

# Introduction

## *Film, Television, and Off-Screen Studies*

A common first line for books on contemporary media, and for many a student essay on the subject, notes the saturation of everyday life with media. Certainly, my list of available cable channels seems to grow every month, while the list of movies in cinemas, on television, for rent, or available for purchase similarly proliferates at a precipitous rate. However, media growth and saturation can only be measured in small part by the number of films or television shows—or books, games, blogs, magazines, or songs for that matter—as each and every media text is accompanied by textual proliferation at the level of hype, synergy, promos, and peripherals. As film and television viewers, we are all part-time residents of the highly populated cities of Time Warner, DirecTV, AMC, Sky, Comcast, ABC, Odeon, and so forth, and yet not all of these cities' architecture is televisual or cinematic by nature. Rather, these cities are also made up of all manner of ads, previews, trailers, interviews with creative personnel, Internet discussion, entertainment news, reviews, merchandising, guerrilla marketing campaigns, fan creations, posters, games, DVDs, CDs, and spinoffs. Hype and synergy abound, forming the streets, bridges, and trading routes of the media world, but also many of its parks, beaches, and leisure sites. They tell us about the media world around us, prepare us for that world, and guide us between its structures, but they also fill it with meaning, take up much of our viewing and thinking time, and give us the resources with which we will both interpret and discuss that world.

On any given day, as we wait for a bus, for example, we are likely to see ads for movies and television shows at the bus stop, on the side of the bus, and/or in a magazine that we read to pass the time. If instead we take a car, we will see such ads on roadside billboards and hear them on the radio. At home with the television on, we may watch entertainment

news that hypes shows, interviews creative personnel, and offers “sneak peaks” of the making of this or that show. Ad breaks will bring us yet more ads and trailers, as will pop-ups or visits to YouTube online. Official webpages often offer us information about a show, wallpaper for our computer desktops, and yet more space for fan discussion, thereby supplementing the thousands of discussion sites run by fans or anti-fans. The online space also offers the occasional alternate reality game or particularly creative marketing campaign. Stores online and offline sell merchandise related to these films and shows, ranging from collectible *Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003) “replica” swords or rings, to Dunder Mifflin t-shirts for *The Office* (2005–), to a talking Homer Simpson bottle opener. They sell licensed toy lines, linens, breakfast cereals, vitamins, and clothing to children. Bookstores and comic book shops sell spinoff novelizations and graphic novels. Game stores sell licensed videogames and board games. Fast food stores sell the Happy Meal or Value Meal. Music and video stores sell soundtracks, CDs of music “inspired by” certain films or shows, and DVDs and Blu-Ray discs rich with bonus materials, cast and crew commentaries, and extra scenes. Tour companies offer official *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) or *Sopranos* (1999–2007) tours of the New York area, while *Lord of the Rings*-themed tours of New Zealand are possible, and some fans lead themselves on their own tours of filming sites. Fans also write stories and songs and make films or vids about or set in film and television’s storyworlds. Film and television shows, in other words, are only a small part of the massive, extended presence of filmic and televisual texts across our lived environments.

Given their extended presence, any filmic or televisual text and its cultural impact, value, and meaning cannot be adequately analyzed without taking into account the film or program’s many proliferations. Each proliferation, after all, holds the potential to change the meaning of the text, even if only slightly. Trailers and reports from the set, for instance, may construct early frames through which would-be viewers might think of the text’s genre, tone, and themes. Discussion sites might then reinforce such frames or otherwise challenge them, while videogames, comics, and other narrative extensions render the storyworld a more immersive environment. In the process, such entities change the nature of the text’s address, each proliferation either amplifying an aspect of the text through its mass circulation or adding something new and different to the text. While purists may stomp their feet and insist that the game, bonus materials, or promos, for instance, “aren’t the real thing,” for many viewers and non-

viewers alike the title of the film or program will signify the entire package. Individuals or communities will construct different ideas of what that package entails, based on their own interactions with its varying proliferations, and on their own sense of its textual hierarchy. But rarely if ever can a film or program serve as the only source of information about the text. And rather than simply serve as *extensions* of a text, many of these items are filters through which we must pass on our way to the film or program, our first and formative encounters with the text.

While many consumers deride the presence of hype and licensed merchandise as a nuisance, we also rely upon it, at least in part, to help us get through an evening's viewing or a trip to the multiplex. Decisions on what to watch, what not to watch, and *how* to watch are often made while consuming hype, synergy, and promos, so that by the time we actually encounter "the show itself," we have already begun to decode it and to preview its meanings and effects.

We are all familiar with the vernacular imperative to not "judge a book by its cover." But we all do so nonetheless. Our world is heavily populated by promos and surrounding textuality, and these form the substance of first impressions. Today's version of "Don't judge a book by its cover" is "Don't believe the hype," but hype and surrounding texts do more than just ask us to believe them or not; rather, they establish frames and filters through which we look at, listen to, and interpret the texts that they hype. As media scholars have long noted, much of the media's powers come not necessarily from being able to tell us what to think, but what to think about, and how to think about it.<sup>1</sup> Mediated information and narratives are frames par excellence, trimming and editing the object of their attention for us with significant power and skill. Advertisers especially are charged with the task of creating frames for many of the items that surround us, harnessing semiotics and cultural scripts to frame everything from soft drinks to vacuum cleaners to back-pain medicine. They do so not simply by telling us to buy such products or services, but by creating a life, character, and *meaning* for all manner of products and services. Hype, in short, creates meaning. And by doing so, it regularly implores us to judge books by their glossy covers.

