

“Day of Wrath” in the Mirror of Hybrid Fantasy: Typological Similarities of *A Song of Ice and Fire* by G. R. R. Martin and *Hard to Be a God* By the Strugatsky Brothers — A Secondary Publication

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Abstract: The article presents a comparative and typological study of *A Song of Ice and Fire* by G. Martin and *Hard to Be a God* by the Strugatsky brothers. These works are analyzed together with their screen versions. The purpose of the study is to reveal the typological (genre, plot, ideological, philosophical, and narrative) similarities of both works. The conducted research is relevant as the comparative and typological approaches help to understand the ideological and philosophical messages related to the role of an individual in history and the temptations for heroes endowed with supernatural power. This analysis is performed based on a combination of typological and comparative approaches: the comparative approach helps reveal deep similarities between these two works, and the typological approach helps comprehend their role in a wide cultural context. The conclusion is made that *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be a God* have several typologically close features. They belong to the genre of hybrid fantasy, they do not have a direct assessment of events, and there is no “all-competent” author’s point of view. Nevertheless, there is a metaphor of “an involved observer” who, nonetheless, is also limited in his possession of information. Both works represent a common psychological motivation of the heroes, which is based on a “mechanical” response to evil with more violent evil; a shift from the Christian tradition, atheistic and agnostic philosophizing are also represented in both works as well as a broken denouement and unresolved lines associated with the fate of the main characters. It should be noted that the works studied here belong to different historical and cultural epochs but they illustrate the development of typologically similar trends in literature and cinema, which are as follows: the strengthening of a pessimistic view of man and history, weakening of the spiritual and moral component, lack of assessment of the heroes’ actions, breakage (or inevitable absence) of denouement. The works of these authors are immensely popular because they satisfy the unspoken “social order,” and in some cases, they form it.

Keywords: Hybrid fantasy; *Game of Thrones*; *Hard to Be a God*; Historicism; Christian

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1. Introduction

G.R. R. Martin's series of novels *A Song of Ice and Fire* has enjoyed considerable popularity around the world thanks to the Game of Thrones television series. In Russian fantasy literature, there is a typologically similar phenomenon where *Hard to Be a God* by A. and B. Strugatsky was the most popular science fiction work among Soviet readers in the 60s ^[1], and it also had two screen adaptations (in 1989 and 2013). Both works reveal the author's understanding of the Middle Ages fantastically. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the typological (genre, plot, genre, plot, ideological-philosophical, and narrative) similarities of both works.

2. Objectives of the study

- (1) To reveal the hybrid genre nature of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be a God*.
- (2) To consider the image of the "brutal Middle Ages" in connection with the metaphors of the arena and the involved observer common to both works.
- (3) To comprehend the psychological motivation of the heroes' deeds based on the principle of counteracting violence with even greater violence and the concept of self-deification;
- (4) To study the role of the metaphor of "mechanism" in constructing the secondary reality of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be a God*.
- (5) To study the narrative strategies of A. and B. Strugatsky and G.R.R. Martin, leading to the creation of works with cut-off endings.

A Song of Ice and Fire and *Hard to Be a God* are usually considered in conjunction with their screen adaptations, and both works have repeatedly been the subject of literary and philosophical studies. Nevertheless, there have been no works related to the comparative-typological analysis of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be a God*, which, although belonging to different epochs and cultural environments, have much in common. Consideration of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be a God* in a comparative manner is the reason for the novelty of this paper. The relevance of such a study lies in the fact that the comparative-typological approach allows for a deeper assessment of the inherent ideological-philosophical messages in these works, related to the role of personality in history and the temptations of heroes endowed with supernatural powers.

3. Methodology

The methodology of the study involves a combination of comparative and typological approaches. In understanding the essence of these methods, we rely on the principles indicated by M. Khrapchenko: "The comparative-historical approach focuses on understanding the unique characteristics, similarities, and connections of individual literary phenomena. On the other hand, the typological study goes beyond these specifics and aims to discover the underlying principles that reveal a shared literary and aesthetic commonality. It seeks to identify a sense of belonging to a particular literary and aesthetic community, categorizing literary phenomena into types or genres. This affiliation can be identified even when literary facts are not directly connected, emphasizing the broader principles that unite them within a certain literary and aesthetic framework" ^[2]. The comparative approach helps to identify the underlying similarities of the works under study, and the typological approach helps to conceptualize their role in a broad cultural context.

