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Alterations of the Fictional Line: Possible Encounters Between Authors and Complex Characters

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Abstract: This essay aims to examine the transformation of the traditional boundary between actantial roles inside fiction in literature and transmediality, to understand how this shift enables potential encounters between complex characters. This study focuses on contemporary complexity novels, where characters attempt to break free from their author-creators, as they offer a particularly compeling dynamic for investigation. It will examine this type of complex narration while also exploring the fluidity of contemporary storytelling in literature and transmediality, which introduces innovative narrative structures. Novels that reflect on the relationship between authorship and characters provide valuable insights from both a theoretical-literary and transmedia perspective, which deserve to be examined in light of the changes in the structure of contemporary narratives.

Keywords: character; author; narratology; complexity; fiction

1. Introduction—Between Authors and Complex Characters

In the literary realm, the advent of modernity has ushered in new narrative patterns, further amplifying the shifts in authorship that have been occurring over time—ever since Barthes and Foucault brought the author into focus with their essays. The proclamations about the death and disappearance of the author, which reached their peak in the late 1960s, performed a sort of miracle, as Benedetti argues, because if everything is dead, everything is possible again (Benedetti 1999, p. 194). The author has not only returned but also could become more complex by employing innovative strategies, which modernity facilitates, and which become particularly evident when authors and characters intersect in literary texts.

In contemporary literature, contrary to earlier predictions, the role of the author has expanded, manifesting in various forms such as the author-image, the strategic author, the implicated author, and the fetishized author (Iovinelli 2004, p. 31). The authorial types in modern literature represent the fusion, the transformation that results from new and unexpected combinations (Rushdie 1991, p. 432). Complexity thus becomes the hallmark of contemporary literature: in particular, in novels and short stories, authors often play with their own function and authorship, blending and multiplying themselves, but reversing roles with characters. Characters become authors, just as authors become characters.

This is the case in the works that are the focus of this contribution, where the alteration of fictional actantial roles seems most evident, allowing authors and characters to mix their roles.

There is an extensive body of studies on the issue of the character, often starting from the analysis of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics* and passing through Cervantes' *Don Quijote*—considered the first true modern character—reaching up to the present day.

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However, what is of real interest here is not so much the broad and all-encompassing notion of the character but rather the evolution of the character function, which seeks to emancipate itself from its author and place itself on the same narrative level.

Over time, the character becomes so "autonomous" that critics, starting from the second half of the 20th century, began to address the issue of its self-determination and to try to find some objective and concrete elements to differentiate the person from the character (Zéraffa 1969). Thus, within complex narratives, the character increasingly gains a remarkable degree of autonomy:

> As virtual human beings, characters even appear to have a life of their own. Forster expresses the experience of many novelists when he says that characters have the tendency to "lead lives of their own" and "get out of hand". On the part of the readers of fiction, characters seem to acquire a degree of autonomy too. They are easily extrapolated from the text, and readers tend to remember novels for their characters. Thus, characters appear to be virtually autonomous, leading a life independent of text, reader, or even author. (Fokkema 1991, p. 20)

The question that scholars will increasingly seek to address concerns the possibility of the "real" existence of a character: being existent without existing is the sophisticated prerogative common to mathematical entities, unfunded architectural monuments, spiritual emanations in Gnostic systems, and fictional characters (Pavel 1992, p. 47). Obviously, in this sense, metafiction plays a significant role, especially when it incorporates structures such as metalepsis (Medaglia 2020). In this regard, phenomena related to complex authorship have become increasingly numerous and intricate, affecting contemporary fiction in its multiple and often controversial manifestations. These include collective and multiple writings that feature a plural authorial identity, autofiction and metafiction, ghostwriting, ergodic literature with its expansion beyond the written text, the transmedial domain with its media transformations, as well as all texts that significantly alter actantial roles (Medaglia 2020, pp. 85–107).

In this light, metafiction is a literary device that consciously interrogates the nature of fiction, often destabilizing the distinction between reality and imagination. It is characterized by a narrative that deliberately highlights its own artificiality, frequently breaking the fourth wall to directly engage the reader. This technique subverts traditional storytelling by exposing the mechanics of fiction, prompting audiences to critically examine the construction of narratives.

A quintessential example of metafiction is evident in John Barth's short story collection *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968). Barth's self-referential narrative style disrupts conventional storytelling, compelling readers to acknowledge the text as an artificial construct. According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction "foregrounds the writing process itself and problematizes the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 1984, p. 2). Metafictional techniques are also prevalent in contemporary literature, such as Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), which merges detective fiction with self-referential discourse. By interrogating authorship and identity, Auster challenges the conventions of narrative realism, a fundamental characteristic of metafictional writing.

In this background, metalepsis refers to a deliberate violation of narrative boundaries, often disrupting the distinction between different levels of storytelling. When employed within metafiction, metalepsis functions as a self-reflexive device that exposes the artificiality of the narrative structure and challenges conventional reader engagement. By breaking the implicit contract between author, narrator, and reader, metalepsis invites audiences to question the nature of fiction and its relationship to reality.

In this light, Genette defines it as "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe" (Genette 1980, p. 234). This narrative transgression

creates a paradox in which different ontological levels collapse, generating an effect of estrangement and heightened self-awareness. In metafictional texts, metalepsis is frequently employed to highlight the instability of narrative authority. For instance, in Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), the novel's structure constantly shifts between narrative levels, positioning the reader as both an observer and a protagonist, thus complicating the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Another striking example is found in Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914), where the protagonist, Augusto Pérez, directly confronts his creator, the author himself, in an act of radical metalepsis. This intrusion not only dismantles the illusion of fictional autonomy but also foregrounds the constructed nature of literary characters. As Patricia Waugh argues, metafictional narratives "problematize the relationship between fiction and reality, author and reader" (Waugh 1984, p. 22).

