



Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and
Fantasy Research
journal.finfar.org

The Haunted Forest of *A Song of Ice and Fire*: a space of otherness

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Abstract: George R. R. Martin's world of Westeros is inspired by the European medieval period, as stated several times by the author. In using history to confer authenticity to his world, Martin shapes certain elements not only of medieval history but also of its imagination. One of those elements is the forest. The medieval forest was considered a land legally set aside for specific purposes such as royal hunting. This notion of the forest as a separated space also influenced its portraying in medieval imagination as a counterpoint to the civilized world and as a space of chaos, danger and the supernatural, connected with pagan religions and cultures. These characteristics are also present in A Song of Ice and Fire particularly in the Haunted Forest.

The Haunted Forest is located in the North, beyond the Wall and is inhabited by the free folk or wildlings. It is a separated space and it carries much of the symbolic charge of the medieval forest. It is connected to the supernatural, to danger and to a culture regarded as barbarian. It is also associated with the mysterious creatures known as the Others – their identities established by the fact that they are different from the supposedly civilized world south of the Wall and are, therefore, dangerous. The aim of this article is to show how the forest is as a space of alterity, of otherness, where the real and the symbolic mix together, unveiling the fantastic aspect of the narrative in A Song of Ice and Fire.

Keywords: Forests, Fantasy, A Song of Ice and Fire, Medieval Imagination, Otherness.

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Beyond the Wall the haunted forest stands as it stood in the Dawn Age, long before the Andals brought the Seven across the narrow sea.
(George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 517)

Otherness is a characteristic of the other. It is a state of being different, alien to the social identity of someone and to the identity of the self. An example of otherness is when a group of individuals who relate to each other see others outside their group as dissimilar and, consequently, problematic. This leads to exclusion and alienation of those who stand outside that group, because they are different

from the collective social norm. However, the other only exists when there is a sense of self, and in order to achieve a complete sense of self the other is a necessary element, according to Bakhtin: “I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help” (Bakhtin, qtd. in Todorov 96). In this sense, in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* books, it is in the Haunted Forest that otherness comes into question, because it is a place connected with the supernatural, from where strange and disruptive creatures are from, and from their difference arises the distrust and fear from those in the territory of Westeros.

Thus, the Haunted Forest contaminates with otherness those who come in contact with it, making them other: the wildlings, the Others and the men from the Night's Watch. The question of otherness in Martin's work has also been approached by Anna Marynowska in her essay “The Cities and Aliens in George R. R. Martin's ‘A Song of Ice and Fire’”, in which the focus is the relationship between cities and certain characters, and how otherness is expressed in those places as well as inside each character. A similar approach is intended here: this essay aims at exploring the space of the Haunted Forest in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series as a construction influenced by the medieval forests, whether real or imaginary, as a space of otherness, and how the characters who are in contact with it are also regarded as other. However, before proceeding to the analysis, it is important to take into account fantasy's relationship with the Middle Ages, since it influences the construction of the whole world of Westeros, as stated several times by the author, but also of the forest as a dangerous place of savage creatures that, eventually, are regarded as other.

The world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is inspired by the medieval period, its history, geography, literature and imagination. In the basis of its plot are historical facts and figures which help to establish a bridge between the world of the reader, the Primary world, and the fantastic world, the Secondary world, created by the author. This gives the author a certain freedom to play with historical elements because accuracy is not the main goal. In fact, when confronted with what is historically unknown, the fantasy author has the liberty to build his own world even if it is inspired by historical elements, a point also made by Veronica Schanoes: “. . . [F]antasy represents the ways of knowing and making sense of the world that are excluded by the dominant discourse of history” (237). This allows the author to interpret the medieval period but also to reflect upon his own society and culture.

