this thesis use language associated with oppression, physical imprisonment, or espionage. For example, in recounting an archival research trip experience in his contribution to the edited volume *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Experience*, David Gold used phrases like “after a pointed interrogation, [the librarian/archivist] allowed me to visit,” “under her watchful eye,” or “every time I asked for another catalogue, I expected her to throw me out.”¹⁷¹ Burton writes about the archives as a “panopticon whose claim to total knowledge is matched by its capacity for total surveillance.”¹⁷² Derrida talks about “the violence of the archive itself, *as archive, as archival violence*.”¹⁷³ Craig Robertson, writing about the frustrations involved in dealing with security at a NARA site in Maryland, writes, “two weeks into my second visit to the D.C. area for research, I no longer waste any excess energy on my dealings with the ‘guardian of heritage.’”¹⁷⁴ There are many more examples of the same type of language used in reference to research in an

¹⁶⁹ Antoinette M. Burton, ed. *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, (2005): ix.

¹⁷⁰ Lowenthal, *Archival Perils*, 51.

¹⁷¹ David Gold, “The Accidental Archivist: Embracing Chance and Confusion in Historical Scholarship,” in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, ed. Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 15.

¹⁷² Antoinette M. Burton, “Introduction: Archive Fever, *Archive Stories*,” in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005): 9.

¹⁷³ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Craig Robertson, “Mechanisms of Exclusion: Historicising the Archive and the Passport,” in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005), 68.; NARA is short for the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

archive, including several references to old archival practices and modes of thinking about archival professionals that are terrifically outdated. The idea that archivists see themselves as completely neutral parties during a fonds' arrangement and description process is one of these outdated and misunderstood notions often perpetuated in writing from scholars outside the archival profession. This type of misinformation is part of the gap that Caswell and other archival scholars address in their writing about representations of the archive.

4.4 Identifying Gaps in Understanding

Claims of archivist neutrality are but one piece of the gap between portrayals of archivists and archival practices and how they are in actuality. Much of the literature read for this thesis references the “claims to total knowledge” of the archive, thus perpetuating an outdated notion of impartiality strongly associated with colonialism. For many years now, archivists have acknowledged the archive's role in perpetuating a one-sided picture of history, yet as we can see from examples earlier in this chapter, some scholars from other disciplines still apply nineteenth-century archival practice to twenty-first-century archivists. Archival scholar Elisabeth Kaplan writes that

the pervading view of archives as sites of historical truth is at best outdated, and at worst inherently dangerous. The archival record doesn't just happen; it is created by individuals and organisations, and used, in turn, to support their values and missions, all of which comprises a process that is certainly not politically and culturally neutral.¹⁷⁵

Kaplan's point brings up the question: do scholars from other fields take the time to read current archival scholarship?

¹⁷⁵ Elisabeth Kaplan, “We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity,” *The American Archivist* 63 (Spring/Summer 2000): 147.

There is a sense in archival scholarship that, unfortunately, the contributions of scholars in the field are largely ignored. Caswell argues that the incomplete representation of “the archive” in humanities scholarship is partly due to the rare inclusion of archival studies scholarship in the works of humanities scholars.¹⁷⁶ Jeannette Bastian writes about the “often-heard concerns” of librarians and archivists that the “literature on the archive does not cite archivists.”¹⁷⁷

Herein lies the crux of the situation: if humanities scholars are cognizant of the changes in the archival profession, almost none of them are acknowledging these changes in their writing.

Scholars come into a repository looking for records of the past, but in writing about their modern experiences in “the archive”, they are keeping the archives and archivists trapped in that same past. Often, the work of modern archivists is not even acknowledged. There is a scene in the series finale of *Game of Thrones* that perfectly illustrates what archival professionals consider the erasure of the archivist's work in academic scholarship.