In contemporary literature, metalepsis continues to serve as a powerful tool for narrative experimentation. Works such as Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) utilize metaleptic structures to unsettle traditional storytelling techniques, emphasizing the recursive and unstable nature of fiction. By transgressing narrative levels, these texts not only challenge readerly expectations but also invite deeper reflection on the act of storytelling itself.

Ultimately, metalepsis within metafiction serves as a means of questioning the limitations of narrative frameworks. By subverting hierarchical storytelling structures, it compels readers to engage critically with the text, fostering a greater awareness of the constructed nature of literary discourse.

We are thus in a realm where the narrative operates independently of its creator, allowing everyone—characters and authors included—to circumvent and transcend the usual boundaries imposed by fiction. This enables them to begin leading lives of their own, at least in part, independent of the work from which they originated: fiction is not just fiction, and reality is not just reality. Both are fictitious, or rather, they are linguistic constructs and can be depicted (Iovinelli 2004, p. 53).

Therefore, in agreement with Iovinelli, if the boundary between history and fiction is never clear and never predetermined, then we find characters who are also the authors of the texts they quote or reference placed in the foreground. The whole story is a hypertext, and every individual becomes a character (Iovinelli 2004, pp. 174–75).

In this regard, the interplay between author-character and character-character destabilizes the reality of the fictional world, dismantling the barriers that traditionally separate these roles within the narrative and allowing both author and characters to interact on a plane of mutual, albeit fictional, equity.

Several literary works feature such interference between author and character (Medaglia 2020), facilitated by various forms of metalepsis and other narrative techniques, enabling them to engage within a space that challenges conventional fictional categorization. This situation underscores the power of the fiction/nonfiction divide. In this sense, fiction does not become reality and, as Dorrit Cohn has clarified, reference in fiction is fundamentally different from that in nonfiction (Cohn 2000), however, within the narrative fiction, through this complex form of metalepsis, the actantial planes are altered. In this light, good examples could be, on one hand, Michel Houellebecq's novel *The Map and the Territory* (2010), in which author Michel Houellebecq is gruesomely murdered, and on the other hand, John Maxwell Coetzee's *Summertime* (2009), in which a young English academic decides to write the biography of the South African Nobel writer, who is said to have died prematurely.

2. The Advent of New Media

Texts structured around the interplay between author and characters, though they have always existed—consider the early forms of meta-literature and the interactions between authors and characters in ancient and modern literary works—have proliferated with the advent of contemporary times and new media.

The concept of convergent media, theorized (2006) and then updated (2016) by Jenkins, has profoundly reshaped the creation, distribution, and consumption of narratives, significantly impacting both the media industry and audience interaction: for instance, Jenkins says that "transmedia approaches are multimodal (. . .), intertextual (. . .) and dispersed (in that the viewer constructs an understanding of the core ideas through encounters across multiple platforms)" (Jenkins 2016). Today, convergent media represents the blending and merging of traditional forms like television, cinema, and print with emerging digital technologies such as social media, video games, and streaming platforms.

A pivotal aspect of this transformation is the emergence of transmedia storytelling, where narratives unfold across multiple platforms and formats, each contributing uniquely to the overall narrative experience.

Before proceeding further with the analysis of the subject at hand, it is necessary to take additional steps into the theoretical dimension of the issue, briefly discussing the terminology associated with the transmedial framework. In fact, for a long time, distinct terms such as intermedial, transmedial, and multimedia have been used synonymously. However, there are significant differences between them (Medaglia 2024).

For many scholars, the term *intermedial* has proven to be the most effective (Rajewsky 2014, pp. 197–206; Fusillo 2015, pp. 703–706). Nevertheless, over the past twenty years, related terms have gained prominence, with *transmediality* being the first among them, initially introduced by Kinder in 1991 (Kinder 1991). The success of this term can largely be attributed to Jenkins's studies on convergent culture and the media products that emerged from it (Jenkins 2016). In this regard, *transmediality*, *crossmediality*, and *media convergence* have gained significant traction over the past decade (Conti 2023, p. 57).

By the late twentieth century, scholars from various disciplines—each approaching the subject with different methodologies—began employing these terms to describe the evolving media landscape and the relationships between different media forms. To account for the complex and highly diverse terminological landscape, one can consider several terms frequently employed in Anglophone scholarship (Fusillo et al. 2020, p. 154). These include *transmedia intertextuality* (Kinder 1991), *multimedia reiteration* (Schatz 1993, pp. 8–36), *intermedial meshing* (Gaudreault 2006), *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins 2006), *multiple platforms* (Jeffery-Poulter 2003, pp. 155–64), *distributed narrative* (Walker 2004, pp. 91–103), *plurimediality* (Wolf 2005, pp. 252–56), *cross-media production* (Bechmann Petersen 2006, pp. 94–107), *media mixes* (Ito 2007, pp. 88–110), *cross-media distribution* (Turow 2008), *multimedia performance* (Klich and Scheer 2011), and *deep media* (Rose 2013).

In some cases, the differences in terminology are negligible, while in others, significantly distinct terms are mistakenly used interchangeably despite their theoretical divergence. In the former case, terms such as *cross-media production*, *distributed narrative*, and *deep media* all describe what is essentially Jenkins's concept of *convergent transmediality*, albeit under different names with strong theoretical similarities. In contrast, terms like *transmedial* and *intermedial* are often erroneously treated as synonyms despite their distinct theoretical implications, which will be elaborated upon in the following discussion.