4. The role of the science fiction component in *A Song of Ice and Fire* by G.R.R. Martin and *Hard to Be a God* by A. and B. Strugatsky.

Although *Hard to Be a God* is considered a science fiction and fantasy novel in publishing practices, while *A Song of Ice and Fire* is shelved as fantasy, researchers have noted the dominant presence of historical novel features in both cases^[3,4]. The storyline of the medieval world in *Hard to Be a God*, related to intrigue and coup d'état, does not contain overtly fantastic elements. In fact, if it were not for the line of Rumata (Anton), it would fit quite well into a standard historical novel. In the world created by Martin, the fantastical components related to the use of magic and magical creatures (the Other, dragons, shadows, children of the forest, etc.), appear in a very limited form, unlike in classical fantasy (*The Lord of the Rings* by J. K. Rowling, *The Wheel of Time* by R. Jordan, etc.), so in a number of works included in the series of *A Song of Ice and Fire* (*A Feast for Crows*, the stories of Duncan the High of Duncan the Tall), fantasy is virtually absent, and the narrative, thus, into a (pseudo) historical novel.

The limited function of the fantastical element in both *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* suggests a genre ambiguity in both works. Specifically, in the context of science fiction literature where miracles are often explained rationally, *Hard to Be a God* is considered not to fit within the science fiction genre. This judgment is based on the absence of detailed descriptions of future Earth technology, a lack of explanation for transmitting information from TV transmitters back to Earth, and unanswered questions about the fuel source for helicopters on a medieval planet. Despite the presence of the science fiction idea of progression (Earthlings, representatives of a technologically, technically, and morally advanced civilization that operates undercover on a “backward” planet, trying to accelerate its development in an imperceptible way), formally, it is a fantasy where miracles are included in the fabric of the narrative and do not require scientific explanations. It is likely that fantasy is also present in *Hard to Be a God* due to the influence of a broad cultural context: the 1950s and 1960s are associated with the formation of this genre in Western literature.

On the contrary, in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the genre model of science fiction appears under the mask of fantasy. Magic in Martin's world works according to some kind of immanent laws, similar to the laws of nature. Characters such as Melisandre and the priest Thoros use magic at their own risk without the slightest idea of whether or not it will work or what the mechanisms of its effects are. At the same time, from the context of the cycle as a whole, it becomes clear that the “awakening” of magic is related to the change of the planet's axis of rotation and the imbalance of mythologized poles. In Martin's universe, these elements replace the traditional fantasy concept of a simple dichotomy between Good and Evil, introducing a more complex and nuanced moral landscape. In addition, elements of science fiction in *A Song of Ice and Fire* are tied to one of the seemingly fantasy characters in the saga — Bran. Through his transformation into the Three-Eyed Raven, Bran encounters a non-linear chronotope, allowing him to influence the present by projecting his consciousness back in time. An example of this is seen in the plot involving Bran's impact on Hodor's mind, famously known as “Hold the door.” This utilization of time travel is a characteristic of science fiction, drawing parallels with other works such as Ray Bradbury's novella *A Sound of Thunder* and Martin's own science fiction story, *Under Siege*. In *Under Siege*, the protagonist also possesses the ability to “transmigrate” his consciousness into the bodies of individuals from the past, further emphasizing the incorporation of science fiction elements into the narrative. Bran, at the end of the show, turns out to be a kind of living machine, the keeper of Westeros' memories. The plot of creating repositories Martin is also borrowed from science fiction (the idea of repositories of knowledge in the novel by W. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*). The influence of science fiction is evident in the depiction of “unclean forces” in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Instead of typical fantasy creatures like orcs and trolls, Martin introduces the Others, reminiscent of the familiar concept of zombies from science fiction. This blend of genres

characterizes Martin's saga as science fiction set in a fantasy world.

