



“A Song of Ice and Fire” in Historical Perspective: a Mimetic Study

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: 2022-06-20 Revised: 2022-07-28 Published: 2022-08-01 Keywords: <i>A Song of Ice and Fire;</i> <i>Medieval England;</i> <i>Mimetic.</i>	Medieval England was filled with history such as invasions by foreigners, The Wars of the Roses, and power struggles. A Song of Ice and Fire is a historical fiction novel that have a lot of in common with Medieval England. The aim of this study is to find the similarities between the novel and real medieval England in terms of Setting, Event, and the similarities within each of Character. The author uses the Qualitative Research with Mimetic approach by Abrams. The authors found that there are several similarities in terms of Setting between the novel and the real world, one of them is the geographical condition between two countries, Westeros and England. The Event in the story also resembles the historical event such as Aegon Conquest that resembles William Conquest in 1066, And the Characters also brought the same attribute that resembles the original actors in medieval England.
Artikel Info	Abstrak
Sejarah Artikel Diterima: 2022-06-20 Direvisi: 2022-07-28 Dipublikasi: 2022-08-01 Kata kunci: <i>A Song of Ice and Fire;</i> <i>Inggris Abad</i> <i>Pertengahan;</i> <i>Mimetic.</i>	Abad Pertengahan Inggris dipenuhi dengan sejarah seperti invasi oleh orang asing, The Wars of the Roses, dan perebutan kekuasaan. A Song of Ice and Fire adalah novel fiksi sejarah yang memiliki banyak kesamaan dengan Inggris Abad Pertengahan. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menemukan kesamaan antara novel dan Inggris abad pertengahan nyata dalam hal Setting, Event, dan kesamaan dalam masing-masing Karakter. Penulis menggunakan Penelitian Kualitatif dengan pendekatan Mimesis oleh Abrams. Penulis menemukan bahwa ada beberapa kesamaan dalam hal Setting antara novel dan dunia nyata, salah satunya adalah kondisi geografis antara dua negara, Westeros dan Inggris. Peristiwa dalam cerita juga menyerupai peristiwa sejarah seperti Penaklukan Aegon yang menyerupai Penaklukan William pada tahun 1066, Dan Karakter juga membawa atribut yang sama yang menyerupai aktor asli di Inggris abad pertengahan.

I. INTRODUCTION

England has never end of story to tell. This country located on the European continent is part of the United Kingdom alliance with three other countries, namely; Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Located in a strategic location is a natural boon bestowed on the UK. However, these advantages do not only mean good for its citizens, abundant resources make Britain a target for invasion from the outside world. The first foreign invasion of England was carried out by the Romans in 55 BC led by Julius Caesar in a series of his Gallic campaigns. One of Caesar's reasons for invading England was its abundant mineral resources (Todd, 2008). The invasion of England did not stop there, after the Romans, the Saxons came from Germany (Härke, 2011). The Saxons aim to carry out the mission of spreading Christianity in England (Yorke, 2002). In the midst of the Anglo-Saxon regime, the Vikings

attacked, but were blocked by the Saxon forces, continuing the Anglo-Saxon civilization until 1066. In that year an army arrived from Normandy, led by William. The conquest was triggered by the death of the heirless Anglo-Saxon king, King Edward the Confessor. William's claim to the throne of England is based on his kinship with King Edward the Confessor (Wood, 2012). However, it was not William who succeeded the throne of England, but Harold Godwinson who had no relationship with the previous king (Lawson, 2000). Norman and Anglo-Saxon armies faced each other at the Battle of Hastings, with the result of a landslide victory by the Normans, and the death of the last Anglo-Saxon king, Harold Godwinson (Marren, 2004).