Ultimately, the proliferation of terminology has led to a degree of conceptual confusion (Negri 2015). A universally accepted technical-specialist vocabulary addressing new media relationships has yet to be established within the academic community. Consequently, this study seeks to further specify the use of terms within the medial framework.

Indeed, this "terminological jungle" (Rajewsky 2018) continues to expand, introducing new terms that refine methodological tools and deepen the theoretical horizon. In this contribution, *transmediality* is adopted as a flexible term capable of encompassing various narrative typologies.

Moreover, media convergence has also revolutionized the role of the audience, shifting them from passive consumers to active creators and curators of content, changing again concepts and definitions. Particularly through social media, audiences engage with stories, discuss them, create fan fiction, and sometimes influence their development through direct feedback. Digital platforms, equipped with advanced recommendation algorithms, enable personalized narrative experiences by suggesting content based on individual preferences, thereby tailoring unique experiences for each user. This customization is further facilitated by the increased accessibility of narratives to a global audience, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

In the current era, narratives have evolved towards greater speed and diversification through a process aimed at expanding the narrative universe around the original matrix. This process enriches it with new distinct elements at each transition across different media. Each expansion of the story world thus becomes a new textual manifestation that contributes to deepening and enriching the original text, adding further layers of understanding and depth (Mallamaci 2018, p. 47). As a result, each individual product becomes a gateway to the entirety of the narrative complexity (Jenkins 2006, p. 95), expanding the breadth of engagement. This is also influenced by the fact that certain media are more suitable for diverse types of consumers than others. In this context, the contemporary task of storytelling appears to be the creation of expansive universes articulated through multiple narratives. These are composed of stories distributed across various media platforms within large editorial projects, organized into complex communication systems. The content can be experienced in both real and virtual worlds and in both individual and interactive modes (Giovagnoli 2020, p. 139).

All of this unfolds in relation to the various forces that define convergence, which for the first time are emerging simultaneously from opposite directions: convergence, as observed, is both a top-down process driven by corporations and a bottom-up process driven by consumers. Corporate convergence exists alongside participatory convergence (Jenkins 2006, p. 18).

The era of convergence we find ourselves in today has profoundly altered storytelling dynamics. It is influenced by grassroots movements from a bottom-up approach and often concurrently by a top-down approach. Consequently, critics have grappled with a range of theoretical questions regarding narrative and the analysis of stories in metamodernity, particularly evident in television serials. This new wave of pervasive media is defined by media convergence, rapid content dissemination, and an engaged, participatory audience. These elements are pivotal in comprehending the evolving cultural landscape unfolding within the digital realm.

De Sola Pool examined the processes of convergence that were obscuring the boundaries between different media (de Sola Pool 1983, p. 23); then Jenkins characterizes our current era as a convergent culture where cultural convergence becomes pervasive due to the widespread availability of channels and the portability of new information and communication technologies (Jenkins 2006, p. 16). Convergence is thus a process driven by opposing forces: top-down and bottom-up (Jenkins 2006, p. 18). This is further complicated by remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000, p. 5), where new media reconfigure and repurpose forms, techniques, and meanings from older media (McLuhan 1996, pp. 14–17).

In addition to convergence and remediation, there are also considerations of immediacy and hypermediation. These contrasting dynamics coexist within the media landscape,

with hypermediation often seen as a counterpart to immediacy, creating a complex interplay of presence and challenge (Bolter and Grusin 2000, pp. 33–34). In response to these cultural transformations, storytelling has become a focal point within the mediasphere that both generates and continually regenerates it, a nexus of intermedial relationships that manifest through adaptation, combination, or reference (Vittorini 2017, p. 201).

Media convergence, content circulation, and active audience participation are not only reshaping our media experiences, but also profoundly influencing culture and society as a whole.

3. Transmediality and Characters

The interpretation of a new medium upon its emergence, along with all its implications, has long been a pressing issue. Since the 20th century, this challenge has grown more acute due to the rapid pace of transformations that characterized the century. Identifying the distinct components of media systems within processes of convergence has become increasingly difficult (Bolter and Grusin 2000, p. 12).

From the 1990s onward, there has been a notable television revolution leading to what Mittell describes as complex TV (Mittell 2004), elevating television series to productions of increasing sophistication. Today, the prevalence of TV series over films is widely acknowledged as nearly commonplace (Sepinwall 2014, p. 8). Television has indeed demonstrated several advantages over cinema, gradually solidifying its significance in certain contexts. It has proven adept at narrating extensive stories, allowing characters to evolve over extended periods, and fostering a deeper intimacy by entering viewers' homes rather than necessitating their departure (Sepinwall 2014, p. 36).

Television series, with their accrued complexity over time, have emerged as the culturally dominant form of storytelling. This shift is attributable to two primary factors: elaborate narrative structures and characters, and simultaneous global distribution across platforms, reaching vast audiences and enabling tens of millions worldwide to watch them on release day. The simultaneous presence of these two conditions—one relating to narrative structure and the other to distribution—has, in my view, contributed to the progressive cultural ascendancy of TV series over films and other storytelling forms (Calabrese and Grignaffini 2020, p. 78).

Television series and their transmedia frameworks have become intricate: they employ narratives enriched with moral complexities, often blending diverse narrative genres, and feature characters who evolve continuously and resist easy categorization. Additionally, these narratives unfold across multiple levels through extended temporal arcs, actively involving viewers and often employing cinematographic techniques in photography and editing.

Contemporary TV series demonstrate their complexity through their narrative structures, characterized by deep integration of genres and widespread intertextuality. This results in a visual language marked by intricate camera movements, long takes, cross-cutting, handheld camera work, special effects, and unique visual and auditory techniques (Grasso 2007, p. 7).