This connection between history, and particularly medieval history, and fantasy is clarified by John Clute when he states:

Fantasy as a genre is almost inextricably bound up with history and ideas of history, reflected and reworked more or less thoroughly according to the needs, ambitions and intentions of individual authors. . . . To many writers and readers, a fantasy novel should be set against a quasi-historical (very often quasi-medieval) background, and the boundaries between historical novels and fantasy can be thin. (Clute 468)

Therefore, it is possible to understand that the Middle Ages has a profound influence in fantasy works and, specifically, in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series providing the narrative with a realistic feel where fantastic elements are introduced. In the words of Martin himself: “That's the general process for doing fantasy, is you have to root it in reality. Then you play with it a little; then you add the imaginative element, then you make it largely bigger” (Hodgman). But it is also important to note that the world created by Martin is not a faithful representation of the Middle Ages itself, it is rather a narrative with a medieval setting where contemporary characters and dilemmas are introduced. This links Martin's work to the concept of neomedievalism, proving that the Middle Ages have continually been reimagined in contemporary culture, and that popular culture is the main vehicle for the renewed interest in this period. Nevertheless, this is an imagined past, a frequently idealized and romanticized construction of the medieval era. In the words of Umberto Eco, “We are dreaming the Middle Ages” (64).

The interest in the Middle Ages started in the Victorian period, showing a certain nostalgia for a period of which much is imagined and little is known, perpetuating certain misconstrued notions about an idealized past that still linger to this day. This is called medievalism and, to Eco, in medievalism “the Middle Ages are taken as a sort of mythological stage on which to place contemporary characters” (68), an aspect previously noted about *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Eco is also the first one to use the word “neomedievalism”, writing that, “. . . we are witnessing . . . a period of renewed interest in the Middle Ages, with a curious oscillation between fantastic neomedievalism and responsible philological examination” (63). Although a stable definition of the term is difficult, neomedievalism may be considered as a reimagining of the medieval period with no concern for accuracy, reconstructing it instead of deconstructing it (Marshall 23).

In addition, despite Martin’s allegation of authenticity through a realistic attempt to portray the Middle Ages, dismissing other fantasy works as “Disneyland Middle Ages” (Hodgman). Martin does build a neomedieval setting where he depicts his own notion of the medieval period. This shows the author’s necessity to distance himself from previous depictions of the Middle Ages in fantasy works, offering a more realistic, violent, and dark portrayal of the period displaying, according to Shiloh Carroll, an attempt “. . . to create a hierarchy of fantasy texts in which gritty realism is privileged over traditional romantic neomedieval fantasy” (Carroll 60). The Haunted Forest, for example, becomes a much somber, darker, and dangerous territory than the forests of medieval romance with all their perils. David Marshall also adds that neomedievalism is, “. . . a self-conscious, ahistorical, non-nostalgic imagining or reuse of the historical Middle Ages that selectively appropriates iconic images . . . to construct a presentist space that disrupts traditional depictions of the medieval” (22). This disruptive nature also adheres perfectly to the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series because Martin breaks some of the medievalism clichés that have been perpetuated since the Victorian period, presenting a cruder reality with no sense of nostalgia whatsoever.

The Haunted Forest

The Haunted Forest bears some resemblances with the forests of the Middle Ages, whether real or imaginary, these concepts are important for a better understanding of the presence of the medieval aspects in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, and how they are mixed with the fantastic elements, particularly in the forest. The forests of Westeros are inspired by the forests of the Middle Ages as they were also separated territories with specific functions that influenced the social life of those who depended upon them. But the fact that they were spaces accessible only to some people, such as the king and his court, perpetuated the feeling of the forest as a strange and foreign place, sometimes dangerous, but also appealing. In this way it is also central to acknowledge the importance of the medieval imagination in the construction of the forest as a perilous and alien place, a place of the unknown. Jacques Le Goff regarded the imagination as a dimension of history, central for a full understanding of the Middle Ages and of the mental structures of those who lived in that period present in its literary and visual culture (1). The forest is a key element in the medieval imagination, especially in chivalric romances, as the scenario of the knight's adventures, where he proves his courage and his valor against monsters and enchantments. It is a space of possibilities and of the supernatural, where civilization, represented by the knight, proves its superiority over the wilderness. It is also possible to assert that in the space of the forest converges the real and the marvelous, in the sense that reality was transformed to create the imaginary aspect, something that is transported to the Haunted Forest in Martin’s world.