It should be noted that the authors of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be God* themselves were not adherents of genre purity. Strugatsky appealed to the genre of fairy tales (*Tale of the Troika*), and Martin stated that “the difference between science fiction, fantasy, and horror is rather superficial”^[5]. It is also known that when Martin began to write *A Song of Ice and Fire* he sent requests to his editor for three entirely distinct books — a science fiction work, a horror piece, and a fantasy trilogy. However, he was advised to pursue the fantasy trilogy as it was deemed to be more marketable and easier to sell^[6]. In fact, in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Martin operates within three genres simultaneously. Given that he initially entered the realm of American literature as a science fiction writer, this aspect in *A Song of Ice and Fire* serves as a “memory of the genre,” as described by M. M. Bakhtin. It's worth mentioning that the theme of “alien intervention,” developed by the Strugatskys, is also present in Martin's work *Tuf Voyaging* (1986). The recognition of the protagonist actively intervening in the fates of other worlds echoes with the title of Strugatsky's novel *Hard to be a God*: “The profession of God is even more difficult than that of an ecologist, although I must say that when I took it on, I knew it was risky”^[7].

Thus, in both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to be a God*, we are dealing with hybrid genre forms: the external framework of the historical novel is layered with a fantastical matrix – a story about life on another planet. At the same time, the genre model of fiction itself is also hybrid: in the case of *Hard to be a God*, it is fantasy in a science fiction setting; and in the case of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it is science fiction in a fantasy setting. The fantastical elements contribute to the hero's powers and abilities: it could be helicopters, futuristic weaponry, and unknown fighting skills (*Hard to be a God*); or dragons and magic spells (*A Song of Ice and Fire*). The intervention magic in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is like the Earthlings and their technology in *Hard to be a God*. In both cases, this intervention is devastating to mere mortals, and it confronts the protagonist with a significant moral decision: how to wield (or, perhaps more crucially, refrain from using) their extraordinary abilities in a medieval and antagonistic environment. The peculiarities of the environment hostile to the hero and the ways of creating the image of the “brutal Middle Ages” in dialog with contemporary realities will be discussed below.

5. The “brutal Middle Ages” and the metaphor of the involved observer

In Martin's hybrid horror *Sandkings*, written in 1979, one can find an extended metaphor for the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series: a cruel master organizes fights between the inhabitants of the sandcastles, little alien xenomorphs, endowed with the rudiments of reason. Raised in an atmosphere of violence, the creatures escape from their dungeon, grow up, and destroy their master. *A Song of Ice and Fire* was also influenced by the atmosphere of Martin's first novel, *Dying of the Light*, wherein a medieval restoration unfolds against the harsh backdrop of life on a desert planet. This influence is further evident in the short story “The Way of Cross and Dragon,” portraying a revival of the Middle Ages in the distant future through the lens of a cosmic inquisition. Martin's early works have significantly shaped the depiction of the “brutal Middle Ages” within *A Song of Ice and Fire*, portraying it as an arena where powerful lords engage in relentless struggles for control over the Iron Throne. Martin distinguishes his characters with shades of moral complexity, avoiding the traditional dichotomy of “Good vs. Evil” common in “high fantasy.” Instead, he shifts the metaphysical conflict from a simplistic battle of good and evil to a clash between the natural philosophical poles of Ice and Fire, elevated to the status of mythologemes. The unyielding conflicts among morally ambiguous characters form the foundation of the “social” conflict in the narrative. Violence becomes the primary mode of interaction in this complex web of relationships, heightening the naturalism of the depicted events.

The image of the Middle Ages in *Hard to Be a God* is conditioned by the traditions of medieval novels, and the intensification of the gloomy atmosphere serves Strugatsky's general purpose: revealing a repulsive and unjust world where a hero possessing superpowers is compelled to withhold them due to the Earth scientists' imperative for a non-violent experiment. The greater the prevalence of violence in the hero's environment, the more poignant his predicament becomes. Despite having the capability to alter the course of history in an era stuck in the perpetual Middle Ages, the hero hesitates to use violence in resisting evil, grappling with the moral dilemma of resorting to force.