4.5 Tyrion is Erased from The Story, or The Invisible Archivist and Her Invisible

Labour

A lot has happened between the scenes discussed in Chapter Three and this next scene; the Stark allies defeated the Night King in the epic Battle of Winterfell,¹⁷⁸ Queen Daenerys sacked King's Landing¹⁷⁹ - and was subsequently assassinated - and the lords of the land have elected Bran Stark (now known as Bran The Broken) as the new King of the (now) Six Kingdoms of Westeros.¹⁸⁰ In one of the show's final scenes, Samwell Tarly, now a royal advisor and the Grand

¹⁷⁶ Caswell, *The Archive' Is Not and Archives*, para. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Jeannette A. Bastian, “Moving the Margins to the Middle: Reconciling ‘the Archive’ with the Archives,” in *Engaging with Records and Archives: Histories and Theories*, ed. Fiorella Foscarini et al. (London: Facet Publishing, 2016): 13.

¹⁷⁸ S8:E3, “The Long Night”

¹⁷⁹ S8:E5, “The Bells”

¹⁸⁰ S8:E6, “The Iron Throne”

Maester of the Red Keep, walks into the new king's Small Council meeting.¹⁸¹ In his arms, he is carrying a large manuscript, which he sets down on the table in front of Tyrion Lannister, Bran's new Hand of the King.¹⁸²

Tyrion: "What's this?"

Sam: "A Song of Ice and Fire. Archmaester Ebrose's history of the wars following the death of King Robert. I helped him with the title."

Tyrion: "I suppose I come in for some heavy criticism."

Sam: "Oh.. I would not say that."

Tyrion: "Oh! He's kind to me? I would not have guessed. (when no one responds, he pauses to look up)... "He's not kind?"

Sam: "He..."

Tyrion: "He what? What does he say about me?"

(Another long pause...)

Sam: "I don't believe you're mentioned." (clears throat)

At this, Tyrion starts looking a little panicked, while the other Small Council members try to hide their smiles.

In the second episode of Season One, Jon Snow asks Tyrion, a dwarf born into the prominent Lannister family, why he is always reading. Tyrion's response sets him up as someone who will use intelligence and quick wit to contribute to the story. He replies, "My brother has a sword, and I have a mind. And a mind needs books like a sword needs a whetstone. That's why I read so

¹⁸¹ An interesting designation, considering he never fished his training as a maester, let alone has the years of experience that are generally required to be called "Grand." This is only one of the continuity issues that happen towards the end. There is a whole extra level of "suspension of disbelief" required to get through Season 8, which, for a show with dragons and ice kings and wights, is really saying something.

¹⁸² S8:E6, "The Iron Throne", at 1:06:12.

much, Jon Snow.”¹⁸³ Though *GoT* has an ensemble cast and thus *technically* does not have a “main character,” Tyrion has the most onscreen airtime - 697 minutes throughout the series of 73 episodes.¹⁸⁴ This is more time onscreen than any of the other characters, including Jon Snow, who is on screen for 651 minutes over the course of the series. Throughout all that time, Tyrion becomes known as a keen political thinker (though he occasionally makes some significant errors in judgement). Emphasising Tyrion's lifetime of study and practice contextualises the notion that his exclusion from a chronicle of political events in which he figured prominently is absolutely preposterous.

Much like Tyrion's erasure from Westerosi history, archival professionals have observed that archivists' contributions often go unacknowledged in scholarship. Jeannette Bastian argues that

There is a sense that somehow the scholars of the archive have not only reappropriated the archives but also have relegated archivists to a subordinate position – that once again, archivists are in danger of becoming handmaidens. And this view often seems to be borne out in academic discourses where scholars seem surprised that archivists and librarians are upset.¹⁸⁵

Terry Cook writes that “it is very clear that even the educated portion of the public and media have very little idea of what archivists do.”¹⁸⁶ Michelle Caswell asserts that “when archivists are acknowledged, they are seen as mindless bureaucrats who hinder rather than aid access to records.”¹⁸⁷ All of the literature written by archival scholars and read for this thesis discusses professional misrepresentation in one way or another. All of the authors commented that, as a collection of individuals with a shared profession, they would like to be recognised for their

¹⁸³ S1:E2, “The Kingsroad”

¹⁸⁴ <https://comicbook.com/tv-shows/news/game-of-thrones-characters-ranked-by-screentime/>

¹⁸⁵ Bastian, *Moving the Margins to the Middle*, 13.

¹⁸⁶ Terry Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 35.