Characters in these modern serialized narratives also undergo significant transformations, acquiring more intricate psychologies often portrayed with shades of light and darkness. Berardelli's typological classification—further refined by Mallamaci—categorizes these characters as anti-heroes: those who subvert ("I refuse, hence I oppose"), are frustrated ("I desire, yet I cannot"), inept ("I wish, but I fail"), positive anti-heroes ("I can't (as I'd be a villain), but I must (be a hero)"), accidental ("I don't wish to, but I'm reluctantly involved (thus I must)"), and by denial ("I am what I am") (Bernardelli 2016, pp. 10–12; Mallamaci 2018, p. 83).

As a result of these character developments, audience engagement with these figures evolves: viewers must maintain continuous attention and emotional investment, fostering a sense of intimate familiarity with characters, believing they can predict their emotions and actions. However, in reality, this should never fully occur. Screenwriters, after creating a captivating "web" of interests that ensnares the audience, must carefully distribute information and anticipate viewer reactions as much as possible (Mallamaci 2018, p. 76).

Thus, to bridge the gap between audience and characters and integrate the latter into viewers' daily lives, the serialization process has become pivotal (Cardini 2004, pp. 68–69).

According to Sepinwall, the apex of this revolution was reached with *The Sopranos* and *The Wire*, which, due to their complexity and depth, redefined perceptions of TV series. Referring to *The Wire*, he contends that David Simon and co-author Ed Burns were not simply crafting a TV show; they were constructing a televised novel that, once aired, could aspire to be the great American novel, rivaling printed literature in significance (Sepinwall 2014, p. 113).

A complex television series, in addition to those already highlighted, must embody specific characteristics: it must be original, attempting new narrative or linguistic paths; have a self-aware narrative construction; possess textual complexity enriched with meta-textual and self-referential references; engage an active audience, not mere spectators but participants actively involved in creating the series' world through various means (Maio 2009, p. 16).

Furthermore, as Mittell argues, compared to the last thirty years when the distinction between episodic series (self-contained episodes) and serials (continuing storylines) was clear, today these distinctions blur (Mittell 2004, p. 14) due to the diffusion of a complex narrative seriality model. In this context, storytelling assumes that a serial television program creates a lasting narrative world, populated by a coherent group of characters experiencing a chain of events over a certain period (Mittell 2004, p. 24).

Indeed, it can be affirmed that only certain narrative forms can match television series in terms of narrative capacity and breadth (Mittell 2004, p. 478). Seriality, in its length and complexity, becomes the cornerstone of narration, where each individual episode, while analyzable on its own, fits into the continuity of a sequence. The narrative itself thus potentially becomes an infinite and expansive storytelling, capable of iterating the same narrative patterns over prolonged periods—months, more often years, and in some cases even decades.

The term transmedia storytelling denotes a practice that significantly expands the scope of a television series into a range of other media (Mittell 2004, p. 479).

In essence, transmedia storytelling is a story told across multiple media, where each text makes a distinct and significant contribution to the overall narrative complex. In the ideal model of transmedia storytelling, each medium involved is utilized for what it does best, allowing a story to be told through a film and subsequently extended through television, books, and comics. Each access point to the franchise must stand alone so that viewing the film is not a prerequisite for playing the game or vice versa (Jenkins 2006, pp. 84–85). Consequently, each transmedia product becomes a gateway to the entirety of the narrative complexity, enhancing engagement breadth, especially considering that different media involve various types of audiences.

The phenomenon of serialization and subsequent expansion, discussed from a theoretical standpoint, predates the contemporary and digital eras, tracing its origins back to ancient times. Of particular interest is a study by Donatella Capaldi and Giovanni Ragone on the archetypes of seriality in literary contexts (Capaldi and Ragone 2017, pp. 44–61). They argue that genres depend on seriality. Media aimed at stability use semiotic systems to organize perception and experience within specific realms of imagination through

repetitive structures. Repetition, or the series that repeats the same patterns, is crucial for mediamorphosis, ensuring movements of spatial extension and facilitating a stable codification over time. Literature stands as the oldest and most continuous artificial technology medium in the history of culture (Capaldi and Ragone 2017, pp. 44–45).

A comprehensive study of the archaeology of seriality and its associated concept of expansion necessitates a broad historical approach. It commences with works such as Don Quixote, seen as a remediation of serial structures across all existing narrative genres (Capaldi and Ragone 2017, p. 45), and focuses on the Baroque era, which witnessed the definitive 'explosion' of seriality in figurative, architectural, and literary fields (Capaldi and Ragone 2017, p. 47). Various genres characterized by prominent levels of repetition and seriality include ancient epics, Hellenistic novels, and medieval romances, marked by intra-textual and inter-textual standardization (Capaldi and Ragone 2017, p. 48).

While expansion and seriality are ancient phenomena, modernity has seen the proliferation of transmedia techniques, allowing for expansions that follow a different logic. This is due to the fact that in today's saturated schedules, experimenting with new transmedia strategies is a way to stand out and retain viewers; in past decades, programs that employed transmedia strategies were exceptions, whereas today, it is more exceptional for a high-profile series not to use them (Mittell 2004, p. 480). Thus, when a transmedia paratext is created, it becomes part of a complex intertextual network.

According to Jenkins, transmedia storytelling "represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins 2011).

Therefore, transmedia products consistently serve to enhance the primary narrative experience, particularly that of television series, with their stories involving complex characters and settings.

4. An Example of Transmedia Character

Considering what has been stated theoretically so far, it is now possible to briefly focus on an example of a complex character, namely Richard Castle.

