

CRIPPLES AND BASTARDS AND BROKEN THINGS:
MASCULINITY, VIOLENCE, AND ABJECTION IN A *SONG*
OF ICE AND FIRE AND *GAME OF THRONES*

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January 2019

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Of the Australian National University

Declaration of Originality

This work has not previously been accepted for any degree and is the result of my own independent investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references.

An earlier version of the chapter “The Bear and the Maiden Fair” is published in *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies*.

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Abstract

Normative models of masculinity that are based upon violence, domination, and invulnerability are recognised by scholars as damaging for the individuals who enact them and for the societies in which they are enacted. In both the “real” world and the cultural texts that reflect and shape it, this narrow definition of masculinity is debated, reinforced, and/or critiqued. Challenges to normative masculinity are often identified in literary representations; but fantasy fiction seldom features in these analyses, despite the genre’s ongoing engagement with masculine characters, themes, and images. The genre’s long history of subversive content and ability to (re)imagine the world without the constraints of realism also suggest its capacity to expand conceptions of masculinity. Using a theoretical framework based primarily on Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity and subversion, Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, and Barbara Creed’s notion of the monstrous feminine, I argue that, in George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996—) and its television adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011—), when masculine characters use violence to gain power at others’ expense, they are positioned as monstrous and are shown to be part of a destructive cycle, whereas when these characters use violence in ways that makes the world a more liveable place, they are able to maintain their constitutive borders and proliferate their ideas and practices through queer kinship. Illegal and excessive forms of violence used by normatively masculine characters, such as torture and rape, are critiqued through the same textual devices as legal and legitimate sovereign violence when they are individualistic and reproduce existing power structures. In contrast, female, disabled, and queer masculine characters make violence a visibly masculine act and use it in ways that are coded it as heroic or horrifying, depending on whether it empowers or disempowers others. The relationship between masculinity and violence is negotiated in the Martinverse in complex ways, and I demonstrate that the fantasy genre and its conventions have unique potential for presenting alternative masculine discourses and queer kinships that interrogate, refuse, or work the weaknesses in patriarchal logics of reproduction and repetition that maintain a lack of opportunity for certain subjects unable to access these privileged power dynamics.

Acknowledgements

This project was generously funded by an Australian Government Research Training Program Stipend Scholarship, and additional funding for presenting earlier chapters of the thesis at international conferences was provided by an ANU Vice Chancellor's HDR Travel Grant and a Madonna and Michael Marsden International Travel Grant.

Warm thanks to my primary supervisor, Katherine Bode, for working tirelessly to make this project better than I could have imagined; for supporting me as an academic; and for being incredibly patient, especially with my pet words.

I would also like to thank Katie Sutton and Kate Mitchell, for the time and effort they have contributed to supervising this project. I am particularly grateful to Katie for stepping in as my primary supervisor in my second year and for providing ongoing encouragement.

Special thanks to my friend and colleague Chuckie Palmer-Patel for our long email conversations about fantasy, for kindly volunteering to read several chapters of this thesis, and for giving sound and encouraging editorial advice.

I owe a very important debt to Penny Holliday and Vivienne Muller, without whose passion for masculinity studies this project would never have been conceived; and to Jason Sternberg, whose enthusiastic support enabled me to embark on this quest.

Thank you to the PhD Coffee Coven, especially Lauren Sadow, Katie Cox, Ally Wolfe, and Kate Oakes. This thesis would not exist if not for your support and our combined love for stickers, cheese, and wine.

Big thanks to my very patient family, especially my Dad, who tells me he's proud of me every single week, without fail.

Finally, I am indebted to my best friend, Shane Murphy, who saw and valued this project long before it began, and who has kept it going with his unwavering support.