These elements of the medieval life and imagination are mixed together in the world created by Martin, and the forests of Westeros, especially those south of the Wall, bear more similarities with the real forests of the Middle Ages, whereas the forest known as the Haunted Forest, beyond the Wall, is more connected with the forests of the medieval imagination. The latter is a natural frontier between the known world and the unknown, it is the space of the supernatural, of monstrous

creatures, and those who inhabit it are considered barbarian, dangerous, and their identities are established because of their contrast with the supposedly civilized world in the South - they are other, whether one refers to the wildlings, the supernatural beings known as the Others, or even the members of the Night's Watch. Based on the representation of the forest in medieval imagination and having in mind the idea of otherness, the following analysis intends to demonstrate how the Haunted Forest in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series is a place of otherness and how it affects the characters who come in contact with it.

The territory of Westeros is limited by a giant man-made wall in the North which marks the border of the known territory governed by the king who sits on the Iron Throne. The Wall is reminiscent of Hadrian's Wall in Scotland that marked the borders of the Roman Empire in Britannia, and protected it from the "barbaric" tribes in the North, such as the Picts. In Martin's world, the Wall also protects Westeros from the unknown and dangerous ground far North known as the Lands of Always Winter, where the Haunted Forest is located. In direct relation to this forest are three groups of characters: the wildlings, the creatures known as the Others, and the Night's Watch. All of them are regarded as other because they are in close contact with the forest, a space of otherness. It is this construction of the Haunted Forest as a space of otherness and its relationship with those who come in contact with it that will be the object of the ensuing analysis.

The Wildlings

The Haunted Forest is inhabited by the wildlings or free folk, who refuse to bow before a king and are regarded as barbarians to those who live in the South:

The largest and most numerous of the various peoples beyond the Wall named themselves the free folk, in their belief that their savage customs allow them lives of greater freedom than the kneelers of the south. And it is true that they live with neither lords nor kings and need bow to neither man nor priest, regardless of their birth or blood or station. (Martin, *The World of Ice and Fire* 147)

In this way, it is already possible to assert that the forest is a place outside civilization because those who inhabit it do not live according to any social contracts. The forest is, therefore, the space of the outsider, of those who do not abide by the laws - the outlaws.

In fact, that was also a reality in the Middle Ages as forests were also regarded as spaces of alterity in the sense that they stood apart from the social order, ". . . the forests were *foris*, 'outside'", the laws applied there were different, and its access was restricted to an elite (Harrison 61). Eventually, the forest also became associated with those who were in the margins, outside social order, such as the star-crossed lovers, the pariahs, outlaws, the persecuted, the wild and mad men. But by seeking refuge in the forest, these people were also violating the Forest Law, a concept created in England by King William, the Conqueror in order to protect the King's Forest which, as the name suggests, was a forest used solely by the king where he could hunt. From then on the forest became a legal and administrative concept with special laws that protected the animals and that restricted its access to the rest of the population (Postan 22). The King's forest was, according to the exchequer of King Henry II, ". . . a safe abode for wild animals, not all of them but only the woodland ones, and not everywhere, but in particular places suitable for the purpose", and ". . . has its own laws, based, it is said, not on the Common Law of the realm, but on the arbitrary legislation of the King . . ." (Johnson 60).

The King, then, became the legislator of the forest and the one in charge of ordering the proper punishments. The forest was, therefore, a restricted area with specific laws, and a dangerous space for those who tried to access it illegally. Nevertheless, criminals sought refuge in the forest and, in this way, entered the ". . . *shadow of the law*. . . The shadow of the law is not opposed to law but follows it around like its other self, or its guilty conscience" (Harrison 63). Thus, those who

inhabit or come from the forest are regarded as different and alien to society, contrasting with those living in the civilized world. Civilization, then, gave men a sense of belonging and safety, while the forest gave a sense of unrest, exclusion and isolation. The same dynamic applies to the Haunted Forest in Martin's fantasy series, as those who inhabit it or have any contact with it are regarded with distrust and are considered alien to society. In this way, the wildlings become other because they live in the forest, an isolated territory, they do not abide any laws nor subject before any king, being socially excluded.