A Song of Ice and Fire and *Hard to Be a God* show a typological similarity, dictated by their common archetype of the historical novel with classical exposition. In the structure of both works, there is a weak king and a strong "gray cardinal," who destroys the king and takes his place (such are the pairs of Pietz the Sixth – Don Reba in *Hard to Be a God* and Robert Baratheon – Queen Cersei in *A Song of Ice and Fire*); the Holy Order in *Hard to Be a God* and The Sparrows movement in *Song of Ice and Fire* are equally a threat to "noble" lords and dons; the Dothraki in *A Song of Ice and Fire* correspond to the "hordes of copper-skinned barbarians" in *Hard to Be a God*; the "night king" of the Vaga Wheel corresponds to the image of the King-Beyond-the-Wall, Mance Rayder; the rebellious Arata the Beautiful corresponds to Beric Dondarrion with his brotherhood without banners. Even the function of the church in both works is quite similar: the official church lacks moral or mystical authority. The list of these similarities could go on. The knot of intrigue and malice tightens, noble lords perish, and the most hideous forces of society are unleashed – this is the common thread of both works.

At the same time, *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and especially their screen adaptations, enter into a dialog with their contemporary cultural and social environment, adjusting the artistic text in their own way to the desires of the public, and sometimes even shaping them, responding to the "social order" of the era ^[8]. In Strugatsky's novel, scenes of violence are portrayed in a subdued manner, avoiding deliberate naturalization. The emphasis is on the characters' attitudes towards violence, as seen in Don Rumata's reflection: "Do you know how the burning corpses on the poles smelled? Have you ever seen a naked woman with her stomach ripped open, lying in the street dust? Have you ever seen cities in which people are silent and only crows scream?" This approach adds depth to the portrayal of violence, highlighting the impact on individuals rather than sensationalizing the acts themselves ^[9]. The main theme of their work is the moral conflict in the protagonist: to be or not to be a killer in a world of killers. All this corresponds to the "sentimental," in the words of director A. German, the spirit of the 1960s ^[8].

The series, based on Martin's series of novels, like the books themselves, reflect the peculiarities of modern world society and the public's need to depict violence in combination with the collapse of global civilization: "In the case of the IP, Martin's books were fortunate in that they met the bar of 'barbarization' from the start, offering a sufficiently high level of violence and the necessary portion of apocalyptic sentiment" ^[12]. Researchers see the IP as a "product of mass culture," which contains "an obvious self-description of Western society" ^[11]. The series "plays with the sense that our own civilization is threatened by its own problems of its own making" ^[11]. The story of the awakening of a deadly, ever-increasing evil in the form of the Others, emerging from the violent displacement of the Children of the Forest, can be seen as a metaphor for contemporary issues. It may symbolize the coronavirus crisis that followed the series, reflecting an unexamined societal structure contributing to catastrophes. *Hard to Be a God* and its screen adaptations represent a case of far more innocent reflexivity. In the novel, the name of the main antagonist, Don Reba, is read as a sound play on Beria's name (in the draft version Don Reba's name was Rebia), resulting in a dialog with the country's recent past. The 1989 screen adaptation is perceived as an "action movie," responding to the demands of the audience of the time, while the 2013 adaptation. the researchers see the reflection of social

stagnation in contemporary Russian reality: “Evil, presented in Herman’s film as ontological is, on the one hand, a response to the processes of globalization, on the other hand, a reflection of the need for a new self-identity” [8].

By indirectly entering into a dialog with the reader/viewer, *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* introduce a the metaphor of the involved observer. In *Hard to Be a God*, it is not just Don Rumata and the other observers who are present, but also the Earth scientists. Through devices embedded in hoops on their heads, these scientists are the architects of the Experiment aiming to hasten the course of history on the planet trapped in perpetual Middle Ages. Don Rumata constantly emphasizes that the scientists must witness the consequences of their actions: “Rumata adjusted the lens over the bridge of his nose. Pretty scenes were observed today on Earth, he thought gloomily” [9].