The Norman invasion had a profound effect on life in England. The Normans brought many changes ranging from grammar, to the laws that were applied underwent a comprehensive

change (Bennett, 2014). Britain has not experienced any foreign invasion since then. However, hundreds of years since the Norman invasion, England is stuck in a protracted civil war titled *The Wars of the Roses*. The civil war between the Lancaster and York dynasties for power lasted for thirty years, from 1455-1485 (Hicks, 2011). As previously explained, the history of medieval England is filled with bloody, horror, and brain-stirring stories to think about how cruel life was at that time. Battles, wars, conquests and struggles for power became commonplace and filled history books dealing with medieval England. New Jersey writer George R. R. Martin synthesized the history of medieval England into a series of novels entitled *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Martin wraps the story with a touch of fiction and fantasy. He also created his own fictional world, Westeros, in which there are all the dynamics of power politics similar to what happened in medieval England. When reading Martin's work which tells about the conquests carried out by Aegon, the reader seems to be reminded of the conquest of William in 1066. When reading about Aerys II, a mad king and overthrown by his successors, we see the real figure of Richard II, an English king who fared like Aerys II. Even when imagining the shape and geographical conditions of a fictional country called *The North* which is described in the story, it is the original country of Scotland that comes to mind. Martin invites readers to join him in seeing the atrocities and horrors of medieval England through a work of fiction that can be enjoyed. Therefore, based on the background that has been described, the author is interested in conducting research related to seeing the similarities between the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the original history of England in the Middle Ages, to see how far the accuracy offered by the novelist can represent real events experienced by medieval England.

II. METHOD

This research is a qualitative research with descriptive analysis. The theory that underlies this research is the Mimesis approach by Abrams. Mimesis is an approach in literary criticism which holds that literary works are created by imitating or resembling aspects that exist in real life (Abrams, 1971). This approach was originally expressed by Plato who said that the profession of artists and writers was at the lowest level, because their work only imitated existing realities. In other words, Plato despises the

profession of artists and writers (Luxemburg et al., 1989). Plato's opinion was later debated by his own student, namely Aristotle, who said that artists and writers not only imitate existing reality but also give meaning to the world in which we live, thus presenting an element of novelty in their work (Luxemburg et al., 1989). The Mimesis approach is used considering the purpose of this research is to find similarities between the stories in the novel and the original history. The object analyzed in this research is the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin. The series contains six novels namely; *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), *A Dance with Dragons* (2011), and *A World of Ice and Fire* (2014). The author decided to analyze six books at once because the stories in all the books are related to one another, which if the author only uses one book, the story will be cut off. However, the author will not analyze the entire contents of the six books in this study, but only take some aspects that are considered important to be expressed in this study.

In this study, the author will analyze the similarities between the stories in the novel *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the history of England in the Middle Ages. However, the author limits this research by only analyzing it through three aspects, namely aspects of setting, events, and characters. The author limits this research to only analyzing the similarity of the story with the original history by focusing on three aspects, namely Setting, Events, and Characters. The reason for choosing these three aspects is because these aspects are considered the most important and become the foundation for a work of fiction. The setting or setting is often said to be the fulcrum, which suggests the notion of place, time relationship and the social environment in which the events are told (Nurgiantoro, 2018). Meanwhile, according to (Budianta, 2002) setting is the time and place where the events in a drama or story occur. According to (Wellek, n.d.), conflict is something dramatic, referring to a bet between two balanced forces and implying a retaliatory action. In line with this opinion, Meredith and Fitzgerald (in Nurgiantoro, 2007:122) state that conflict is something unpleasant that occurs and or is experienced by the characters of the story, which if the characters have the freedom to choose, he (they) would not choose that event befall him. Another important element in a literary work is the

characterization or character. According to (Nurgiyantoro, 2018) a character is an actor whose life journey is told in a fictional story through the plot, both as actors and sufferers of various events told. Through this theoretical foundation, it is hoped that it will clarify the definitions and concepts of the aspects to be analyzed in this research.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the purpose of this study, in this section, we will analyze some similarities between the story in the Novel *A Song of Ice and Fire* with real events in medieval England by focusing on three important aspects of fiction, namely; Setting, Events, and Characters.