It is also noted that the wildlings particularly celebrated the gods of the forest: "The countless tribes and clans of the free folk remain worshippers of the old gods of the First Men and children of the forest, the gods of the weirwood trees . . ." (Martin, *The World of Ice and Fire* 147). It is possible to acknowledge, then, that the wildlings worship gods connected to nature, an aspect that is reminiscent of pagan cultures, such as the Celts, which also revered nature and its elements, and regarded the forest as a sacred space. Because of its connection to these ancient cultures, in the Middle Ages the forest was the last stance of pagan beliefs and rituals, and it was considered a space of chaos, disorder, the unknown, and evil, in conflict with Christian values. In the words of Corinne Saunders, forests were ". . . landscapes of the unknown" (3) and, therefore, dangerous.

Being connected with paganism, the forest was a hostile place because it was a remembrance of, for example, the druids in Celtic forests, of sorcerers and of their obscure rituals. In fact, in *De Bello Civili*, a 1st century poem by the roman poet Lucan, several forests in Gaul are described as being the place of barbarian acts and strange cults. It also mentions a forest near Marseille that was destroyed by Caesar where the trunks of the trees were carved with the faces of the gods. There were barbaric acts practiced in honour of the gods with many terrible offerings, and the trees were splattered with human blood (Lucan, 447-453). The same dynamic can be recognized in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, in the importance attributed to the weirwood trees in the north of Westeros, which have faces carved in their trunks, ". . . perhaps to give eyes to their gods so that they might watch their worshippers at their devotions" (Martin, *The World of Ice and Fire* 6).

Furthermore, Tacitus, in the *Annales*, also mentions an attack to the island of Mona, in Wales, in the 1st century, a place associated with the druids, in order to weaken the Celtic tribes and society, where forests are described as sacred and dedicated to barbarious superstitions (XIV 30). It is a possibility that the Church was influenced by these and other descriptions of classical authors and ended up regarding the forest as a space with values opposite to the Christian ones, where demons and spirits of nature lived, where the pagan gods still dwelled, and where barbarian and wild men lived - it was the space of a pre-Christian cultural memory that needed to be destroyed: ". . . when forests are destroyed, it is not only an accumulated history of natural growth that vanishes. A preserve of cultural memory also disappears" (Harrison 62).

As the space of the supernatural where demons and gods lived, the forest in Celtic myth was also the space of the Otherworld, a place where the borders between the real, human world and the Otherworld blurred. It was a natural and supernatural place and the possibility to walk between both worlds was real (Chadwick 183). This is noticeable in some Celtic literature, such as the Welsh Celtic tale "Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed", in the *Mabinogion*, where the character Pwyll comes in contact with Arawn, sovereign of the Otherworld, by means of entering the forest. With this in mind, the Haunted Forest in Martin's work is also regarded as a heathen place with no order, contrasting with the main religion of Westeros, the Faith of the Seven. Whereas members of the Faith of the Seven worship several aspects of the same god, something very similar to Christian faith, the people in the North, including the wildlings, believe in a more animistic view of the world, similar to Celtic beliefs. In this way, otherness is also established by having a different religion, a different system of belief, connected to that same place that is feared: the forest and nature in general.