¹⁸⁷ Caswell, “*The Archive*” *Is Not an Archives*, Para. 26.

contributions to scholarship and all the work and theory-based decisions that go into making records accessible. Terry Cook (2011) quotes archivist and historian W. Kaye Lamb (1963) when he writes that

to many historians, the archivist was ‘essentially a hack: a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. He collects things, cleans them, catalogues them, puts them on shelves, and eventually takes some of them off shelves and puts them on a table when a historian wants them. All of this is true enough, but it neglects entirely those aspects of the archivist’s job that call for intelligence, knowledge, and judgement.’¹⁸⁸

Not all scholars erase or minimise the importance of archivists in their writing. In reference to a particular research trip, Gesa Kirsch writes, “in the archives, I had the great pleasure of meeting a man with whom I had corresponded for the last two years. ... Now that I had arrived in person, he greeted me as an old friend and made sure I got the assistance I needed.”¹⁸⁹ Unfortunately, Kirsch's favourable reference to the archivist's work was rare amongst the selection of scholarship read for this thesis, and even then, she only acknowledges the archivist in one of the aspects of his role – as a provider of reference services. Archival studies as a discipline is often under-advocated and underappreciated, leaving the profession open as an object of stereotyped portrayals in both popular culture *and* academic scholarship.

Caswell claims that a “failure of interdisciplinarity” is one of the things that is responsible for the distorted view of the archives/archivists.¹⁹⁰ Certain scholars, such as medievalist Bridget Whearty, are making efforts to bring the appropriate recognition to archivists as individuals capable of contributing more than just reference help. Whearty's development and application of “The Caswell Test” as a method of ensuring the inclusion of scholarly contributions of archivists

¹⁸⁸ Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape,” *The American Archivist* 74, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 609.

¹⁸⁹ Gesa E. Kirsch, “Being on Location: Serendipity, Place, and Archival Research,” in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, ed. Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008): 23.

¹⁹⁰ Caswell, “*The Archive*” *Is Not an Archives*, para. 4.

and librarians is an excellent first step. The 'test' functions as a system of checks and balances that humanities scholars can use to make sure the contributions of archival scholars are acknowledged in their work.¹⁹¹ Whearty echoes the call for increased interdisciplinary outreach that some archival scholars recommend; however, since this recommendation is repeated in several articles from archival scholars over the past decade, it seems that current outreach activities either have little effect or are not widely implemented.¹⁹²

This thesis has brought to light some of the parallels that can be drawn between medievalism and the understanding of the “medieval” in pop culture and scholarship and a new concept I developed called *archivalism* - the understanding of “the archive” - in these same modalities. Though medievalism initially struggled to find acceptance as field of study, its recognition as an academic specialty has grown such that now it has its own journals and conferences; and, as KellyAnn Fitzpatrick writes, “we even have our own ‘superstars’.”¹⁹³ One of the most successful aspects of medievalism is its ability to cross disciplinary and cultural bounds. Fitzpatrick illustrates this when she writes “the interdisciplinary nature of our field [medievalism] means that sometimes they [scholars of medievalism] are also medievalists or English scholars, but they might also be Nobel Prize-winning poets or wandering members of British comedy troupes.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ The Caswell Test, named after archival scholar Michelle Caswell, is a way for humanities scholars to stop the erasure of archival professionals. Whearty writes, “when we write about libraries and archives and especially when we want to write about “the archive,” we must... (1) have at least 2 (ideally more) ARCHIVISTS and/or LIBRARIANS in our argument, who (2) appear not just as support staff in paratextual ‘thank you’ notes but as valued interlocutors and intellectual equals in the main body of our arguments, and who (3) we don’t just talk about, but we talk with and listen to – that is we must read and cite more librarians’ and archivists’ own publications, just like we read and cite other valued experts and authorities.” Whearty, “Invisible in the Archive”, 12.

¹⁹² I refer back to Caswell, “*The Archive*” *Is Not an Archives* (2016).; Oliver and Daniel, *Identity Complex*, 50.

¹⁹³ Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism*, 10-11.

¹⁹⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism*, 10-11. Fitzpatrick says in Note 23 that she is referring to “A 2013 conference on ‘The Middle Ages in the Modern World’ held at the University of St. Andrews boasted plenary lectures by Carolyn Dinshaw, Seamus Heaney, Bruce Holsinger, and Terry Jones (of Monty Python fame).”