There are indeed transmedia characters who transition from being fictional characters in a complex television series to becoming real-life mystery authors, thus breaking down the barrier between author and character (Medaglia 2020, pp. 269–349). These characters expand through transmedia extension, maintaining their serial nature on one hand, while giving rise to a new literary author who utilizes narrative space.

In this sense, these are paratextual extensions, where paratexts can be identified as a modification of the hypertext, understood by Genette as any text derived from a previous text through a simple or indirect transformation, whereby hypertextuality is most often declared through a paratextual clue (Genette 1997, pp. 10–11), along with a relative and consequent transformation of genres. In *Seuils*, Genette entirely focuses his attention on paratextual elements, offering a more comprehensive definition than he had in *Palimpsests*. In this sense, it is clarified that the text very rarely appears in its 'naked' form, that is, without being completed by a certain number of verbal or non-verbal products (Genette 1989, p. 3). The epitext, which Genette dedicates less space to than the peritext, is free from physical constraints and belongs to a virtually unlimited social space (Genette 1989, p. 337), so that it can be anywhere outside the original text, as long as it is accessible to the audience of a medium. In fact, through his reasoning on thresholds, Genette glimpses what might have happened to the epitextual apparatus, without being able to fully describe the changes that would soon emerge. However, Genette understands how the influence of new media puts pressure on the paratext and its potential, altering it in ways that are

still not fully analyzable from a theoretical perspective. Mittell, in a way, seems to rework paratextuality in light of the media revolution. While not claiming that everything is paratext, Mittell certainly seems to include several paratextual types in his investigation, strongly linked to the advent of new media (Mittell 2017, pp. 487–88). In the past, television products employing transmedia strategies were, in some ways, an exception, whereas today, it is exceptional when a television series of a certain complexity does not make use of them (Mittell 2017, p. 480). As a result, it has now become senseless to consider texts separately from their paratexts (Mittell 2017, pp. 480–81), since once a product circulates, it immediately becomes part of a complex intertextual network (Gray 2010, pp. 208–11). In this sense, the series *Castle* can serve as a valid example of a transmedia character, with complex paratextual derivations (Sezen 2023, pp. 293–294).

Castle is an American television series created by A.W. Marlowe, which first aired on FOX on 16 October 2009, and concluded on 16 May 2016 after eight seasons comprising 173 episodes. Set in New York, the series follows the adventures of Richard Castle (portrayed by actor Nathan Fillion), a famous mystery novelist who assists in investigations at the New York City Police Department's 12th Precinct. He collaborates closely with Detective Kate Beckett (played by actress Stana Katic) of the Homicide Squad, drawing inspiration for his novels and their female protagonist, Nikki Heat, from her and her investigations.

What is particularly interesting is that the nine novels published by the character Richard Castle during the series featuring Nikki Heat were later written and published in the real world as well: this is a case where a pseudobiblium becomes reality. Indeed, between 2009 and 2019, they were released one after another: *Heat Wave* (2009)[1], *Naked Heat* (2010), *Heat Rises* (2011), *Frozen Heat* (2012), *Deadly Heat* (2013), *Raging Heat* (2014), *Driving Heat* (2015), *High Heat* (2016), *Heat Storm* (2017), and *Crashing Heat* (2019)[2]. In fact, in addition to these novels, others have appeared in reality belonging to different series, such as the one related to Derrick Storm—initially the main character of author Castle, whom he had himself killed off. It was precisely due to this reason that the author went through a creative crisis before meeting his new muse Beckett and creating the series featuring Nikki Heat. In reality, three novels featuring Derrick Storm were published in 2012: *A Brewing Storm*, *A Raging Storm* and *A Bloody Storm*[3]. Moreover, the *Castle* TV series also expanded its narrative universe through the release of comic books, further exemplifying its transmedia storytelling approach. In 2014, *Castle: A Calm Before Storm*, a comic book series published by *Marvel Comics*, was launched. This comic book series continues the adventures of Richard Castle, the bestselling mystery novelist portrayed by Nathan Fillion on the TV show, offering fans a new way to engage with the character and the world of *Castle* beyond the television screen.

The comic books function as a supplementary narrative to the TV series, introducing new cases and plotlines that align with the show's tone and character dynamics. *Castle: A Calm Before Storm* follows Castle and Beckett as they investigate a complex case, bringing them into high-stakes situations. Although it does not directly follow the events of the TV series, the comic maintains the same atmosphere, character relationships, and narrative style, with Castle often acting as the narrator, reflecting his worldview and perspective.

These comics are part of a broader transmedia strategy, using various media formats to expand the *Castle* universe and enhance the fan experience. Just like the novels written by Castle's character within the show, the comics contribute to a deeper exploration of the show's characters and themes. They offer fans an opportunity to engage with the story in new ways and continue their connection with the *Castle* narrative. As a result, these comic books play an essential role in solidifying the franchise as a transmedia experience that extends beyond television, allowing for a richer and more immersive interaction with the material (Straw 2014; Cogdill 2017b).

Returning to the book series, the author of these mystery novels—all bestsellers, moreover—is none other than Richard Castle himself: as Sezen states, "attributed to fictional authors and sharing the same covers with their imaginary counterparts, these diegetic extensions were aiming to provide the literary experiences promised on-screen. In other words, they were interpretations of imaginary books, offering the experience of mimetic textual nostalgia" (Sezen 2023, p. 293). In this context, *Heat Wave* serves as a condensed retelling of many episodes from the previous season, framed within a new, overarching case. The narrative is further enriched with character development, particularly emphasizing the internal thoughts and emotions of the main characters (Wells-Lassagne 2017).