The wildlings may also be interpreted as representative of Norse and Germanic tribes in contrast with the civilization of southern Europe. This supposed division between North and South

is visible in the classical period where the Celtic, Norse and Germanic tribes were considered barbarian and non-civilized, with strange customs and rituals. This thought was perpetuated long after, when the Roman Empire was considered the height of civilization and knowledge only to decline and collapse at the hands of invading "barbarians" from north of Europe in the 5th century, and later with the Viking invasions of the 8th century that devastated Continental Europe and the British Isles. The North was, therefore, associated with danger and death. In fact, in medieval imagination, the North of Europe was a symbolic space connected to violence and destruction, and Northmen were considered enemies of the Christian civilization, as well as "... looters of property, destroyers of human life . . ." (Rix 1). They were considered barbarian because they lived outside the Roman Empire and were not familiar, leading to misleading stereotypes (Rix 2). The same happens when it comes to the wildlings in the world of Westeros: they are regarded as barbarian and dangerous because they live beyond the Wall, and are strangers to everyone in Westeros.

In the world of George R. R. Martin, the belief that those who live in the Haunted Forest are wild men is several times mentioned, as when Bowen Marsh says to Jon Snow: "These are wildlings. Savages, raiders, rapers, more beast than man" (Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 572). This mention to bestiality is also important because the forest is also a space of transformation and transfiguration. In a symbolic way, those who lived or who were in constant contact with the forest were regarded as non-human, contaminated by the supernatural aura of the forest: "One could not remain human in the forest; one could only rise above or sink below the human level" (Harrison 61). That is the reason why the free folk are also known as wildlings, because those who entered an alien space could not preserve their humanity and would turn into wild beings. Thus, here is another form of otherness: the wild as opposed to the human and the civilized.

The Others

From the Haunted Forest also come the strange creatures known as the Others. Not much has been written about them but they are non-human beings described as: "Tall . . . and gaunt and hard as old bones, with flesh pale as milk" (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 8), with "Blue [eyes]. As bright as blue stars, and as cold" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 370). The identity of these creatures is established by contrast with what it is known. In fact, notions of self-identity have always been equated with Good, while Evil is associated with otherness, consequently relating otherness to exteriority and danger. These ideas reinforce the notion that the other is someone to be feared, an opponent, guilty of all things, usually connected to the devil: "It is this proclivity to demonize alterity as a menace to our collective identity which so easily issues in hysterical stories about invading enemies . . ." (Kearney 65). Therefore, these creatures in the world of Westeros are the Others because not much is known about them, they are different, dangerous, and it was believed that they were nothing more than legends, since they have not been seen for thousands of years. They are also associated with death, since they are able to raise dead people upon touching them, creating those known as wights, who can be easily identified because of their bright blue eyes. They are the Others because "... otherness is other-than-the-same", and no creature can match them (Treanor 4).

The Others come from beyond the Wall and throughout the novels they always appear in the Haunted Forest, whether when they kill Ser Wayman Royce (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 10-11) or when Samwell Tarly kills an Other using a dragonglass dagger (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 252-253). This makes the forest a space connected with monstrous and evil creatures, an aspect influenced by the medieval imagination that placed such creatures in the space of the forest. It placed, for instance, a mysterious Green Knight in the forest of Wirral, in the medieval English work *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ca. 1340-1400), as well as giants and a creature known as the Questing Beast in the forest of the *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485), of Sir Thomas Malory. Hence, in Martin's world, the Others are one of the fantastic elements in a work that offers a narrative more

focused on realistic aspects: they are unknown creatures, inhuman and no character can relate to them.

The Others are also in opposition to Daenerys and her dragons, the former representing the forces of Ice and the latter representing the forces of Fire, the two conflicting forces that give name to this fantasy series. Thus, the Fire symbolizes the human heart and passion against the coldness of the inhuman creatures, because the Others bring death and chaos, a counterpoint to human life and social order.