Like the Middle Ages, archives and archival materials are studied by scholars from across the disciplines and professionals outside of the academy.

The concept of archivalism proposes new methods for examining representations of the archive and archivists; it encourages examinations from multiple viewpoints and in various contexts.

This chapter discussed scholarly research stories compared to portrayals of knowledge keepers and spaces in fiction. One can also read this body of literature in the context of user experience studies. Huvila writes that “user perspective and user studies have received noticeably little practice attention in archives and archival studies,” especially when compared to the “interest in users’ needs” demonstrated in libraries and LIS research.¹⁹⁵ The authors of the stories in this chapter – i.e. the archives’ users – recount experiences that reflect a desire for more transparency of the archival process. The archival scholars cited in this chapter wish to have the work of archivists acknowledged in scholarship from non-archival studies disciplines. There are ways that the interests of both parties can be addressed, including interdisciplinary outreach, as suggested by both Caswell and Whearty.

4.6 Resisting the Erasure of Archivists and Archival Work Through Telling our Own Stories

Until targeted interdisciplinary outreach activities hit enough of a critical mass to effect real change, there are steps archivists can take to play more active roles in evolving their image. For example, archivists can make their work more visible to others through increased documentation of their arrangement and description decisions in the finding aid. Kaplan admits that archivists

¹⁹⁵ Itso Huvila, “Participatory Archive: Towards Decentralised Curation, Radical User Orientation, and Broader Contextualisation of Records Management,” *Archival Science* 8 (2008): 15.

are trained to “avoid editorialising in [their] finding aids” although they are “surrounded by examples of [their] own blatant participation in the creation of the historical record.”¹⁹⁶ Even so, several archival scholars have called for archivists to increase practice transparency via adding more detail to appraisal reports and finding aids. Terry Cook writes that

appraising archivists should themselves be formally documented and linked to these same appraisal reports and descriptive entries, with a full curriculum vitae placed on accessible files, complemented by autobiographical details of the values they used in appraisal and that they reflected in description.¹⁹⁷

As a “public tool” that reflects the work of the archivist, finding aids are an excellent outlet for public archival education.¹⁹⁸ Jennifer Douglas writes that finding aids can be augmented for this purpose by “the addition of colophons or footnotes ... to account for processing decisions and to acknowledge the archivist’s interpretive role” and also the inclusion of “essays to describe institutional policies and practices surrounding description and to allow more space to trace the history of a fonds.”¹⁹⁹ Light and Hyry say that archivists can use colophons to “record biographical information about a processor, as well as any perspective they would like to contribute to the finding aid.”²⁰⁰ Including more personal and decision making information is an excellent step towards increasing an archivist's visibility amongst patrons who access collections. This type of visibility creates the added benefit of disproving the long-held belief that archivists are neutral in their selection, arrangement, and description practices. Douglas observes,

¹⁹⁶ Elisabeth Kaplan, “Practicing Archives with a Postmodern Perspective” (Sawyer Seminars on Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001); Michelle Light and Tom Hyry quoted from “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” *The American Archivist* 65, no. 2 (September 2002): 221.

¹⁹⁷ Cook, *Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth*, 35.

¹⁹⁸ Kristin Cook and Heather Dean, “Our Records, Ourselves: Documenting Archives and Archivists,” in *Archival Narratives for Canada: Re-Telling Stories in a Changing Landscape*, ed. Kathleen Garay and Christl Verduyn (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2011): 64.

¹⁹⁹ Jennifer Douglas, “Toward More Honest Description,” *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (June 2016): 43.; See also Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” *The American Archivist* 65, no. 2 (September 2002): 216–30.;

²⁰⁰ Light and Hyry, *Colophons and Annotations*, 224.

unfortunately, that “although several different solutions—or partial solutions—have been proposed, archivists have been slow to adopt them.”²⁰¹

4.7 Chapter Conclusion

The introduction to this chapter proposed the possibility of similarities between the way popular culture represents archives and how they are represented in some academic writing. Buckley writes that there is an

ever-present, sometimes faint, but always pervasive dichotomy: in many respects, popular culture is obviously aware of the true nature of the archival experience, yet it has chosen to embrace the more sensational and entertaining elements of information storage and retrieval. The dichotomy becomes evident when elements of a real-life archival experience are instead utilised to introduce narrative tension and obstacles.²⁰²

In the quote above, Buckley speaks specifically about pop culture, yet is scholarship so different?