On the covers (which are identical to those seen on the TV show, before the novels were actually published), his name prominently appears. Additionally, on the back cover of the book, there is a photo of the actor who portrays Richard Castle in the TV series. Furthermore, if you look at the flap or back flap of the book, you will find his biography—that of the character Richard Castle, of course: "Richard Castle is the author of numerous bestsellers, including the critically acclaimed Derrick Storm series. His first novel, *In a Hail of Bullets*, published while he was still in college, received the Nom DePlume Society's prestigious Tom Straw Award for Mystery Literature. Castle currently lives in Manhattan with his daughter and mother, both of whom infuse in his life with humor and inspiration" (Castle 2012).

Castle has a first and last name, family ties, a face—that of the actor—and a past. Consequently, the character has become so famous that he has also become an author (nowhere does the actual author's name appear) and has taken on the image and face of the actor who portrays him. It matters little that speculations can be made about the real writer of the novels: in fact, Hyperion, the American publishing house of the volumes, confirmed that the novelist behind Richard Castle could be one of the writers who appeared in the TV series. In this regard, in the episode titled *Deep in Death* (first episode, second season), some mystery novelists make an appearance, including Stephen J. Cannell, James Patterson, and Michael Connelly. In another episode, *The Dead Pool* (twenty-first episode, third season), Michael Connelly and Dennis Lehane appear as themselves (but not Stephen J. Cannell, who passed away in 2010). In a brief appearance in the series (second season, episode five), there is also a writer much less known than those just mentioned, namely Tom Straw: precisely the one whose name appears on the title of the award given to Richard Castle for his first novel, mentioned on the back flap of his books. In reality, thanks to an interview published on 27 October 2017, titled *Q&A with Tom Straw, Author of Buzz Killer* on the *Criminal Element* website, it is revealed that the writer of the novels signed by Richard Castle is indeed Tom Straw, who kept the secret for years—until the conclusion of the series—as requested by the publishing house that published the various novels. Tom Straw, the ghostwriter of *Heat Wave*, explained that he was directed not to directly adapt *Castle*, but rather to expand on its central narrative elements and portray the main character's persona as an author. In this sense, he characterizes his novel as "Castle's idealized version of his ride-along experiences from the show" (Cogdill 2017a).

Intriguingly, the acknowledgments section also sheds light on author Castle's narrative approach, drawing parallels with New Zealand mountaineer Edmund Hillary, the first man to conquer Everest in 1953, and his trusted sherpa Tenzing Norgay. Castle compares Hillary to himself and portrays the sherpa as an indispensable figure without whom the novel's creation would not have been possible, yet often overlooked:

> And though Edmund Hillary is widely known as the first man to conquer Everest, he would never have reached the summit without Mr. Norgay. For those of you unfamiliar with that first historic climb, Tenzing Norgay was Sir Edmund Hillary's Sherpa. Whenever I come to the acknowledgments section of a book,

> I often think of Tenzing Norgay, that unsung hero of Hillary's climb [. . .] And finally, to my most loyal and devout Sherpas, Tom and Andrew, thank you for the journey. Now that we've reached the top, in your company it feels as though the stars are within my reach. (Castle 2012, pp. 298–99)

These statements could be interpreted as meta-literary reflections on the identity of author Castle and the ghostwriter who penned the novels. Notably, among the last to be acknowledged are individuals named Tom—alongside Andrew, likely a nod to the series' creator. It is almost as if author Castle implies that without the series creator and the novel's writer, his success would not have been feasible. Simultaneously, this reaffirms his existence in the realm of reality. This interplay between different planes—reality and fiction—is artfully explored through textual strategies that elevate Castle from a mere TV character to a versatile literary figure in contemporary storytelling.

Moreover, the character's transition into an author is so convincingly "real" that he dedicates his debut book in the Heat Wave series to Kate Beckett ("To the extraordinary KB and all my friends of the 12th" (Castle 2012)), his investigative partner. He maintains a personal website until 2020 (http://www.richardcastle.net/ (accessed on 1 December 2020)) where he engages with fans, posts messages, and updates. Castle even adopts a pseudonym, Richard Edgar Castle, an homage to the renowned Edgar Allan Poe, underscoring his literary persona.

In its transmedia transition, Castle evolves from a fictional character in a complex television series into a bestselling author in reality. Before delving into the analysis of the first novel in the Castle series, *Heat Wave* (2009), it is important to focus on those episodes of the television series—particularly two—where the book appears in various capacities. The fifth episode of the second season, titled *When the Bough Breaks*, first aired on 19 October 2009, and portrays Castle dealing with the publication of the first book in the Nikki Heat series, which receives enthusiastic reviews. Below is the opening script excerpt from the episode, where Paula, Castle's agent, announces the editorial success he is achieving:

> 00:15, CASTLE LOFT—MORNING
>
> Paula Haas, Castle's book agent, rings the doorbell. Castle groggily exits his bedroom in a robe. Paula buzzes again insistently.
>
> CASTLE—Yes, Yeah. I'm coming.
>
> [Paula fixes her lipstick. Castle opens the door, and she strides in excitedly, planting a kiss on his stunned face].
>
> PAULA—You are not going to believe this.
>
> CASTLE—Paula . . .
>
> PAULA—You are so not going to believe this.
>
> CASTLE—What are you doing here?
>
> PAULA—I can't even believe it.
>
> CASTLE—Believe what?
>
> PAULA—I can't tell you.
>
> CASTLE—I'm still asleep, aren't I? I'm dreaming. I'm having a dream where my book agent has shown up at my house at 7 a.m. to not tell me something.
>
> PAULA—Okay. It's not official yet, but. . .you, my dear, are at the top of their list. And I can't give you any more details than that.
>
> CASTLE—You want some coffee? I'd love to sit down and not discuss this further.
>
> PAULA—I will tell you this. It's a major relaunch of a major franchise. A three-book deal. And they want you.