The Night's Watch

It is also interesting to note that the Haunted Forest acts as a natural border between civilization and barbarism, that civilization defended by the Wall of ice and by the Night's Watch, a brotherhood with several symbolic associations. The existence of this order is deeply connected with the Others, since its foundation dates back to the end of an event known as the Long Night. The Long Night is how people in Westeros refer to a period when winter lasted a generation, leading to famine and terror. It is also said that during that time the Others came to Westeros “ . . . bringing the cold and darkness with them as they sought to extinguish all light and warmth” (Martin, *The World of Ice and Fire* 11). The first men of the Night's Watch were the ones able to defeat the Others, winning the Battle for the Dawn, ending the long winter, and sending the Others to the far North. That was the time when the Wall was made, and from then on the men of the Night's Watch vowed to defend Westeros from the menacing and dangerous forces that lie beyond the Wall (Martin, *The World of Ice and Fire* 12). The building of the Wall, then, becomes a geographical border but also a cultural one, making a distinction between those who live outside and inside it: “ . . . [T]he national *We* is defined over and against the foreign *Them*. Borders are policed to keep nationals in and aliens out” (Kearney 65). In this sense, the Wall also symbolizes the limits of what is other and what is not.

Thus, the Night's Watch represents the opposing forces of men versus monstrous or supernatural creatures. They are vigilantes, protectors of civilization against the danger of the unknown. They live near the Wall, a threshold between human society and the forces of nature which are uncontrollable. They are knights that show their prowess and courage when confronted with powers greater than them. In fact, in medieval imagination, and specifically in chivalric romance, the forest plays a central role in the journey of the knight, assuming itself as a space of potential adventure and escape (Saunders 44). In medieval romance the knight is the hero of civilization that fights against disorder and chaos, a representative of the Christian faith in a pagan or godless space, as is the case of the knight Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. He also acts as a counterpoint to the wild man because the only thing that distinguishes one from the other is the social contract. For Robert Pogue Harrison, the knights of medieval romance are wild men that became heroes of the social order, “ . . . yet who must periodically return to the forest in order to rediscover within themselves the alienated source of their prowess, the wild man's prowess” (66). In this way, the knight is introduced in the world of the forest, a world where logic laws are suspended, to re-establish and reaffirm the social order (Harrison 68). This dynamic is similar when it comes to the Night's Watch. They are protectors of the social order against otherness beyond the Wall – the wildlings and the Others. They also prove their bravery when they are in the forest, and their courage is confirmed when they have to fight those living in the forest, confirming the superiority of the civilized against the wild.

But although the knights of the Night's Watch are on the side of civilization they are set apart of it as well, because the brotherhood is constituted by outlaws, criminals, illegitimate sons and noble men who lost their honour. They also have a more somber and sullen aura than the knights of medieval romance, where they represented specific ideals and had particular values. These Westerosi men wear austere and black clothing, and when the recruits are ready to enter the brotherhood they pledge to never marry nor have children, to not inherit any lands and to sever their

family bonds. They also bow to no king, dedicating their lives exclusively to defending Westeros and the Wall against the perils that lie beyond it. These knights belong to a military order and they defend civilization from everything that endangers it, but at the same time they are marginalized men, outlaws, men that live in the shadows of society. In this way, it is possible to state that those who are outcasts are the ones who fight those who are outside society as well.

Hence, the fact that the Night's Watch is the military order that protects the civilized world of men against the dangerous and strange creatures from the Haunted Forest, alludes to the medieval idea that the knight is the one destined to protect society's values, and to the idea that it is necessary a special type of men to do it. These men from the Night's Watch are, therefore, symbolically similar to the forest itself and to those who inhabit or come from it: they are viewed as a threat to society, since they are outlaws and criminals, and they do not conform to imposed moral standards. They also do not obey any king, they have their own rules, they are in constant contact with the same supernatural world of the forest and, thus, are the ones fit to protect the civilized world.

The otherness from the men in the Night's Watch arises because they live in a frontier where they are always in contact with other elements of alterity. In this way, one's identity depends on the contact with the other, as stated by Mikhail Bakhtin:

It turns out that every internal experience occurs on the border, it comes across another, and this essence resides in this intense encounter. . . . Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he *looks in the eyes of the other* or *through the eyes of the other*. . . . I cannot do without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception). (Bakhtin, qtd. in Todorov 96)

This applies to the men in the Night's Watch who are other to society due to their backgrounds, but who also live in the border between two different worlds. This is also particularly evident in the case of Jon Snow, one of the point of view characters who live in the Wall, because he always feels out of place and sees himself as other. Firstly, because he is an illegitimate son of Eddard Stark, never fully accepted in the Stark family and in society; but also in the Night's Watch because he is regarded as someone who thinks himself better than the other men, due to his education in a noble family. His internal experience as other is similar to that of the other men of the Night's Watch who, in the eyes of society, are also other. But their identities and presence are recognized and legitimated because they belong to Westeros and they fight against those who represent a threat to society: the wildlings and the Others.