Overall, I found that the same stereotypes repeated in both categories and that these stereotypes served similar purposes, namely, as plot devices to move the story in specific directions. It is easier to justify biases and inaccuracies in the portrayals of knowledge keepers and spaces in pop culture entertainment. After all, these authors and showrunners are telling a fictional tale, and knowledge keepers and spaces are (generally) only small devices in a much larger story of a character's journey. On the other hand, it is a little harder to justify how the archives and archivists are portrayed in some academic scholarship that specifically discusses real-life experiences researching in an archive.

²⁰¹ Douglas, *Toward More Honest Description*, 43.

²⁰² Buckley, *Red Files*, 98.

The concept of archivalism challenges the archival researcher to think outside the box when it comes to reading stories about researching in an archive, which includes applying distanced curiosity to the language used to describe knowledge keepers and spaces to understand an author's possible intentions for using particular stereotypes. Interestingly, when tackling the reading from this perspective, I noticed that how these scholars wrote about their archival experiences mirrored the larger story of that scholar's work. For example, scholars whose research specialty focuses on political history and colonialism would write about their experience researching an archive as if it were a prison or oppressive state and, therefore, an obstacle the researcher had to overcome. The scholars who study particular literary genres wrote about their personal experience in the archive with mystery, romance, or other ways that matched their area of expertise.²⁰³

The concept of archivalism provides a lens through which archival scholars can objectively examine what is perceived in the archival studies discipline as a gap or disconnect between the way archives are portrayed across multiple media and how archives and the archivist's work function in real life. It starts to bridge this gap by reminding us that archives and archival records play a role in everyone's lives, whether an academic scholar who utilises archival materials in their professional life or a consumer of popular culture who has never entered an archival institution.

²⁰³ I refer back to Keen's "Romances of the Archive" (2003) as an example.

Chapter 5: Thesis Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The impetus behind this thesis arose from a desire to understand how archivists and archives are represented across multiple platforms, including film, tv, and fictional writing. The combined scholarship read on the portrayals of archivists in popular culture covered a large selection of works of literature, tv, and film. However, I chose to focus on HBO's hit show *Game of Thrones* because it utilizes archival themes in critical plot transitions and, due to its place in the cultural mindset, has successfully crossed literary, television, and academic boundaries.

The scholarship on *GoT* introduced me to medievalism studies, which examines the relationship between what is perceived as the historical Middle Ages and how they are reinvented through popular culture and non-fiction writing. Medievalism provided a thought-provoking perspective from which to examine portrayals of the archive and archivists. Moreover, it inspired me to develop the concept of archivalism, which I define as the study of the relationship between the perceptions of the archive, as expressed in a variety of media, both fictional and non-fictional, and the real work of the archive, archivists, and archival practices. This thesis aimed to present a case for the concept of archivalism as an objective frame of reference for studying how archivists, archives, and archival practices are portrayed to the public in popular culture media and the academic writing of scholars from disciplines outside of archival studies.

For this early exploration of archivalism as a concept, perceptions of the archive were extrapolated from the language and imagery used to portray the archive and archivists in *Game of Thrones* and a selection of non-specialist scholarly sources. Additionally, I examined how the

knowledge keepers and spaces portrayed in these sources potentially contributed to the direction of the stories and how archival records actively participate in *Game of Thrones* as plot devices.