This book is about the machinations of those glossy "covers," about how hype, synergy, promos, narrative extensions, and various forms of related textuality position, define, and create meaning for film and television. Promotion is vitally important in economic terms, of course, as a proper understanding of media multinational corporations' strategies of synergy

and multi-platforming tells us much about the political economy of the mass media. But for synergy to work, meaning must first be established; otherwise, *why* would one buy a Disney toy, get excited about a movie sequel or television spinoff, eagerly anticipate the release of a DVD or podcast, or trawl through the Internet for spoilers or vids? Why, too, might one spend significantly *more* time with such spinoff- or promo-related items than with the film or television show itself? Synergy works because hype creates meaning. Thus, this book represents an attempt to study how this meaning is created, and how it both relates to and in part constructs our understanding of and relationship with the film or television show. It is a look at how much of the media world is formed by “book covers” and their many colleagues—opening credit sequences, trailers, toys, spinoff videogames, prequels and sequels, podcasts, bonus materials, interviews, reviews, alternate reality games, spoilers, audience discussion, vids, posters or billboards, and promotional campaigns.

Consequently, the book argues for a relatively new type of media analysis. While engaging in close reading, audience research, and structural/political economic analysis of films and television programs, we must also use such techniques to study hype, synergy, promos, and peripherals. Charles Acland writes that “the problem with film studies has been *film*, that is, the use of a medium in order to designate the boundaries of the discipline. Such a designation assumes a certain stability in what is actually a mutable technological apparatus. A problem ensues when it is apparent that film is not film anymore.”<sup>2</sup> This is also a problem with television studies, for, I would quibble with Acland, film has never been (just) film, nor has television ever been (just) television. Thus, while “screen studies” exists as a discipline encompassing both film and television studies, we need an “off-screen studies” to make sense of the wealth of other entities that saturate the media, and that construct film and television.

#### *Of Texts, Paratexts, and Peripherals: A Word on Terminology*

We might begin by finding a single term to describe these various entities. *Promos* and *promotion* involve the selling of another entity. Or, stepping beyond “normal” levels of advertising is *hype*. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines “hype” as “extravagant or intensive publicity or promotion.” Hype is etymologically derived from “hyper-,” meaning “over, beyond, above” or “excessively, above normal,” which is in turn from the Greek “*huper*,” meaning “over, beyond.” The term alludes to

advertisements and public relations, referring to the puffing up, mass circulation, and frenetic selling of something. Hype is advertising that goes “over” and “beyond” an accepted norm, establishing heightened presence, often for a brief, unsustainable period of time: like the hyperventilating individual or the spaceship in hyperdrive, the hyped product will need to slow down at some point. Its heightened presence is made all the more possible with film and television due to those industries’ placement—at least in their Hollywood varieties—within networks of *synergy*. Deriving from the Greek “*sunergos*,” meaning “working together,” synergy refers, says the *OED*, to “the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.” Within the entertainment industry, it refers to a strategy of multimedia platforming, linking a media product to related media on other “platforms,” such as toys, DVDs, and/or videogames, so that each product advertises and enriches the experience of the other. And whereas hype is often regarded solely as advertising and as PR, synergistic merchandise, products, and games—also called *peripherals*—are often intended as other platforms for profit-generation.

All of these terms have their virtues. Promotion suggests not only the commercial act of selling, but also of advancing and developing a text. Hype’s evocation of images of puffing up, proliferation, and speeding up suggest the degree to which such activities increase the size of the media product or text, even if fleetingly. Synergy implies a streamlining and bringing together of two products or texts. Peripherals, meanwhile, suggest a core entity with outliers that might not prove “central” and that might not even be doing the same thing as that entity, but that are somehow related.

Although each of these terms has its utility in given instances, all have inherent problems. Hype is often regarded in pejorative terms, as excessive. In addition to its listing of “hype” as “extravagant,” for instance, the *OED* provides a second definition, as “a deception carried out for the sake of publicity,” while the verb form means “to promote or publicize (a product or idea) intensively, *often exaggerating its benefits*” (emphasis added). The term thereby evokes the image of an entity whose existence is illegitimate, inauthentic, and abnormal, when I will be arguing that hype is often mundane and business as usual. Hype, promotion, promos, and synergy are also all terms situated in the realm of profits, business models, and accounting, which may prove a barrier for us to conceive of them as creating meaning, and as being situated in the realms of enjoyment,

interpretive work and play, and the social function of media narratives. To call such elements “peripherals,” meanwhile, is to posit them as divorced and removed from an actual text, discardable and relatively powerless, when they are, in truth, anything but peripheral. Moreover, hype, promotion, and promos usually refer only to advertising rhetoric, and synergy and peripherals only to officially sanctioned textual iterations. Thus, while fan and viewer creations may work *textually* in similar ways to hype, promotion, promos, synergy, and peripherals, they are nearly always unauthorized elements that are thus not covered by such terminology.

Throughout this book, then, while I will occasionally use the above terms as context deems appropriate, I will more frequently refer to *paratexts* and to *paratextuality*. I take these terms from Gerard Genette, who first used them to discuss the variety of materials that surround a literary text.<sup>3</sup> A fuller definition of these terms will be offered in chapter 1, but my attraction to them stems from the meaning of the prefix “para-,” defined by the *OED* both as “beside, adjacent to,” and “beyond or distinct from, but analogous to.” A “paratext” is both “distinct from” and alike—or, I will argue, intrinsically part of—the text. The book’s thesis is that paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them. Just as we ask *paramedics* to save lives rather than leave the job to others, and just as a *parasite* feeds off, lives in, and can affect the running of its host’s body, a paratext constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text.

Paratexts often take a tangible form, as with posters, videogames, podcasts, reviews, or merchandise, for example, and it is the tangible paratext on which I focus predominantly. However, I will also argue that other, intangible entities can at times work in paratextual fashion. Thus, for instance, while a genre is not a paratext it can work paratextually to frame a text, as can talk about a text (though, of course, once such talk is written or typed, it becomes a tangible paratext), and so occasionally I will examine these and other intangible entities within the rubric of paratextuality too.