1. Background Similarities

George R. R. Martin as a writer is very inspired by Tolkien's works such as *The Lord of the Rings* which also carries the same genre as his work, namely fiction and fantasy. As he stated in an interview, that he is very obsessed with creating his own fictional world, by creating very detailed places that are different from one another, complete with maps for his fictional world. His fictional world called Westeros has a map shown on the first page of every book he has written.



Source: Google, Martin (1996)

Image 1. Peta Westeros dan UK

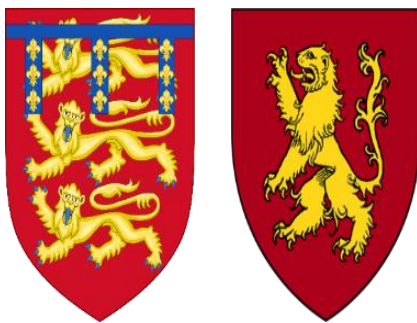
In the map image above, if we look closely, we can actually see that the fictional map of Westeros in Figure (3) is a fiction based on the map of the United Kingdom in Figure (1), the region where England is located. In figure (2), is the map of the United Kingdom when it is modified into a fictional map of Westeros. The islands of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are rotated one hundred and eighty degrees and are placed under the islands of England and Wales. However, what is different from the fictional map of Westeros is that the part that should be the island of Ireland is given a link to unite with the island

of England, so the fictional country of Westeros is not an archipelago like the United Kingdom we know today, but a landmass from south to north. Also, the northernmost part of the fictional map of Westeros in white is an area called The North. From a geographical point of view, The North in fiction can be associated with Scotland. These two regions physically occupy the same location, which is in the northernmost part of the two countries. In addition, the climate in the two regions is also the same. Scotland is known as the coldest country compared to other countries in the United Kingdom, as well as The North, as described by Ned Stark, a character in the novel who says that The North is a very cold region, very harsh, cruel, and unforgiving. (Martin, 2000:179).

In addition to their similar geographical and climatic conditions, these two regions are also one of the largest regions in their respective worlds. As is known, Scotland has a land area of 77.933Km², which automatically places it in second place as the country with the largest area in the United Kingdom, with England taking first place. On the other hand, The North is also a large area within the fictional country of Westeros. There are no measurements that state the exact area of the area in this novel series, because it is in accordance with what happened in medieval England, where various types of measurements such as area, volume, height, and measure have not become something definite and can change and continue to be refined from time to time. time to time (Hosch & others, 2010). In this case, the size of the area of The North is based on the statement of King Robert Baratheon, a king figure in the story who states that Westeros consists of seven regions, and the area of The North is almost as large as the combination of the other six regions (Martin, 2011a). Westeros and medieval England have the same system of government, both adhere to a monarchical system, namely government led by a king or queen. The monarchical system adopted by the two countries is also led by dynasties who come from families that have higher political power than other families. The largest house and the strongest political power in medieval England was the house of Lancaster, as evidenced by the longest reign of kings from that dynasty, such as Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI (Weir, 2008). The author reflects on

the power of the Lancaster Dynasty in his work in the form of House Lannister.

Besides having similarities in terms of naming, the House Lannister is also the most feared dynasty in Westeros. Lannister has many loyal followers which makes it easy for him to reach power (Martin, 2011b). However, many also hate them because of their cunning, arrogant nature, and willing to do anything for the sake of power (Martin, 2012). If the Lancaster dynasty with all its might fought the York dynasty for thirty years for the throne (Hicks, 2011), then the Lannister dynasty was no different. It is Cersei, a queen from the Lannister dynasty, who is willing to kill her own husband, the king, Robert of House Baratheon so that he can control his son who is about to take the throne. Cersei conspired with her cousin, Lancel Lannister to assassinate the king (Martin, 2002).