5.2 Research Findings

Two common themes emerged from my analysis of the three corpora of literature - studies on representations of the archives in popular culture, studies on *Game of Thrones*, and scholarly literature about the archives and archival research from outside the archival discipline. The first consistent finding is that representations of archivists and archival institutions in popular culture entertainment often project the experience of accessing archives in a way that perpetuates stereotypes, placing the archival profession in what it perceives as an unfavourable light that minimizes the archivists and their work. These stereotypes varied slightly, but most were thematically consistent, representing archival institutions as prisons and archivists as the guards between archival materials and the outside world. The second finding was that these stereotyped portrayals of knowledge keepers and spaces are echoed in accounts of archival research in the scholarly works of non-archival studies scholars. In Chapter One, I suggested that, when considering various works via the lens of archivalism, the divide between scholarship, popular non-fiction, and fiction is less than one might initially think, as all three share the same fundamental goal: to tell a story from a specific point of view, thus influencing a reader or viewer's perception of a given topic. This assumption was validated in the context of this research.

The initial assessment of the portrayals of knowledge keepers and knowledge spaces in *Game of Thrones* was consistent with the literature that critiques representations of archivists in popular

culture. One such critique is that the work of information professionals – such as librarians, archivists, and record keepers - is often conflated in popular culture representations, which is why the terms “knowledge keeper” and “knowledge space” are used in several sections throughout this thesis. These terms are especially appropriate to this research, as the work of the maesters, who are the knowledge keepers of Westeros, encompasses a variety of knowledge-based activities beyond combining the work of the archivist and librarian. As representations of knowledge keepers, the maesters embodied several of the stereotypes presented in the literature. Maesters of the Citadel *do* act as guards and barriers between books and archival materials and seekers of information. The Citadel as an institutional building is *literally* a fortress that protects the knowledge within from outsiders (i.e., non-maesters). The stereotypical representations of archivists and archives - observed by archival studies scholars more broadly in pop culture and my observations in *GoT* more specifically - are mirrored in some non-archival studies scholars' stories about their experiences researching in archival repositories.

All of these portrayals imply inaccessibility, whether it be the inaccessibility of the spaces (via the use of the fortress/prison metaphor), the inaccessibility of the knowledge keeper as a person (portrayed as socially awkward or difficult people who obstruct access to information) or inaccessibility due to the secret nature of the material depicted in pop culture media and other writing. The concerns about professional image that are brought to our attention and critiqued in the literature by archival scholars are often organized around *what* they are describing – i.e., what is considered the unfair and inaccurate depiction of archival people, places, or concepts of truth/secretcy in archival materials as inaccessible. The consistency of the themes across genres

makes one wonder if there might be an element of truth in the way that people have represented or read the portrayal of archives?

When taken at face value, there is *some* truth in these depictions. For example, archival collections are housed in vaults or on stacks that are “behind the scenes”; thus, archive patrons are dependent on archivists to provide access to materials. Browsing shelves is not an option, as it is in libraries. Ensuring access to information and resources is, after all, the primary mission of a library. Providing access to materials is also an aspect of the archivist's work, but that access is secondary to preserving and maintaining the materials' organisation. There are occasions where preservation needs and privacy laws dictate either partially or fully restricting access to a collection. These restrictions stem from practical, valid reasons based on archival theory, which, unfortunately, is often not accessible to non-professionals. These factors certainly contribute to the rather sobering central critique that archives are ultimately inaccessible to anyone outside the archival field.

As previously stated, *Game of Thrones* is often used by scholars to introduce discussion about medievalism and the Middle Ages to people who might not otherwise engage with medieval studies.²⁰⁴ Based on the findings from this research, *Game of Thrones* is also an example of archivalism at work in popular culture. Therefore, archivists can use *GoT* to initiate open discussion about the archive and to introduce basic archival theory and practice to people who have limited or inaccurate knowledge of the profession.

²⁰⁴ Referring back to Locke, *Beyond Tits and Dragons*, 172.; Olivia B. Waxman, “Game of Thrones Is Even Changing How Scholars Study the Real Middle Ages,” TIME, July 14, 2017, <https://time.com/4837351/game-of-thrones-real-medieval-history/>.