CASTLE—Heat Wave comes out in less than a week. The book party, which you arranged, is Monday night. I'm trying to launch my own character, why would I want to get involved with somebody else's?

PAULA—What if I told you the character in question is a certain British secret agent?

CASTLE—You mean it's gonna be . . .

PAULA—Shh! Don't say it. You'll jinx it.

CASTLE—He's the reason I became a writer[4].

And in the episode, there is also an event for the book launch, attended by Castle along with his family and the detectives from the Twelfth Precinct:

23:50, INT. HEAT WAVE BOOK LAUNCH PARTY—NIGHT

Castle enters the part with Alexis and Martha on each arm. Photographers snap their photos on their way in. Ryan and Esposito hang out at the bar drinking beer and watching hotties stride past.

ESPOSITO—So this is how the other half lives.

[Castle signs book and women's chests.]

WOMAN—Hi. Could you sign it?

[Alexis sits with Martha.]

ALEXIS—Isn't this great? You're acting again, I'm making straight A's and Dad finished writing another book.

MARTHA—Cherish the moment, kiddo. If there's one thing I've learned in life, nothing ever lasts.

MAN—Hey! It's Nikki Heat!

[Beckett enters in a tight cocktail dress. The photographers swarm her on the way in. Castle catches sight of her. Montgomery greets her as she enters].

The episode wraps up with Castle being offered the opportunity to continue authoring more books in the Nikki Heat series. Initially, he had been tempted with the chance to write about a famous British secret agent—widely believed to be James Bond—but he declined, preferring to stay close to his partner, both in their professional collaboration and, as the series developed, in their romantic relationship with Kate Beckett:

40:15, INT. UPSCALE APARTMENT BUILDING, LOBBY—NIGHT

Castle and Beckett descend the stairs.

BECKETT—Thank you, Castle. I, uh, I never would have been able to solve this case without your help.

[Castle looks stunned].

BECKETT (cont'd)—Well, uh. . . good luck on your new book. I know that you'll do it proud.

CASTLE—Thanks.

[They're both at a loss for words. Castle holds out his hand and Beckett shakes it].

CASTLE (cont'd)—You take care of yourself. And. . .

[Castle's cell rings].

CASTLE (cont'd)—My agent.

[Beckett's cell rings].

CASTLE (cont'd)—Oh.

[Castle's points to her phone].

BECKETT—It's the, uh, it's the station. I-- You know, you better get that.

CASTLE—Yeah.

BECKETT (on cell)—Beckett.

CASTLE (on cell)—Hey, Paula. Ah! Really? (to Beckett) First day Heat Wave sales, through the roof.

BECKETT—Oh! I'm on hold for Captain Montgomery.

CASTLE—Reviews are raves.

BECKETT—Yes! (on cell) Yes, Captain.

CASTLE (on cell)—Would I be interested in doing three more Nikki Heats?

BECKETT (on cell)—Yes, I am aware that the mayor is facing a tough reelection this year.

CASTLE (on cell)—I'm-- I'm sorry. How much?

BECKETT (on cell)—No, I-- I would love to help the department out in whatever way I could.

CASTLE (on cell)—No, no. Forget the other offer. For that kind of money, I'll do a dozen Nikki Heats.

BECKETT (on cell)—He wants me to what?

CASTLE (on cell)—Oh, well that was kind of a one-time-only situation with her and me.

BECKETT (on cell)—Three books? That would take forever.

CASTLE (on cell)—You already spoke to the mayor?

BECKETT—I'm gonna kill you. (on cell) No, no, no, no, sir, I wasn't talking to you. I, uh . . .

CASTLE—Okay.

BECKETT—No need to thank me, sir, I am happy to help His Honor out in any way I can.

As readily apparent, the episode—aside from the backdrop of an unidentified woman's murder—entirely revolves around Richard Castle's role as a writer and his debut novel in the Nikki Heat series, which has been published in reality.

This complex television series, crafted post the television revolution discussed in the more theoretical section of this article, tightly intertwines the various media that comprise it and further amplifies Richard Castle's evolution from a character in a series to a real-world author. Notably, the character-author is the sole name featured in the work, and as previously mentioned, the actual writer behind the novels was mandated to maintain complete silence until the series' conclusion. Richard Castle transcends the role for which he was originally conceived and emerges as a fixture in contemporary literary reality, celebrated as the author of numerous bestsellers.

In addition to this episode, for a more explicit exploration of the connections within Castle's transmedia universe, the eleventh episode of the third season is particularly intriguing. Titled "Nikki Heat", mirroring the name of the novel's protagonist, it aired on 3 January 2011. Here, Castle's novel "Heat Wave" is adapted into a film, with the actress portraying Kate Beckett—Natalie Rhodes—joining the detective during an investigation to better grasp the character's essence:

ESPOSITO—Holy smoke. That's Natalie Rhodes.

BECKETT—Sure is. Apparently, she is playing Nikki Heat.

ESPOSITO—What? That's awesome.

CASTLE—Yeah, it's awesome. What is she doing here?

BECKETT—She called and asked if she could shadow me for a little while. She wanted to get an authentic feel for what it's like to be Nikki by following the person who inspired Nikki.

CASTLE—And you said yes?

BECKETT—Sure.

NATALIE RHODES—Detective Beckett? My god, you are exactly what I imagined Nikki Heat would look like.

BECKETT—Natalie, this is Richard Castle, and this is Detective Javier Esposito[5].