The constant presence of the observer, involved in the process but not participating in it, emerges as a prominent theme in *Hard to Be a God*. Scholars, equipped with observational devices, witness medieval dramas unfold before them like spectators in a movie. Their invisible presence transforms the tragedies of others’ lives and deaths into a kind of playful performance. The progressors themselves, acting as “undercovers,” dress up in the clothes of another world and play the roles of other people with alien names. The prologue begins with the children imagining themselves as “noble dons” with crossbows and ends with a “Nazi skeleton” that Anton seems to have found. Thus, the game is filled with an ominous foreboding. “The motif of the game (...) extends not only to the whole tale, but also to the whole idea of progressivism: people living in another’s guise, as actors play their role” [10].

The metaphor of play is also fundamental to Martin’s cycle, whose first book *Game of Thrones* brings game associations to the forefront. The game is a metaphor for court intrigue but taken to a metaphysical level, hinting at a higher power playing with the fate of the characters. The objectification of the game principle is evident in the recurring motif of a knight’s tournament and gladiatorial combat in the fighting pits of Giscard. The combatants are killed for real, but the audience perceive their struggles as playful and entertaining actions. In essence, readers of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the viewers of the series are in the position of observers – emotionally involved but not physically involved in it. This involvement is not only due to empathy with the characters in the saga, but also a sense of the urgency of the events: “The brutality of confrontation in Westeros is experienced by many as an existential threat, forcing individuals to navigate a game with imposed rules” [11].

The fantasy element in *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* allows the “fourth wall” to be broken down between the spectators of the fighting tournaments and the fighters (for example, the episode of Daenerys’ dragon appearing in the fighting pit, threatening the lives of both gladiators and spectators) and also between the characters living on a medieval planet and external forces: the gods in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the alien earthlings in *Hard to Be a God*. Given the heightened level of violence in *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Shakespeare’s common phrase “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” can be applied to them in a modified form – “All the world’s a fighting pit, and all the men and women merely killers.”

Thus, the high level of violence in both *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* is dictated by the authors’ desire to create an unsightly image of the “brutal Middle Ages.” In this context, the intervention of a hero endowed with superpowers (Rumata, Daenerys) in the affairs of those involved in the social conflict receives a dual evaluation. On one hand, intervention is seen as necessary to restore justice; on the other hand, it brings about and ultimately destroys moral and humanistic values in an already violent world. The subsequent discussion will delve into the dynamics of countering social evil with “fantastic” violence.

6. “Day of Wrath”: The principle of multiplying evil

It should be stated that the plot of the anger of the hero with superpowers comes to the forefront in the screen adaptations of *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Thus, in A. Hermann’s 2013 film adaptation, Strugatsky’s philosophical question about the possibility of accelerating history was replaced by the theater of violence and absurdity (which earned the movie the characteristic subtitle “The Story of the Arkanar Massacre”). At the end of the final season of IP, it becomes clear that the invasion of the dead from the North, originally envisioned by Martin as “the greatest danger of all,” gives way to the conflict surrounding Daenerys’ return to Westeros.

Hard to Be a God and *A Song of Ice and Fire* find not only similarities in the bloody resolution of the conflict, but also in the psychological motivation behind the choices made by Don Rumata and Daenerys. In the first case, it was the murder of Rumata’s beloved Kira that overflowed the cup of patience of the Earthling. In the second case, a string of deaths, beginning with the murder of family members of Daenerys’ family to the execution of Missandei. Both characters are driven by a thirst for revenge. As D. V. Ponomareva notes with regard to *Hard to Be a God*: “It is significant that the massacre committed by him (Rumata - V. M.) in the finale of the novel, is not a divine punishment or a self-confident attempt to of another Golden Age, but a revenge, a desperate act by a man without hope, maddened by grief and powerlessness of a man who failed to cope with the beast within himself”^[13]. Similar in its irrationality is Daenerys’ action at the end of the series. At the end of the series, she wins the war, but the dragon-riding heroine has not had enough of this victory; she chooses blood vengeance and burns everything around her, both guilty and innocent.” Heroes endowed with superpowers not only cease to control it, but also refuse any judgment (human or divine) other than that based on their own idea of justice. The hero responds to the evil done to him with fantastic violence: Rumata uses fighting techniques unknown to the Arcanaran warriors, and Daenerys unleashes dragon flames. The heroes take the position of the punishing deity, but they do not acquire divine qualities, dissolving entirely into their emotions. Their “day of wrath” brings only death.