I must also be clear from the outset that throughout this book, I use the word *text* in a particular fashion. I elaborate upon and justify this use in chapter 1, but early warning should be provided to those readers who are accustomed to calling the film or television program “the text” or, in relation to paratexts, “the source text.” To use the word “text” in such a manner suggests that the film or program *is* the entire text, and/or that

it completes the text. I argue, though, that a film or program is but one part of the text, the text always being a contingent entity, either in the process of forming and transforming or vulnerable to further formation or transformation. The text, as Julia Kristeva notes, is not a finished production, but a continuous “productivity.”<sup>4</sup> It is a larger unit than any film or show that may be part of it; it is the entire storyworld as we know it. Our attitudes toward, responses to, and evaluations of this world will always rely upon paratexts too. Hence, since my book argues that a film or program is never the entire sum of the text, I will not conflate “film” or “program” with “text.” When I call for an “off-screen studies,” I call for a screen studies that focuses on paratexts’ constitutive role in creating textuality, rather than simply consigning paratexts to the also-ran category or considering their importance only in promotional and monetary terms.

Nevertheless, the money trail might guide our initial foray into an off-screen studies, as an invigorated study of paratexts could address an odd paradox of media and cultural studies: while the industry pumps millions of dollars and labor hours into carefully crafting its paratexts and then saturates our lived environments with them, media and cultural studies often deal with them only in passing. How important are they? By late 2008, major studios were spending, on average, \$36 million per film on marketing—a full third of the average film budget—while blockbusters could require considerably more. Smaller companies such as Lionsgate habitually spend up to two-thirds of their budget on marketing.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, DVD sales and rentals handily eclipse Hollywood’s box office revenues, with, for instance, 2004 seeing \$7.4 billion in rentals to theaters, yet \$21 billion from home video.<sup>6</sup> Even blockbusters and box office giants are seeing vigorous “competition” from DVDs; New Line’s \$305.4 million of revenue for DVD sales of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) in 2003, for example, fell just shy of the film’s huge yield at the box office.<sup>7</sup> And cineplexes are also being rivaled by the videogame industry—some of whose biggest hits are film and/or television spinoffs.<sup>8</sup> In the world of television, as Amanda Lotz records, American networks and cable channels devote substantial advertising space to hyping their own programs. Network television alone, for instance, foregoes an estimated \$4 billion worth of ad time in order to advertise its programs, airing over 30,000 promos a year. In 2002, the old WB network accepted more ads from parent company AOL Time Warner than from any other advertiser, suggesting how one of the great economic benefits of conglomeration has been

the ability to advertise on commonly owned channels.<sup>9</sup> Add to this the potentially colossal sums that media corporations can earn from merchandising, licensing, and franchising (in addition to *Lord of the Rings*, think Disney, *Star Wars* [1977], or *The Simpsons* [1989–]), and paratextuality is not only big business, but often much bigger than film or television themselves. Janet Wasko cites estimates that the licensed children's products market is valued at \$132 billion, that licensed products in general generate more than \$73 billion a year, and that movie-based games earned the major studios as much as \$1.4 billion in 2001.<sup>10</sup>

And yet media, film, television, and cultural studies frequently stick solely to the films and television programs with a loyalty born out of habit. John Caldwell notes the film and television industries' widespread devaluation of "below the line" workers as lesser than the "above the line" directors, producers, writers, and actors.<sup>11</sup> Media studies, too, often risk a similar devaluation of those whose labor and creativity can be just as constitutive of the text as that of the above-the-liners. While this move is evident in the relative dearth of materials studying or even theorizing "below the line" work on films and television shows, it is similarly evident in the relative lack of attention paid to the semiotic and aesthetic value of the "below the line" paratext, or to its creators. Synergy is seen in terms of profits, but too rarely in terms of *textuality*, as something that creates sense and meaning, that is engaged with and interpreted as is the filmic or televisual referent, and that can ultimately create meaning for and *on behalf of* this referent. A key starting point for this book, then, is that if the film and television industries invest so heavily in previews, bonus materials, merchandise, and their ilk, so should we as analysts. It is time to examine the paratexts.

### *The Movie of the Trailer*

Illustrating the power of paratexts with a playfully parodic nod was a brief video released in spring 2008 by the online satirical news outlet *The Onion*. "Iron Man," the Onion News Network's faux anchor announced, "was one of the most popular trailers of last summer, but controversy is sweeping the fan community today, following the announcement that Paramount Pictures is planning to adapt the beloved trailer into a feature-length motion picture" (fig. 1.1). He then cut to a supposed entertainment reporter, who noted mixed reaction to the controversial plan to make a movie of the trailer:



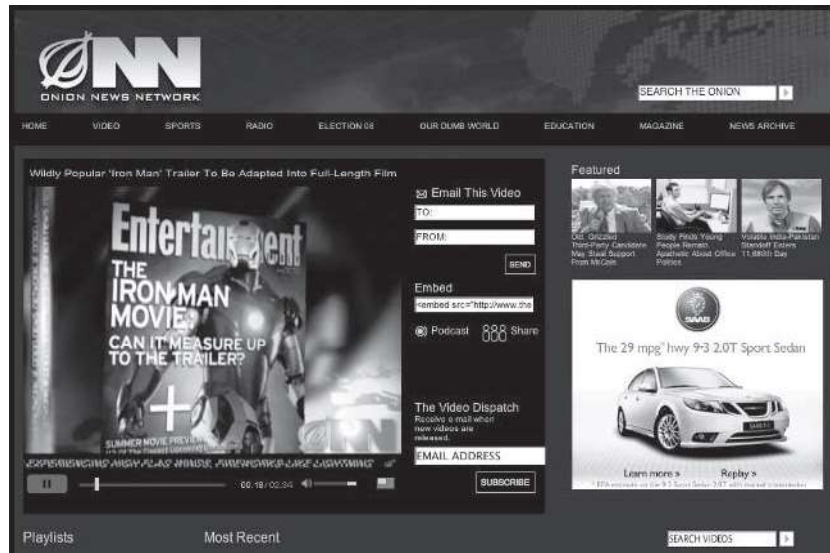


Fig. 1.1. The Onion News Network speculates on whether fans will accept the film adaptation of the *Iron Man* trailer.