Source: Google, Martin (1996)

Image 2. Coat of arms of Lancaster and Lannister

Both, both Lancaster (1) and Lannister (2) also have the same crest, which is commonly referred to as a sigil. The two sigils were included in the flag as a symbol of the strength of the two dynasties. The three lions in the Lancaster sigil represent the cohesiveness and strength they have in the politics of power and the strength of their troops. The blue color in the Lancaster sigil symbolizes the geographical condition of their territory, namely Lancashire which is close to the sea. While on the other hand, the sigil carried by Lannister is still the same as that owned by Lancaster, using a red base color that symbolizes blood, or courage, and a gold lion which symbolizes their strength and wealth, but the lion in the Lannister sigil is only one, unlike the Lancaster which has three lions. This symbolizes that the greatness and strength of house Lannister is not the result of the joint

work of its members, but the result of the efforts of one person, namely Tywin Lannister. Tywin is a hand of the King or a kind of prime minister. As a hand of the King, Tywin more often dominates the kingdom than the king himself (Martin, 2005). Tywin is also a very rich man. All of Lannister's wealth came from him, even an anecdote says that if Tywin defecated, then the dirt he excretes is gold (Martin, 2002). Tywin is likened to a one man show at house Lannister, that's the reason why the Lannister sigil is represented as having only one lion. In addition to the system of government and dynastic system, these two countries also have a unique legal system. England in the Middle Ages knew justice which was solved by battle, or known as trial by battle. This rule of law was adopted after the Normans invasion of England (Leeson, 2011). This judicial system requires two parties, namely the plaintiff and the defendant to fight each other, or to be represented by other people (Leeson, 2011). This justice system is open to various types of cases, ranging from land ownership, to theft and murder. The fictional world of Westeros is also familiar with this system, commonly known as trial by combat, which was first introduced when the Aegon Targaryen regime came to power (Martin et al., 2014). A detailed similarity is that this judicial system was introduced by the conquerors of the two countries, namely William in medieval England, and Aegon in Westeros. Furthermore, after both parties agree to carry out this judicial system, then if the defendant wins the fight, he is acquitted of all kinds of charges and punishments.

2. Event Similarities

As discussed earlier, England is a country that has received several invasions from foreign nations, one of which did and was successful the Normans from France. The Normans were led by William of Normandy, a Duke of Normandy, who was later nicknamed William the Conqueror. Westeros also experienced the same thing. Aegon Targaryen is a fictional version of William, who also comes from another country across from Westeros and manages to conquer the kingdom. He also earned the nickname Aegon the Conqueror because of his success in conquering the great nation of Westeros. Actually the Normans were not alone in invading England, but they were assisted by

other parties such as the Maines, Bretons, Aquitanians, and also Frenchmen (Lawson, 2000). All these nations carried the same banner under the leadership of William, with the same goal, namely conquering England. House Targaryen is the same, they ask for help from some of its bannermen. Bannermen is a term that refers to a small house that has pledged allegiance to a big house or dynasty, in this case the Targaryen house, where they ask for help from their bannermen such as house Velarion, house Celtigars, and house Massey (Martin et al., 2014). These two warlords showed that nothing was impossible, even to conquer a great country in his time. However, in addition to the ability to organize war strategies which are very crucial, diplomacy and political skills are also needed to form coalitions that have a common goal. Even though Aegon is a character in a fictional story, he is still given the same attributes as humans in general, namely that they need each other.