As long as the heroes are in the pole of rationality, they contain their power, seeking reasonable justice. Daenerys tries to do justice without unnecessary bloodshed. She realizes that, for example, to rule Meereen, “it is necessary to win the hearts of its inhabitants, whatever contempt she may have for them”^[14]. Rumata refuses to help Arata, whose words Daenerys could probably have signed in a moment of anger: “I will burn the gilded bastards like bedbugs, every last one of them, all their cursed bloodline down to the twelfth descendant. I will wipe their fortresses from the face of the earth. I will burn their armies and all those who would defend and support them. Don’t worry, your lightning bolts will serve only good, and when there are only freed slaves and peace will reign, I will return your lightning bolts to you...”^[9].

In *Hard to Be a God*, the main philosophical line has to do with the fact that although Rumata, wields an almost divine power in the medieval world, he does not use it: “Grit your teeth and remember that you are a god in disguise”^[9]. In this, we see the idea of kenosis, the self-mindedness of God in Christianity. However, at this point Christian allusions are exhausted: Strugatsky’s and Martin’s heroes show neither humanity nor mercy. The finale of Strugatsky’s novel exploits the Gospel story of the washing of hands. Anka mistakes the strawberry juice on Anton’s hands for blood, symbolizing the latter’s indelible guilt in the massacre. Daenerys’ retaliation for the King’s Landing auto-da-fé is more direct: in the series, she’s killed by Jon Snow, ending the reign of a female tyrant. Indeed, “it’s hard to be a god, but it’s even harder not to be a beast in a world where truth is no different from lies and human life is worth nothing”^[13]. Neither Martin’s nor Strugatsky’s heroes coped with this task.

Comparing *A Song of Ice and Fire* with *The Lord of the Rings*, researchers have noted their fundamental

differences arising from Martin's rejection not only of fantasy conventions but also of the Christian tradition. The distinction is articulated in the observation that Frodo's quest represents a fundamentally Christian plot structure, involving a man facing monstrous forces, a narrative tradition that has traditionally shaped modern society ^[4]. In Strugatsky's and Martin's works, the Christian plot of self-sacrifice is replaced by a plot of vengeance with retribution exceeding the scale of the original evil. The mystical lineage of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which has to do with the origin of the aliens, reflects the same concept.

We cannot quite agree with the opinion of Kozmina, according to which "the experimentalism of the fantastical historical novel is based on the testing of the idea and the person; the choice of the hero turns out to be ambiguous, not corresponding to any traditional models" ^[3]. We believe that the choices made by Rumata and Daenerys are quite predictable and consistent with the mechanistic understanding of human nature in both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be a God*: Evil done leads to more evil. This is the mechanism of the multiplication of evil in the world, and there are no forces that can destroy this ungodly mechanics.

7. Understanding history and being in *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* through the metaphor of the Mechanism

The image of the Mechanism, present in the title sequence of the IP series, reflects the ideological and philosophical component that is implicit in the overall narrative context of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. E. V. Salnikova comments on the symbolism of the splash screen as follows: "...It is not about power over the world, but about the world itself and the symbol of the universe in which mankind tries to juggle, to play, to manipulate, in an endless 'game of revaluation' where the cruelty of the hierarchical structures, establishing orders, is answered by a new cruelty of disobedience and destruction" ^[15].

The artificial sun over the huge game map from which the mechanical castles grow denotes the "genre memory" of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, dating back to science fiction, as well as the general ideological background of the game-like and mechanically impassive structure of Martin's universe.