The *Iron Man* trailer is near and dear to a lot of fans' hearts, so you can imagine how worried people are about this news. Apparently, the plan is to expand that fast montage of very short shots seen in the trailer into full-length, distinct scenes, and in between those scenes, they plan to add *additional* scenes that weren't in the trailer.

She also speculated on the prospects of the studio taking the fan favorite Gwyneth Paltrow, whose "notable" appearance in the trailer they clocked at three-quarters of a second, and placing her at the center of a "tedious romantic subplot that [is] twenty or thirty minutes long." Both "reporters" react with mock incredulity at the notion that Paramount would jeopardize "the integrity of the trailer" and risk "alienating the trailer's core fan base" with such a move, but the entertainment reporter reassures viewers that at least Paramount has announced that they will keep everything that audiences loved, "right down to actual lines from the trailer," and have even brought Robert Downey, Jr., back to "reprise" his role from the trailer, and that they will release the film with eight "entirely new entertainment-packed trailers. So, even if the movie is no good, hopefully the trip to the theater will be worth it anyway."

The item plays with many anxieties of consuming media in a hype-, synergy-, and franchise-filled era, in particular the concern that the ads can prove better than the product itself, and that adaptations risk killing the core elements of the original. In doing so, it points to how complex our interactions with media are, and to how contingent they are on anticipation and expectation, on networks of paratexts, and on previous relationships to a story, character, actor, or genre. The parodic clip suggests the degree to which many if not all people going to watch the *Iron Man* film (2008) will already have started the process of making sense of it. Those who have read *Iron Man* comics, or perhaps played Marvel videogames, will have a sense of what lies ahead, as will (in different ways) those with a past knowledge of Downey's, Paltrow's, or director Jon Favreau's work. And many will have seen the trailer, which was indeed spectacular, thereby creating the groundwork for the Onion News Network's parodic story. Others will have seen posters, visited the website, read reviews, and heard or read interviews with Downey, Paltrow, or Favreau. Some viewers will have had expectations created simply due to the cinema in which the movie was playing, or due to the friends who invited them to come see it. Meanwhile, of course, thousands will have avoided the film, whether due to its genre, cast, or any of the above-mentioned instances of hype and synergy. In short, then, if we really wanted to make sense of the "moment" of interaction between film and audience, we would need to explore all those things that preceded the film, set the frames through which audience members would make sense of it, and set the stage for the kind of movie-going experience they would have. As categorically absurd as *The Onion's* suggestion that the trailer has "integrity" to uphold might seem, the trailer would play a key role in determining how audiences came to the cinema, and what they came expecting. The film would have begun in earnest, then, with the trailer, or with the comics, the videogames, the interviews, the reviews, the ads, and so forth. The text, the essence, of *Iron Man* began long before the film hit theaters, so that when the film finally arrived, yes, it could radically revise that text, but it would not be working with a blank slate; rather, it would need to work through, with, and/or in spite of the multiple meanings that had already begun to form in audiences' minds.

However, this book is not simply arguing that paratexts *start* texts, for they also create them and continue them. Thus, this book is also about the paratexts that we find after a text has officially begun, and that continue to give us information, ways of looking at the film or show, and

frames for understanding it or engaging with it. Their work is never over, and their effects on what the film or show *is*—on what it means to its audiences—are continual.

The Onion News Network's short clip plays with the notion of continuing paratexts, too, for in its suggestion that the integrity of the trailer might be jeopardized by the movie, the clip reflects on how each new iteration of a text—wherever it may be, and of whatever length (ninety seconds or ninety minutes)—can affect the public understanding of, appreciation of, and identification with that text. Quite simply, a “bad” adaptation will inevitably affect the public standing of a text, just as would a “good” one. But to be able to call an adaptation “good” or “bad” requires an audience member or community to have developed a notion of the ideal and proper text, and in this book I will argue that paratexts play as much of a role as does the film or television program itself in constructing how different audience members will construct this ideal text.

#### *Where Is Springfield? Placing The Simpsons*

Another illustrative example lies in the army of merchandise and spinoff products that surround *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* is, of course, one of the world's most successful television programs worldwide, having produced more than four hundred episodes by the time of writing. But surely few if any know *The Simpsons* solely as a television program, for it is also a brand, a world, and a set of characters that exist across clothing, toys, videogames, a film, ads, books, comics, DVDs, CDs, and many other media platforms. For the purposes of my argument here, though, I wish to focus on one particular platform: a set of online ads for *The Simpsons Game* (2007). Since this videogame followed in the wake of *The Simpsons Movie* (2007), in effect we have a third-level paratext: an ad for the game that followed the movie of the television program. As such, if we were to examine this as media studies has more traditionally examined such products, we would focus on it wholly as a hypercommercialized money-grab, as a synergistic attempt to squeeze as much as possible from a successful media product. Ads for games of a movie of a television show rate low on most traditional scales of artistic value.