After gathering their troops, the two conquerors sailed to their respective countries of destination. William landed in England and faced Anglo-Saxon troops led by their king, Harold Godwinson in the area called Hastings (Marren, 2004). William's troops experienced many difficulties in the battle of Hastings, one of which was the difficulty of opening an attack to the Anglo-Saxon troops who defended very tightly (Marren, 2004). In addition, in the midst of the battle rumors circulated about William's death which made his troops lose their spirits and were easy to attack by Anglo-Saxon troops (Bennett, 2014). However, William dismissed the rumors, took off his hood and shouted at his troops. That moment marked the end of the critical period for the Normans, who were able to launch a counterattack against the Anglo-Saxon troops who were unresponsive (Bennett, 2014), which ultimately resulted in a landslide victory for the Normans under William's command. William's troops at that time were predicted to number around ten to eleven thousand troops (Marren, 2004). On the other hand, Aegon and his troops landed in Westeros and built a small wooden fort near the shore which became the forerunner of the establishment of the Capital of King's Landing ((Martin, 2002). Shortly after, Aegon faced King Argilac for control of the region called Stormlands in a battle immortalized as The

Last Storm (Martin et al., 2014). Aegon's troops are also strengthened by three dragons (Martin, 2005), this is where fantasy elements that are different from the original history appear. The troops brought by Aegon numbered sixteen hundred people (Martin, 2002), which is much smaller than William's troops. For this reason, three dragons appear in the story to balance the strength of Aegon and William's troops. In the battle of The Last Storm, Aegon's troops are on a hill, which makes them have to defend against enemy attacks. The situation gets more difficult when the rain starts to fall and turns into a storm, making the dragon unable to emit fire. However, after the rainstorm subsides, the dragon can release its fire and win the battle (Martin et al., 2014).

William and Aegon's journey in battle was not easy. Both face their respective difficulties in battle before finally being able to reach victory. Bringing in a large army from all over France didn't make William think he had the upper hand. So when it was difficult to break through the Anglo-Saxon defenses and when his troops lost their way upon hearing rumors of his death, William was able to quickly turn things around. On the other hand, having three dragons didn't let Aegon let his guard down and think he would automatically win easily. As evidenced by the difficulty that manifests as a rainstorm, and makes his dragon unable to emit fire, Aegon can coordinate his troops to defend well until the rainstorm subsides and achieve victory with his dragon fire burst. It can be seen that both of them show a very strong leadership spirit. Their actions are based not only on sheer ambition, but also on careful planning, patience, and the ability to solve problems with precision.

3. Character Similarities

In addition to the similarities between the characters William and Aegon, which have been slightly mentioned in the previous section, there are other interesting characters to discuss, such as king Aerys II Targaryen who has similarities with King Richard II, the king of England who had a mental disorder. Richard II was the successor to the throne from his grandfather, Edward III. His grandfather, the king who was getting old sickly, eventually died in 1377, marking the beginning of the reign of Richard II who was appointed king in the same year (Saul, 2006).

Richard II was born in 1367, meaning he was made king at the age of ten. On the other hand, Aerys II also had to bear the same burden after his father, King Jaehaerys died in a battle. Young Aerys continued his reign as king at the young age of eighteen (Martin et al., 2014). Managing an empire is a tough job. In addition to intelligence and wisdom, a king also needs to be physically strong and ready to carry out tasks around the clock. Both, Richard and Aerys were not able to enjoy their youth, instead they had to take care of a huge empire, which was a very tough task to do. It takes a lot of mentality and physical strength to be able to do everything at such a young age. However, despite his very young age, the king of England, Richard II was able to rule very well. It is evident from his success to dispel all kinds of disturbances in the south of England. Richard II's ability to coordinate his subordinates is one of the keys to success (Saul, 2006). His fictional partner, Aerys II Targaryen also recorded extraordinary achievements. In the early decades of his reign, Westeros became a prosperous country from South to North (Martin et al., 2014).