The episode not only showcases how Castle's literary world is directly integrated into the TV narrative, but also underscores the fluidity of the boundaries between the two media. Natalie Rhodes' immersion in the role emphasizes the act of transformation from the written page to a visual portrayal, further exploring the fluid relationship between character and narrative that transcends different storytelling formats. Additionally, the episode explores the influence of Castle's novels on the dynamics between the characters, particularly the way that Rhodes' interpretation of Beckett influences the real Beckett's relationship with Castle.

By weaving the adaptation of *Heat Wave* into the episode's plot, *Castle* engages in a self-referential commentary on the transmedia potential of its universe. This episode highlights the metatextual dimension of the series, where the book series becomes an integral part of the show's own narrative, blurring the lines between fiction and reality within the show's universe. The transference from page to screen, both within the fictional world of the show and in the context of *Castle* as a transmedia phenomenon, allows the audience to experience the interconnectedness of the series' media extensions, thus expanding the narrative's scope and enriching the fan experience.

The lines between realities at the fiction level blur further: there is the realm of the television series featuring Castle and Beckett, seamlessly intertwined with the real world through the publication of the novel *Heat Wave*. The protagonists mirror Castle and Kate entirely—both in physical and character traits, as well as in the evolving relationship between them. Added to this is another layer of transmedia blending, where an actress, ostensibly from the real world, shadows Beckett—a fictional character—with the aim of better portraying her in a film. This film, however, does not star the actress but rather the character inspired by her, Nikki Heat.

Thus, there is a movement from the television series into reality, which then reverses its course, veering into yet another medium—cinema—before reconnecting with the real world. Throughout this narrative complexity, the characters stand as the central axis of this storytelling mechanism, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction through storytelling and the interconnection of various media.

Also noteworthy is the twenty-second episode of the third season titled *To Love and Die in L.A.*, which aired on 2 May 2011. Here, against Captain Montgomery's wishes, Beckett travels from New York to Los Angeles with Castle to investigate the murder of her mentor, Mike Royce. During their visit, they tour Zenith Studios and meet the actors cast as Detectives Raley and Ochoa in the cinematic adaptation of Heat Wave. This episode further intertwines and strengthens the narrative disruptions, akin to the previous one featuring Natalie Rhodes.

Episodes linking the book to the series and discussing Nikki Heat as an inspiration—besides those more prominently focused on the first volume *Heat Wave*—are numerous. Notable among these are the ninth of the first season, *Little Girl Lost*;

the first, *Deep in Death*; the twelfth, *A Rose for Everafter*; the fourteenth, *The Third Man*; the seventeenth, *Tick, Tick, Tick. . .*; and the eighteenth, *Boom!*, all from the second season; and the twenty-first of the fourth season, *Headhunters*, among many others.

The similarities between the television series and the novels are manifold, starting with the characters themselves. Their names might change, but their characteristics, roles, and relationships remain consistent. Nikki Heat is Detective Kate Beckett, Jameson Jamie Rook is Richard Rick Castle, Captain Montrose is Captain Roy Montgomery, Detective Raley is Detective Kevin Ryan, Detective Ochoa is Detective Javier Esposito, Medical Examiner Lauren Parry is Medical Examiner Lanie Parish, and Margaret Rook, Jameson's mother, is Martha Rogers, Castle's mother. What is particularly unique is the interconnection of their surnames: both Rook and Castle refer to the same chess piece, the rook. The dynamics between the protagonists are also identical: Beckett, like Nikki Heat, is a detective with the NYPD who reluctantly teams up with a writer; in her case, it is Richard Castle, a bestselling mystery author, while for Nikki Heat, it is Jameson Rook, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. Furthermore, a love story unfolds between Beckett and Castle over the seasons, mirroring Nikki and Jameson; Kate and Lanie share a deep friendship and female solidarity in the series, akin to Nikki and Lauren in the novels; finally, the relationship between Ryan and Esposito mirrors that of Raley and Ochoa.

The plot of *Heat Wave*—titled after the heatwave enveloping New York during the events—remains straightforward. The novel is set in New York City, much like the series, opening with the death of a real estate tycoon who falls from a skyscraper. Whether it is a suicide or murder is in question, prompting Nikki Heat—partnered with Jameson Rook for about a month—to investigate. As they delve into the initial mysterious death, a series of other murders unfold, making the case intricate if not impossible to solve. Alongside the investigation, the novel devotes significant attention to the growing attraction between the two leads, culminating in an enthusiastic night together (Castle 2012, pp. 154–55). The narrative unfolds primarily through dialogue, interspersed with reflections and thoughts from the protagonist Nikki, who contemplates her current desires against the backdrop of past struggles: "She wondered if without realizing it she was getting too tough to be happy. She knew she did less laughing and more judging" (Castle 2012, p. 107).

With a name, face, past, and most importantly, through writing, the character Castle emerges as a fully-fledged author in the contemporary literary landscape. Within these transmedia paratexts, there is a manifestation of diegetic expansion—where an object originally from the narrative world transcends into a character turned author in the real world.

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Notes

1 The novel debuted at twenty-sixth place on "The New York Times Best Seller list" and subsequently reached the top ten, occupying sixth place.

2 In addition to these novels, there is also a series of graphic novels, as well as a video game, *Castle—Never Judge a Book by Its Cover*, in which Castle and Beckett investigate to stop a serial killer.

3 In this case as well, the public success was so wide that in August 2014, ABC had announced the production of a television series on Derrick Storm, which, however, never came to fruition.

4 The original scripts of the series are available on various websites; this one in particular, like those that follow, is taken from: https://scriptline.livejournal.com/23878.html (accessed on 27 February 2025).

[5] See https://scriptline.livejournal.com/35362.html (accessed on 27 February 2025).

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