The ontological conflict in the saga is rooted in the clash of natural mythologemes — Fire and Ice — around which characters are inherently aligned. This dualism is amoral and mechanistic. The injustices of power provoke the anger of those wronged by it, creating a cycle of offense and retaliation. To not appear "weak," they are forced to take revenge, multiplying the evil of the world. The original injustice of House Lannister has spawned such grotesque forms of retaliatory evil, such as the murderous child Arya and Lady Catelyn, who rose from the dead (in the book series). Catelyn, whose bloodthirstiness earned her the nickname Heartless (Lady Stonehart). Christian allusions present in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (the resurrection of the dead; "one God" Lord of Light R'hllor; the idea of the Seven as a god "one in seven persons") are devoid of the proper Christian meaning of mercy and forgiveness, and therefore subject to the same universal mechanics. The resurrected dead are spiritually dead, they become zombies or are resurrected for revenge (Catelyn); R'hllor is not a god, but a wrathful demon; the Seven represent the ordinary pagan pantheon and have no mystical power. In this sense, the plot of the resurrection of Grigor Clegane, citing the reanimation of Frankenstein, Clegane lived as a killing machine, and having risen from the dead, continued his activities. The resurrection does nothing to change Clegane's fate and is a plot addendum to the events of the series, illustrating the overall mechanistic nature of the events. The characters seem credible, but the general pattern of their actions is dictated by the same mechanism of evil: their response to injustice – revenge, and their response to violence is even more violence.

Martin's portrayal of the Middle Ages is indeed brutal, but true historicism, which is the authenticity of the author's recreation of medieval thinking, is absent. A medieval man is religious, feels his responsibility to God, and does not tolerate individualization ^[16]; he is characterized by a sense of uncertainty in the future and

“fear of the Lord”^[17]. Martin’s characters are for the most part explicitly individualistic despite belonging to certain “houses.” Their psychology reflects the traits of modern agnosticism; they do not fear the afterlife, often not even believing in it. In other words, these are very modern characters played in a medieval setting. They resist the mechanism of fate, but they cannot overcome it, becoming figures in a mythological mystery played out against their will. The mystical beginnings of the saga - Fire and Ice - do not coalesce into the image of an ambivalent deity with reason. Instead, they align more with a sci-fi parasite indifferent to the fate of conscious beings caught in its “attraction.” The Lovecraftian idea of the “unreasonable god” is a cross-cutting idea in Martin’s works. This is evident in various instances, such as the “sacral leeches” in *A Song for Lya* and the portrayal of the Volcryns in *Nightflyers*, space giants initially revered as gods but revealed to be insane immortal telepaths). The divine mind of Martin’s universe is as expressed by A. F. Losev, “the mythologized ‘dead Leviathan’ of materialism”^[18]. The ending of the series asserts the victory of this Mechanism: Bran becomes the head of Westeros –no longer a man, but a “memory machine.”

In Strugatsky the function of the Mechanism is performed by the course of history itself, understood in the spirit of atheistic materialism: the progressives’ attempts to accelerate the development of medieval civilization fail, the mechanism of history reverses itself, destroying the achievements of the progressives: “all twenty years of work within the Empire went to waste”^[9]. The mechanism of Rumata’s psychic reaction is quite consistent with Martin’s heroes: rejecting rationality, he demonstrates a kind of “medieval atrocity” that his oppressors never dreamed of.

The heroes’ inability to go beyond the mechanistic bundle of “offense - anger - revenge,” as well as the ontologically elevated role of the “mechanical” foundations of the universe led the authors of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Hard to Be a God* to depart from the classical narrative based on the Christian tradition. which is expressed in the necessity of an aborted ending.

8. The problem of the ragged ending

Analyzing the finale of the IP series, researchers note its raggedness, connected with the incompleteness of Arya’s, Jon’s, and Bran’s lines: “The deaths of the heroes are many – but no catharsis”^[4]. The nonlinearity of time in Martin’s novel series, the lack of an “objective” narrator, the post-classical narrative model, and the complexity of the plot lines – all these do not allow “screenwriters to complete the movie saga in the traditional way. As a result, it either breaks off or goes into infinity”^[4]. In a way, the catharsis in Martin’s work lacks a singular unified point of view, a central moral or narrative anchor. Unlike traditional narratives, Martin does not adhere to a singular truth or justice but presents multiple perspectives. The essence of Martin’s fantasy can be seen as postmodernist, embodying the idea of “not one truth but several, not one justice but many”^[19]. At the same time, a work that has entered into a dialog with contemporary culture cannot fundamentally be finalized in a traditional way as the current cultural epoch is ongoing, for “IP can be read as a form of cultural reworking of the experience of social and political upheaval in European and American society”^[11].