However, upon closer examination of these ads, we can see a viable source of *The Simpsons* as text. Upon navigating to the webpage for *The Simpsons Game*, a visitor was met with a series of links to parodic trailers for supposed stand-alone videogames, each of which used *The Simpsons*

to parody established and popular games or game genres (and each a level in the actual game). Thus, for instance, *Medal of Homer* deftly parodies both the *Medal of Honor* games specifically (1999–) and war games and war films more generally. With a somber yet sweeping orchestral and choral soundtrack worthy of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), the ad opens with a series of zoom-and-pan scratchy black-and-white war “photos” (yet drawn in *Simpsons* style), playing with the visual style of Ken Burns documentaries, and of *Medal of Honor*’s cut sequences (fig. 1.2). Title cards interlace such photos, reading “In the Last Great Invasion” “Of the Last Great War” “They Gave Each Other the Strength” “To Make History.” This reverent spectacle is interrupted following the third title card, though, as we cut to a shot of Homer and Bart in which Homer is scratching his butt. The irreverence then bubbles up further following the last title card, as a prancing Homer interrupts, “Oooh, I’m France, I’m a little girl. I don’t want to be bombed and attacked.” The ad continues to its conclusion, cutting between shots of, for instance, Homer belching flame, or rolling around as a huge human blob, and shots framed to mimic war movie trailers.

In short, many of the key ingredients of *The Simpsons* are in the ad. We see significant irreverence and bodily humor, especially from Homer. We see *The Simpsons*’ signature brand of attractive animation. We see and hear a smart, brilliantly executed media parody that lampoons the seriousness with which both war games and war films take themselves. And we see the snark for which the show is famous. All of this takes place in a brief, eighty-second clip, again replicating the television show’s style of offering short bursts of media parody. And while the *Medal of Homer* ad is executed with great skill, a deeply funny piece of work, so too is the *Mob Rules* ad, which parodies the *Grand Theft Auto* series’ (1997–) trailers and camerawork to a tee. The *Mob Rules* ad also parodies *GTA*’s signature use of violence and male bravado, parodically recontextualizing the line “we’re gonna clean up this town,” for example, as Marge’s appeal to Lisa to help her rid Springfield of the violent videogame. Two other ads parody *Everquest* (1999) and other role-playing games, and odd Japanese puzzle games, respectively. After watching these ads, one has gained an experience similar to that of watching the television show. As ads, the clips may be seen by some as less authentic, as simply hawking their wares, and as purely secondary to the primary text that is *The Simpsons* television show. But the clips produce and continue the text of *The Simpsons* with considerable skill. These third-level paratexts, in other words, are part of the text, becoming sites not only of the production of the text but also of engagement with it.

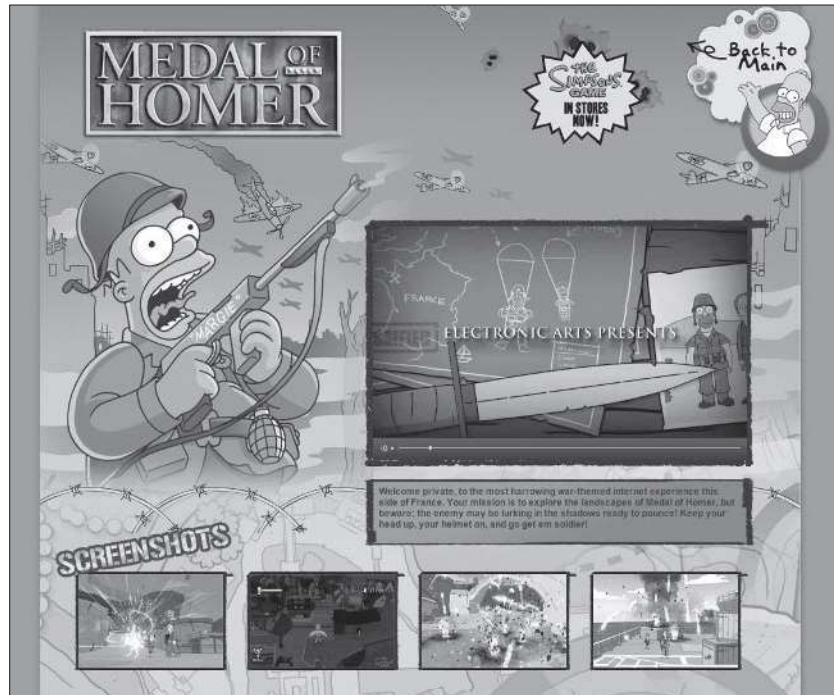


Fig. 1.2. An online ad for *The Simpsons Game* parodies the *Medal of Honor* franchise, complete with its nostalgic documentary-style cut sequences.

Nor are they alone in this regard, as *The Simpsons'* history, and many of its public meanings, has often relied heavily upon its paratexts. While above I suggest that the paratexts were viable parts of the text, at times the show's paratexts have done *more* to create the text as it is known than has the show itself. In particular, we might look at the furor that surrounded the show in its early years, directed primarily at Bart as irreverent youth, but one that centered on—and was in many ways ignited by—the mass popularity of t-shirts labeling Bart an “Underachiever,” while he responds, “And Proud of It, Man.” Many parents, teachers, principals, and pundits around the United States worried about children learning a slacker attitude from the t-shirt's sentiment, and as a result, many schools banned the t-shirts, and conservative rhetoric and complaints swarmed around the show.<sup>12</sup> This rhetoric completely failed to realize the sly message in the t-shirt: as Laurie Schulze notes, “Bart has managed to turn the tables on the system that's devalued him and say, ‘In your face. I'm not worthless,

insignificant, or stupid. If you want to label me an underachiever, I'll turn that into a badge of courage and say I'm proud of it."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, as paratext, the t-shirt created an image for many Americans of *The Simpsons* as a show of little to no values, intent on corrupting children's minds.