Abbreviations

For ease of reading, I make the following abbreviations in my in-text references to the novels of *A Song of Ice and Fire*:

A Game of Thrones (GoT)

A Storm of Swords 1: Steel and Snow (SoS1)

A Storm of Swords 2: Blood and Gold (SoS2)

A Feast for Crows (FfC)

A Dance with Dragons (DwD)

Additionally, when I refer to *Game of Thrones* episodes in-text, I abbreviate as follows:

Season number, episode number “Title” (S1E1 “Winter is Coming”)

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Introduction

George R. R. Martin's fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996—) and its television adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) are among the most popular cultural texts of the twenty-first century so far, but they are also among the most violent. A recent study on character deaths in the series by Reidar Lystad and Benjamin Brown (2018) reveals that of the major characters, over half die by the end of season seven, and of those deaths 63% are caused by assault and 24.4% are caused by injuries sustained during warfare. Male characters make up a substantial 71.8% of these violent deaths and although Lystad and Brown do not comment on the perpetrators of the violence, it is likely that most are men.

The connection between violence and masculinity is not limited to *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* but has been demonstrated in the real world and in cultural texts. Sociological studies of masculinity have, for example, examined sport (Bairner 1999; Hust 2005; Lilleaas 2007; Messner 1990; Trujillo 1991), the media (Arellano 2015; Forter 2000; Hatty 2000), domestic violence (Crenshaw 1991; Mansley 2009; Taylor, Nair and Braham 2013), school shootings (Leary et al. 2003; Messerschmidt 2000), and the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and violence (Connell 2002; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001; Hearn 2004; Trujillo 1991). While different in scope and focus, these studies concur that violence is associated with normative masculine discourses in the real world, and the same is true of popular culture.

In relation to fictional masculinities, Anne Campbell (1994, 30-31) argues that “it is males who both use and receive violence” and “because it is so tightly tied to masculinity, aggression becomes central to the notion of manhood.” Campbell made this argument over two decades ago, yet it remains as relevant today as then, even as the relationship between masculinity and violence in literature has arguably been more explicitly interrogated. For instance, Boon (2003, 267) argues that novels such as Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) explore “a post-war cultural politic that posits violence as the exclusive domain of men and brands male violence as the monolithic evil overshadowing American culture.” The direct discussion of masculinity and violence that Boon identifies reflects the ongoing link between violence and masculinity in popular fiction, whether that link takes the form of critical interrogation or endorsement of what I call patriarchal violence. I use this term to refer to violence that is used to empower the self at the expense of others and maintains

the system of patriarchal reproduction. I also acknowledge the existence of many other types of violence that make the world a more liveable place, such as chivalric violence.

Game of Thrones and *A Song of Ice and Fire* reflect and shape the dialectic between masculinity and interpersonal violence, and their high levels of violence are often critiqued. For many of the series' detractors, the violence is gratuitous (Hughes 2015). *Game of Thrones* has been referred to as engaging in "the glorification of violence for violence's sake" (Morrison in Thistleton 2015) and many public figures have boycotted the series because of its depictions of sexual violence (Lee 2015). Academic scholarship has generally echoed this assessment, particularly in relation to sexual and sexualised violence: for instance, Debra Ferreday (2015) claims that the series reproduces rape culture even as the online fandom resists normalising sexual violence. Many scholars and critics reject the series because of its violence, but they see its violence in simple terms, stemming from an assumption that violence in cultural texts leads to real world violence, a notion that is disputed by media violence scholars (Barker and Petley 2002; Carter and Weaver 2003; Docherty 1990). In Martin's series, violence is far more complicated than its detractors suggest.

I argue that when masculine characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* use violence against less powerful subjects, they are linked to monstrous imagery and are shown to be part of a destructive cycle, whereas characters who use violence to empower others are able to maintain their constitutive borders and to reproduce their knowledges and beliefs through a system of queer kinship. This thesis will contribute to a growing body of discussion on the ways in which popular texts can shape, mediate, and manifest gender discourses in the real world (Goodlad, Kaganovsky and Rushing 2013; McRobbie 2004, 2009; Willis 2016), and more particularly, how they can be seen to present subversive and conservative ideas as well as ambiguity and ambivalence (Berlant 2008; Hall 2006; Radway 1984). In the process, it will also extend the growing body of work on the masculine body and its capacity for violence in non-realist fiction (Askey 2018; Balay 2010; Bealer 2011; Capstick 2015; Evans 2018; Lindén 2013; Moore 2012; Mukherjea 2011; Woloshyn, Taber and Lane 2013).