The education provided by the parents of these two viceroys had set them apart from children their age. Being born into a royal family meant that they had to be prepared to be the successors to the throne, especially at a very young age. But not only education is important, but also they have a high mentality so that they can solve well all the problems faced by their kingdom. Both of them started their reigns off to a promising start, they also succeeded in proving to the doubters, that Aerys II and Richard II were able to bring their kingdom to prosperity and prosperity in a short time. However, in the midst of his reign, problems continued to arise for England. several coup attempts, one of which was the Peasants' Revolt or an attempted rebellion carried out by a group of commoners who strongly attacked Richard II's legitimacy on the British throne (Saul, 2006). Aerys II also experienced the same thing. The efforts of lord Denys, the ruler of the Duskendale region who demanded to be made an autonomous region, led to the imprisonment of Aerys II in the Duskendale dungeon (Martin et al., 2014). Since then, England under the regime of Richard II turned into an oppressive regime, he was transformed into a tyranny for his people ((Saul, 2006). Richard

II began to become mentally unstable, and eventually became insane. He is always overly suspicious of the people around him, and in the end he loses control over himself (Stow, 1999). Aerys II also felt the same way. Duskendale Dungeon has turned him into a different person. Aerys II no longer paid attention to his appearance. His long hair was never shaved or washed, his fingernails were very long and never taken care of again. He became more suspicious of those around him, just like Richard II. He didn't want to leave the castle at all. As the years passed, his madness deepened, and he was nicknamed the 'Mad King', or the mad king (Martin et al., 2014).

In the end these two brilliant young kings had to suffer a tragic end. Childhood which is the golden period for the growth and development of a child must be filled with high-level activities to rule the kingdom. Unfortunately, problems and affairs of state regardless of the age of the king, will always exist almost all the time. On the other hand, the immaturity of mental development at a young age made these two kings not as strong as they should be, so the problems that plagued the kingdom accumulated one after another affecting the psyche of Richard II and Aerys II until they finally became mad king. Both were ousted from power by his successor, Richard was deposed and killed by Henry IV in 1399 in the series of war campaigns of The Wars of the Roses (Saul, 2006). While Aerys II was taken down by Robert Baratheon, and killed by his own bodyguard, Ser Jaime Lannister (Martin et al., 2014).

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusion

From the analysis that has been done, it can be concluded that the stories told in the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* have many similarities with the original history of medieval England. In terms of setting resemblance, the fictional world of Westeros has a physical resemblance to the map of the United Kingdom where England is located. The geographical conditions that indicate the description of The North region are very similar to those in the original country of Scotland. The legal instruments used in Westeros such as courts requiring both parties to fight also occurred in real-life medieval England. In terms of the similarity of

events, the author of the novel presents the readers with the story of the invasion and conquest by Aegon Targaryen which has similarities with the conquests carried out by William. In terms of character similarities, the figure of Richard II is well reflected in the character of Aerys II from his childhood to the end of his life. Of course, there are many more similarities between the story in the novel and the original history, for example, the Robert Baratheon rebellion which resembled Henry IV's coup, the story of the Red Wedding, the massacre of all members of the House Stark family at a wedding which bears a resemblance to the Black Dinner, namely the massacre at a luncheon that took place in Scotland, or the character of Joffrey Baratheon, a cruel, cunning, and mischievous prince of Westeros who bears a resemblance to the original historical figure, Edward of Lancaster, and many others. However, they cannot be included in this study due to limitations.

The main purpose of literary works from a pragmatic point of view is to entertain the audience. But in addition, Aristotle views that literary works can be a new way to gain knowledge. A unique way to understand almost every aspect of human life that is too complex to study (Teeuw, 2020). So, the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* can be an entry point for readers to learn about history, especially what happened in medieval England. In addition, there are many meanings of life that can be gleaned from the stories in the novels and in the original history. Finally, the author would like to convey that this research is not perfect, so further refinement is needed from further researchers. There are still many phenomena that have not been revealed in this novel series, such as gender discrimination, representation of women, and semiotic studies related to the hidden meanings in this novel.

B. Suggestions

The discussion related to this research is still very limited and requires input, suggestions for the next writer are to study more deeply and comprehensively about the "*A Song of Ice and Fire*" in Historical Perspective: a Mimetic Study

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