Then, in 1992, at the Republican National Convention, another paratext further sealed this image of the show, when President George H. W. Bush insisted that the United States needed more families like the Waltons and less like the Simpsons. Just as Bush's vice-president, Dan Quayle, had brought *Murphy Brown* (1988–98) into the culture wars between conservative and liberal America, Bush made *The Simpsons* a front in that war (as did First Lady Barbara Bush, who also shared her hatred for *The Simpsons* with the press). While *The Simpsons* was already infused with Matt Groening's anti-establishment beliefs, sly satiric edge, and irreverence, the t-shirt controversy and the Bush speech suddenly amplified these qualities. Now, to watch *The Simpsons* and/or to wear the t-shirt was to posit oneself proudly against Bush's neo-conservatism, while to dislike the show and/or to ban one's children from seeing it was to publicly declare one's allegiance to those ideals. The paratexts made the show considerably more controversial, edgy, and anti-establishment than many of its episodes made it; certainly, in England, where the t-shirt controversy never bubbled up to the same degree, and where Bush's comments received considerably less attention, the show was often seen as endearingly *pro*-family values, to the point that Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has often proudly and unflinchingly sided with Bart over Bush, claiming that *The Simpsons* is "on the side of the angels."<sup>14</sup>

We must also turn to *The Simpsons*' paratexts if we wish to understand its relationship to advertising and consumerism. As I have examined elsewhere, *The Simpsons* is one of the only commercial television programs in the United States to have consistently attacked American consumerism and capitalism.<sup>15</sup> It regularly savages advertising's ethics and style, and rarely involves product placement while doing so (thus avoiding the *Wayne's World* [1992] mock-yet-show strategy of parodying product placement), and many of its key figures serve allegorical functions with relation to consumerist capitalism—see, for example, Homer, the anti-hero who mindlessly buys anything he is told to; Krusty the Clown, the Ronald McDonald sell-out children's entertainer; Mr. Burns, the evil corporate overlord; and Lisa, the hero whose environmentalism and anti-consumerist ethos is all too rare on American television. So, were we to evaluate the show's relationship to and messages regarding advertising based solely

on the television program, we would likely judge it as resolutely leftist in sentiment. However, to do so would be to overlook the apparent hypocrisy that while it criticizes Krusty's lust to put his brand on everything, so too does *The Simpsons* brand at times appear to be on everything, and while it criticizes advertising, from the early use of Bart to advertise Butterfinger candy bars to countless other appearances in ads, *The Simpsons* has been complicit with more advertising than have most other shows on television.<sup>16</sup> Yet some of its other paratexts also criticize ads, as with *The Simpsons Hit and Run Game* (2003, discussed further in chapter 6), in which destroying ads rewards one with money and quicker travel time, and whose story is based around advertising run amok. Matthew McAllister notes *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening's commitment to privileging licenses that are self-conscious and mocking of their commercialism.<sup>17</sup> Thus, at the paratextual level, or, rather, between the level of the show and the level of the paratext, the text is deeply conflicted, complex, and contradictory when it comes to advertising, consumerism, and capitalism. Individual audience members will see it as either anti-consumerist, rampantly consumerist, or somewhere in between, based in large part on their own interaction with not only the television program, but also the paratexts. Once again, a central popular understanding, or understandings, of *The Simpsons* come to us in part through the meanings created by the paratexts, not just the show.

To understand why paratexts might be so powerful, we might reframe the issue as being one of time and place. In the United States, at the time of writing, *The Simpsons* plays on the FOX network, on Sundays at 8 p.m. when in season. Thus, the show itself is strictly contained by time and place, even if we factor in its syndication, and VHS, DVD, and DVR recordings and replays. However, *The Simpsons'* paratexts allow Springfield to exist well beyond those boundaries. Echoes of Springfield are in most shopping malls, throughout cyberspace, in countless souvenir stores worldwide (as Russian nesting dolls in the Czech Republic, as porcelain Homers in the night markets of Tijuana, and as soapstone carvings in Kenya, to list a few), in games and electronics stores, on newsstands, in comic stores and bookstores, in TV specials, lying on the floor of many a child's room, on many an adult collector's shelf, on people's chests and heads, and in countless other venues. Such is FOX's strategy of synergy: that people will not be able to escape Springfield. But when Springfield is seemingly everywhere, many people will only experience Springfield outside of the television show, and even many of those who regularly watch

the show at its scheduled time and place will also experience Springfield in countless other locales. In a very real sense, then, *The Simpsons* often exists in the paratexts, and those paratexts are fostering many of its meanings and its fans', non-fans', and anti-fans' reactions.

My task in this book, then, is to engage in a textual cartography of sorts, mapping texts and making sense of the complex social geography not only of Springfield, but of multiple other storyworlds. I will be examining the types of meanings created by paratexts, how they variously dovetail or clash with meanings from their related texts, and how paratexts give value and/or identity to texts. I will move through various types of paratexts, and various entertainment properties from film and television, offering both a theory of paratextuality and numerous illustrations of how it creates textual meaning.

### *An Overview of the Book*

Paratexts, this book argues, are a central part of media production and consumption processes. But precisely because of their centrality, no single book can do more than scratch the surface of their overall importance to a better understanding of media and culture. The present book focuses on paratexts as textual entities, emphasizing the relationship between paratexts, films, and television programs and audiences. But given their textual properties, and their prominent placement in consumption cultures, greater attention should also be paid to how paratexts are created and regulated. Taking the eye off the paratext, as media studies has often done, impoverishes our understanding of production and regulation cultures, and hence our ability to intervene meaningfully in these cultures. The present project, however, limits itself primarily to consideration of the paratext's impact on texts and on audiences, as a way of establishing why paratexts matter in the first place.