The sci-fi element introduces temporal nonlinearity into the plot, as Bran impacts the present by moving into the past. As Stanisław Lem put it, “it was the most ordinary time loop”^[20]. Evidently, the “myth of eternal return” (Mircea Eliade) filtered through postmodern consciousness emerges as a rather common mythologem in modern popular prose. In the final scene of *The Dark Tower* by Stephen King, Roland Discayne too finds himself inside a “time loop” and must repeat the circle of his journey, as he has done so many times before.

The tragedy of eternal repetition, which hints at the potential infinity of plot unfolding is absent from *Hard to Be a God*’s novel and its film adaptations. Nevertheless, the raggedness of the finale is a common quality

of *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* (in addition to the “raggedness” of the series’ denouement, it should be taken into account that the novel series is still ongoing and will probably never end). The storyline of medieval Arkanar ends with the massacre of Rumata and we know nothing about the rest of the planet. The fate of Rumata-Anton is also unclear, and it is only in the epilogue that we learn that his former friends see blood on his hands. At the same time, the epilogue brings us back to the metaphor of the game that opened the prologue: the blood on Anton’s hands turns out to be strawberry juice, and this substitution, equating the “blood” of humans and plants, which serves as a way of partially “defusing” the tragic finale. The abundant blood spilled on another planet, representing the benign “future” of Earth, transforms into berry juice. In a broader philosophical context, it suggests that the two are the same essentially.

A. Hermann’s film adaptation characteristically illustrates the negation of catharsis. The potential for catharsis could have occurred if the heroes of “Hard to Be a God” and “A Song of Ice and Fire” had disrupted the mechanism of multiplying evil. An expected resolution could have been a sudden act of mercy, sacrificing itself to break the Mechanism. But such an ending is impossible neither in the tragic world of *Hard to Be a God* nor in the polyphonic reality of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. On this basis, *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, along with their screen adaptations, defy traditional artistic constructs of the 20th–21st centuries, rejecting common viewpoints, moral monologism, Christian tradition, and catharsis as the primary emotional resolution.

9. Conclusion

This study allows us to conclude that *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* have a lot of typologically similar features. Both works belong to the category of hybrid fiction and resist unambiguous genre labeling. Besides, there is no direct assessment of events, no “omniscient” author, but there is a metaphor of an “involved observer” who is also limited in his or her knowledge. Both works share a psychological motivation among their heroes, marked by a “mechanical” response of answering evil with reciprocal evil. They also exhibit a commonality in undermining the Christian tradition, rooted in atheistic and agnostic philosophizing. Life and history are viewed as components of a universal Mechanism in both narratives. Additionally, both works feature fragmented endings and unresolved storylines concerning the fate of the main characters. It should be noted that *Hard to Be a God* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, belonging to different historical and cultural epochs, can be seen as illustrative works. They illustrate the development of typologically similar tendencies in literature and cinema, such as a strengthened pessimistic view of man and history, a weakened spiritual and moral component, the absence of a clear evaluation of heroes’ deeds, and a fragmented or fundamentally absent conclusion. Undoubtedly, these tendencies are not only present in the works of Strugatsky and Martin, but cover a significant stratum of works of the second half of the 20th–21st centuries.

Among the authors whose work can be traced similar phenomena are S. Lem, S. King, R. Zelazny, C. McCarthy, S. Lukyanenko, D. Glukhovsky, and many others. The works of these authors are immensely popular as they satisfy an unspoken “social order” or in some cases form it. Therefore, such works should be further studied to understand the evolution of modern mass consciousness.

Disclosure statement

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