5.3 Shifting Perspectives with the Concept of Archivalism

Based on the literature read for this thesis, professional image and identity are clearly important to archival professionals. Previously, I wrote that some archival studies scholars had noticed a narrow view of the archives and archival practice in scholarship about the archival experience from other fields, citing a “failure of interdisciplinarity.”²⁰⁵ Perhaps this cannot be pinned entirely on the lack of citations to books and articles by archival studies scholars or outreach events, but is partly due to the way the archival profession *responds* to seeing itself as ignored or misrepresented. If archival studies scholars want to be acknowledged as trained professionals and scholars and improve the image of the archive in scholarship, they need to read scholarship about the archive to try to understand the “Why” behind these representations - including how that representation contributes to the scholar's story – instead of focusing so much on potentially inaccurate or negative descriptors. This shift in perspective can help lead to interdisciplinary dialogue that is more collaborative and less confrontational, providing opportunities to facilitate a deeper understanding of current theories and practices that answer questions about why archives function as they do.

The concept of archivalism offers an avenue to explore a shift in perspective. Here too, we can look to the example of medievalism, which acknowledges that interpretations of the Middle Ages are “inevitably colored by the culture, biases, and purposes of the interpreters.”²⁰⁶ Medievalism has done a spectacular job of rising to the occasion when it comes to pop culture and scholarly representations of the Middle Ages. There are two ways to respond to outside representations of an academic field: One is rigid, demands acceptance of a narrow perspective, and responds with

²⁰⁵ Caswell, “*The Archive*” is Not an Archive, para. 4.

²⁰⁶ Carroll, *Medievalism in ASOIAF & GoT*, 8.

negativity to representations outside their own self-understanding. The other is flexible, acknowledges the myriad of factors that contribute to how things are perceived and represented, and thus draws in a wide variety of people from a wealth of backgrounds. As a field of study, medievalism tends toward this more objective stance. The concept of archivalism suggests that the second option may also be a more appropriate response if the goal is to encourage a deeper understanding of the profession.

The concept of archivalism presents a shift in thinking that can be used to benefit the field. Through the lens of archivalism, we can see the advantage of studying how we come across to the public via pop culture entertainment. Like medievalism scholars, we can use current pop culture portrayals to create inroads with an interdisciplinary student population that might not otherwise be exposed to archival education. Archival scholar Tom Nesmith brings up excellent point that needs to be addressed when introducing any new audience to archival theory and practices. He states that “[a]rchives are now contributing significantly to a wide range of knowledge creation and dissemination activities across a great many forms of economic and cultural life, from the mass media to the formal education system.”²⁰⁷ This contribution is unapparent to many because they do not associate home or web-based systems for storing mundane personal documents - such as credit card statements, receipts, or medical records - with personal archiving or archival practice. Drawing attention to the connection between everyday personal recordkeeping and archival practice is a small but essential way to make archives more accessible. Improved accessibility can, in turn, contribute to eventually minimizing the

²⁰⁷ Tom Nesmith, “Toward the Archival Stage in the History of Knowledge,” *Archivaria* 80 (Fall 2015): 122.

differences between the portrayals and the real work of the archives that the concept of archivalism examines.

5.4 Utilising the Concept of Archivalism for Future Research

Early in this research, I considered how the stereotypes of knowledge keepers and spaces presented in pop culture might influence a viewer's perception of the archivist's work or the experience of researching an archival institution. While addressing this question was beyond the scope of this thesis, it did suggest several possibilities for future research, including studies that question how people formulate their opinions of the archive, why showrunners and authors choose to utilize certain stereotypes, and the role that pop culture media might play influencing public perception of the archive. I am also curious about what inspired students in archival studies graduate programs to become archivists and if pop culture representations played a significant role in those decisions. I suspect that pop culture portrayals of knowledge keepers and spaces *did* play some role in formulating their interest in archives as a profession for many of those students.

This thesis explored the concept of archivalism as a new approach to studying the impact and perception of archives in the cultural mindset. It brings together multiple types of archival representation to provide archival scholars with a holistic way to examine modes of thinking about the archives objectively. It acknowledges that, like records activation, each activation of archival representation in fiction or scholarship reflects the writer's personal experience, the needs of the intended audience, and the ultimate direction of the story. Just as medievalist scholars from a variety of disciplines use *Game of Thrones* and the study of medievalism as

points of entry to medieval studies, reframing portrayals of knowledge keepers and spaces through archivalism can be a valuable tool for educating the public about the archive, drawing more people to the field of archival studies, and inspiring interdisciplinary dialogue amongst scholars.

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