The book also focuses exclusively on television and film paratexts, though of course the music, videogame, online, and print industries have their own thriving examples. And while theater layout and branding, channel identification sequences, and the like may work as paratexts, and are thus worthy of attention,<sup>18</sup> they do so for multiple texts, whereas here I have chosen to stick to paratexts that "belong" to a particular show. The book's focus is also restricted mostly to popular and recent Hollywood film and television, in part because Hollywood produces so much paratextuality that it offers an embarrassment of riches for study, and thus



rich soil in which to plant a theory of paratexts that I hope can grow elsewhere too, and in part because many of these examples are more accessible than older, independent, or non-American products. I deliberately return to some texts (such as *Lost* [2004–] and *Lord of the Rings*) with different paratexts, so that readers can see various facets of their paratextual entourage, but I would like my readers to be able to fill in a fuller picture themselves, hence my choice to restrict most analysis to more prominent shows. By doing so, I do not mean to imply that paratexts are either a recent or an American phenomenon: Hollywood's current fondness for a franchise-based economy perhaps makes paratexts more voluminous today, but they have always existed and thrived, as they do outside Hollywood and America.

From the outset, it should also be noted that many of my examples are of paratexts attached to niche or fan properties, but the book is not about fan cultures per se. Rather, I argue that paratexts often construct some of the wider audience's scant encounters with the text, and thus while the *show* might be a niche or fan property, many of its paratexts (such as trailers, movie posters, hype, reviews, and audience commentary) are not only quintessentially mainstream, but also the mediators of niche and fan entities to both fans *and* the wider audience. Admittedly, not all will work this way. Paratexts are the greeters, gatekeepers, and cheerleaders for and of the media, filters through which we must pass on our way to "the text itself," but some will only greet certain audiences. Many fan-made paratexts, in particular, address only those within the fandom. Other paratexts will scare away potential audiences, as the semblance of being a "fan text" is often enough to detract some. In such cases, though, the paratexts create the text for the fleeing would-be audience, suggesting a "geek factor" or an undesired depth that may turn them away. In other instances, paratexts will insist that a text is more mainstream, less niche or fannish. However, regardless of whether the paratexts greet or turn audiences away, they often prove to be vital mediators of the niche or fan property to a wider audience: just as Bart Simpson t-shirts and Butterfinger ads constructed an idea of what *The Simpsons* was about, for non-fans arguably more than for fans, so too do paratexts regularly address the non-fan, even when attached to fan properties. As such, this book is neither about fan cultures nor not about them; it instead aims to make sense of the textual residue that often flows between all "audiences," fans, non-fans, and anti-fans.

Chapter 1 begins by defining the phrase "paratext" more precisely and situating it within other existing theories of what texts are, what work

they do, and how they do this work. The chapter establishes the textual importance of paratexts, examining the constitutive role they play in creating public understandings of the text. It also distinguishes between “entryway” and “in medias res” paratexts, the first being those that we encounter before watching a film or television program, the latter those that come to us in the process of watching or at least interpreting the film or program. All successive chapters examine a few central case studies, so that the depths of paratexts’ meanings, and of audiences’ interactions with them, can be examined up close. However, throughout chapter 1, in order to set up exactly why paratextual study might be necessary in the first place, I offer a wide variety of examples from film and television and from existing scholarship that further excavates the importance of paratexts.

Chapter 2 offers several examples of how paratexts work as gateways into the text, establishing meanings and frames for decoding before the audience member has even encountered the film or television program. The iconic examples here are movie posters, trailers, and advertising campaigns that surround films and television programs, not only encouraging us to watch the shows, but also establishing the frames through which we “should” interpret and enjoy the shows. Through examining first several movie posters, and then the promotional campaign in New York City for ABC’s *Six Degrees* (2006–7) and its official website, I argue that hype can determine genre, gender, theme, style, and relevant intertexts, thereby in part creating the show as a meaningful entity for “viewers” even before they become viewers, or even if they never become viewers. I then turn to trailers, examining the starkly different trailers for Atom Egoyan’s film *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997)—one American, one Canadian—and arguing that the difference resulted in the sale of, effectively, two different films. Finally, I maintain an interest in paratexts’ abilities to create “proper interpretations” that audience members are encouraged to adopt, by discussing television opening credit sequences and their roles as both mini-trailers for new viewers and ritualistic anthems for returning viewers. Ultimately, chapter 2 takes several examples of producer-created paratexts to study the degree to which producers can proffer interpretations and readings of their texts even before they begin.

If chapter 2 is about how paratexts create meaning for texts, chapter 3 is about how they create scripts of value for them. In particular, the chapter examines how author, aura, and artistry—all qualities often said to be lacking in the age of big-budget blockbusters and for-profit art—are hailed and awarded to texts by their paratexts. I begin by examining how

reality makeover shows' promise to serve society is given weight by their webpages' attempts to code them as philanthropic, community-generating programs with considerable civic value. Much of the rest of the chapter examines the particularly important role that DVDs play in giving value to fictional texts through their bonus materials such as commentary tracks, making-of documentaries, special effects galleries, and alternate scenes. I turn to the prominent example of the Platinum Series Special Extended Edition DVDs of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, a four-disc set replete with various bonus materials. I argue that these materials richly layer the text, paralleling the cast and crew's travails in making the film to the epic campaign against the ultimate evil depicted in the tale. As a result of these materials, the DVDs posit the film as above the mundane products of a commercial industry, and as a crowning aesthetic achievement that represents an "older," nobler form of art. Part and parcel of this process, too, is the lionization of Peter Jackson, the film's director. Thus, I will also examine the role of DVDs, both *The Two Towers* and numerous DVDs for television shows, and of podcasts and other sources of authorial interviews, in attempting to resurrect the figure of the author that literary and cultural studies theory has long thought dead. My argument is not that television or film have improved with DVDs and podcasts, but rather that the DVDs and podcasts repeatedly insist that their shows are better, becoming a key site for the construction of discourses of value.