Conclusion

In the Middle Ages, the forest was considered as a separated space. Those who lived there were regarded with distrust and contaminated by the mysterious aura of the forest. It was also a microcosm, a place of pre-Christian cults and rites in a period where Christianity was trying to impose itself, rejecting everything that went against its doctrines. Consequently, the forest became the place of the unknown, of the supernatural, where strange and pagan creatures lived, of wild men, standing opposite to life in the civilized world. The forest ended up being the place of the natural and of the supernatural, where relationships between man and space are established, both in his daily life and in his imagination, where both are influenced by each other. These aspects seem to merge in the Haunted Forest created by George R. R. Martin, where the supernatural effect is created and a sense of wonder is always present.

In this forest lie the spirits of the First Men, the first humans to set foot on Westeros, as Jon Snow states in his thoughts: "*This is the haunted forest*, he told himself. *Maybe there are ghosts here, the spirits of the First Men. This was their place, once*" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 509). Thus,

it carries an old heritage and stands as a space of cultural memory. But the Haunted Forest stands more prominently as a space of danger and of strangeness. It contains the souls of those who have departed, but also the life of those who live outside social norms and are considered savage: the wildlings. They live outside civilization, in the wilderness of the forest, and they also do not live according to social contracts, although there is a structure in the wildlings' way of life. The forest is, therefore, representative of otherness because it shelters those who stand outside society, who question it, and are regarded as different.

The Haunted Forest is also a space connected with creatures whose identity is established by the fact that they are different, frightening and regarded as evil: the Others. These creatures are truly other, they are one of the main threats to the world of Westeros, they represent the unknown and the monstrous, the legends that come to life to reclaim their past and overshadow the present. These Others metaphorically embody the fear of death and of the destruction of civilization by an alien race.

Finally, in direct relationship with the Haunted Forest is the Night's Watch, the men who protect Westeros from the dangerous creatures that lie north of the Wall. But although they are men from Westeros, they are not a part of society. They are not the knights of the medieval romance, they are ostracized knights who live in the margins of society, in the border between the known world, Westeros, and the unknown, north of the Wall. In this way, they are also "others", because they do not fit in with social norms, they fight wild men and stand up to supernatural and alien creatures that endanger the world as it is known. Being in constant contact with the Haunted Forest, they become outlandish men as well, who stand apart but also stand out from society.

Thus, Martin is trying to show that everyone has some kind of otherness inside themselves. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, otherness is embodied in a particular space, the Haunted Forest, but it is also inside each character, their identities truly revealed when confronted with an other. Martin creates certain expectations in the reader just to destroy and subvert them. In this case, he builds what apparently seems a dualist tension between the forces of Ice and Fire, light and dark, Good and Evil, just to show that Man is not made of only one thing; people are multifaceted beings and have these dualities inside themselves, making them more complex.

Hence, the forest stands as a strange land of strange creatures and of strange events. It presents the reader with aspects of threat to and disruption from society: the forest as a space of chaos and disorder, of the unknown, of wild men and supernatural creatures, but also of outcast knights in charge of containing the threat of the supernatural hanging over civilization and order. And because these knights represent danger and are apart from the social order, they are also other. The wildlings, the Others, the Night's Watch and the Haunted Forest are all constructions of otherness because they are in contrast with civilization, the known world and social order. The Haunted Forest marks, then, the border between the known and the unknown world, the danger of forgotten myths and legends, of barbarian men with their bizarre and wild beliefs, and of a night that represents ignorance and all the fears of Man.

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