Chapter 4 focuses both on how paratexts manage a broader system of intertextuality and on how grouped, sequenced, or otherwise related films and television programs can become paratexts themselves, their decoding processes so intricately intertwined with those of their related films or television programs that we might regard them as occurring under the long shadow of former texts. My first case study draws on work conducted with Bertha Chin into online would-be audiences' reactions to the *Lord of the Rings* films before they had even been made. Chin and I found not only enthusiastic discussion of the films, but actual early interpretation and evaluation of them, and thus this case study examines the degree to which their proposed frames for making sense of the films had been inherited from the *Lord of the Rings* books by J. R. R. Tolkien, and how audience discussion managed this system. Continuing the story, I then look at how the *Lord of the Rings* films, after release, became their own paratexts for would-be viewers of Peter Jackson's next outing, *King Kong* (2005), and for the adaptation of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (2005). Next I turn to *Batman Begins*

(2005) to see how the film's plot and casting seem to have been guided in large part by an awareness of the dark shadow cast over the Batman franchise by the previous Batman film and cinematic atrocity, *Batman and Robin* (1997). Finally, I turn from films as paratexts to the author as paratext, examining online postings from the early days of television producer J. J. Abrams's *Lost* and *Six Degrees* that suggested fans were using Abrams's previous work and their constructions of him as artist to make sense of and predict plot threads in his new work. Through these various examples, chapter 4 aims to analyze how dependent all interpretation is on various other films and television programs, on audiences' varying levels of familiarity with those films and programs, and on how the paratext of audience discussion circulates and coordinates intertexts.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 all take products of the entertainment industry as their topic. Given Hollywood's huge coffers, its intense need to make each of its films and programs stand out in a media-saturated environment, and its success in turning many paratexts into revenue-generators, a large proportion of the paratextual world is commissioned into existence by Hollywood. However, it would be a grave mistake to consider audience-created paratexts as lesser in potential importance or complexity. Thus chapter 5 studies numerous examples of audience-created paratexts. Much has been written elsewhere on how fan fiction and mash-ups can be used to contest the "official" meanings proffered by Hollywood, but the chapter's first two case studies instead examine how paratexts can be used to intensify certain textual experiences, less working against the industry's version of the text than cutting a personalized path through it. First, I draw on work conducted with Jason Mittell into *Lost* fans' consumption of spoilers (advance information of what will happen in the plot) to study how this consumption shows a move away from the strict plot-based mode of engaging with *Lost* and toward a more puzzle-, character-, and/or experiential-based mode. Second, I examine "vids," fan-made videos that splice and edit together multiple scenes from a film or television program with a piece of music. While, again, vids have been studied within the framework of fan rebellion and critique, this section instead concentrates on how character-study and relationship vids can be used to examine a particular character's or theme's path through an otherwise busy film or program, thereby allowing time for the viewer to pause and reflect. Finally, I turn to press reviews as audience-made paratexts that do battle with Hollywood's own paratexts, usually before the film or television program has even aired, and I focus particularly on reviews of NBC's *Friday*

*Night Lights* (2006–) as an example of a show whose reviewers engaged in a concerted effort to reframe NBC's own publicity for the show. This final example grows from a discussion of the ways in which various audiences have differing levels of power and privilege to frame or reframe films or programs.

Many of the book's examples are of paratexts that have been appended to a text, either before or after the fact, but in chapter 6 my interests turn to paratexts that more directly challenge the binary of paratext and film or program, forcing us to wonder exactly what is "primary" or "the original" and what is "secondary" or "peripheral." *Star Wars* action figures feature first, as I examine their significant imprint and impact on the films, and on both public and fan understandings of them. Whereas cultural critics have long seen licensed toys as a particularly egregious instance of mindless and manipulative consumerism, I argue that the toys became a viable source of the text, framing and intensifying many of the film's themes, while also allowing the *Star Wars* universe to be inhabitable. This concern with making storyworlds accessible and inhabitable then extends into a discussion of various forms of film- or television show-related games that allow players into a text to explore, sample, and/or create parts of the storyworld interactively. In particular, I explore licensed videogames that place the player in control of an avatar situated in the storyworld, enabling a limited set of interactions with characters and places within the broader text. I also examine an increasingly popular form of game, the alternate reality game (ARG), focusing on the *What Happened in Piedmont?* ARG that preceded the broadcast of A&E's *Andromeda Strain* (2008), and that opened up significant room for audiences to learn about, engage with, and "taste" the storyworld independent of the mini-series.

Finally, since the book argues that paratexts create texts, in the Conclusion I discuss examples of the entertainment industry ignoring this logic and producing facile paratexts of little to no value or intelligence, or, alternately, embracing this logic and surrendering parts of their texts to their paratexts, often producing fascinating and significant results. Drawing from numerous interviews with paratext creators, conducted by myself and others, I briefly address the practical issue of how film and television creators can more meaningfully integrate paratexts into the storytelling and production process. To be of value or impact, and to be worthy of close study, paratexts need not be integrated, but by ending with a discussion of integration, I hope to highlight several key issues involved in the production and study of paratexts and their worlds.

Ultimately, through the book's multiple examples and through its theoretical wrestling with concepts of paratextuality and textuality, I hope to illustrate how vibrant and vital a contribution to meaning-making and the development of storyworlds paratexts offer us. While paratexts can at times be seen as annoyances, as "mere" advertising, and/or as only so much hype, they are often as complex and intricate, and as generative of meanings and engagement, as are the films and television shows that they orbit and establish. To limit our understanding of film and television to films and television shows themselves risks drafting an insufficient picture not only of any given text, but also of the processes of production and reception attached to that text. Paratextual study, by contrast, promises a more richly contextualized and nuanced image of how texts work, how and why they are made, and how and why they are watched, interpreted, and enjoyed.