This thesis performs the first substantial analysis of masculinities as they are enacted and deconstructed in this major popular series and develops a critical framework for analysing two types of enactment of violence in this series, their relation to the fantasy genre's promises, and the embodied ways in which characters' monstrosity is expressed. To this end, I also break new critical ground by considering characters' violence in relation to their overall character arc, and how it leads

to either a destructive cycle or a proliferation of their ideals and aspirations through queer reproduction, depending on whether the violence empowers others or reinforces patriarchal structures. My focus on masculine characters' entire story arc and their (mis)uses of violence and bodily autonomy builds on the work of scholars such as Charul Patel (2014) and Alyssa Rosenberg (2012), who argue that masculine characters become linked to the monstrous because of their violence.

Masculinity is by no means the only relevant lens for exploring Martin's series; other vectors of power, particularly race and class, are continually negotiated in the narrative. The representation of non-white characters such as the Dothraki, a dark-skinned nomadic people, has been linked to an ongoing disdain for racial others within the fantasy genre (Young 2015b). While class issues have seldom been the focus for scholarship on the series, Valerie Estelle Frankel (2014) notes that the series' perspective characters are overwhelmingly high-class, indicating that the series privileges classist ideologies. As Butler (1993, 18) argues, I recognise with respect to *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* that "these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation." Despite the undoubted importance of considering this deployment, for reasons of scope I focus on how masculinity and violence are negotiated in the series, including by normative male bodies (chapter two and three) as well as by female (chapter four), disabled (chapter five), and queer (conclusion) characters.

Throughout the thesis I refer to the books and television show as "the Martinverse." Yet the entire universe is considerably larger, and includes video games,¹ graphic novels, wikis, internet memes, companion texts—including *The World of Ice and Fire* (2014), *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* (2015), and most recently, *Fire and Blood* (2018)—a spectacular amount of fan art² and fan fiction, online fan forums and websites³, merchandise, and events like "Fire and Ice Con: A *Game of Thrones* Fan Convention." Martin has also written a considerable amount of work outside of this universe, including short story collections and science fiction, horror, and mystery novels. I focus on the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels and the *Game of Thrones* television show to the exclusion of these other

¹ See Schröter (2016) for a discussion of the representation of women and femininity in different *Game of Thrones* video games.

² See Howe (2015) for an analysis of the way that Daenerys Targaryen, Jon Snow, and Cersei Lannister are depicted in fan art based on *Game of Thrones* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

³ See Helen Young (2014b) for a racial analysis of the main fan site, Westeros.org.

aspects of the Martinverse first and foremost for reasons of scope. The novels and television series are the two main texts around which the rest of the Martinverse is oriented, and hence provide a clear starting place for analysing masculinity in this narrative world. Given that this project is the first in-depth analysis of masculinity in the series, I also felt it appropriate to focus on the two most stable texts in this group and the two with the largest audiences. (While *A Song of Fire and Ice* has a far smaller audience than *A Game of Thrones*, the former is seen as the progenitor for the rest of the universe, even as it now lags behind these other forms.) In other words, the novels and television series form the foundation of the Martinverse and so too form the foundation for analysing its depiction of masculinity and violence in this fictional world.

Even excluding these proliferations, my corpus remains large. *A Song of Ice and Fire* is at the time of writing comprised of five novels: *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), and *A Dance with Dragons* (2011), two of which are physically so large that they are sold in two volumes in some countries. Similarly, *Game of Thrones* spans seven seasons of roughly ten hour-length episodes, and a final eighth season will commence in April 2019. Two more books are planned, *The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*, though no release dates have been announced. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the texts as adaptations, I follow Linda Hutcheon (2012) in viewing each text as its own distinct entity with its own value. I recognise that the television series is derived from the novels but this does not mean that it is derivative, and that the relationship between the two texts becomes increasingly blurry as the television series outpaces the narrative in the novels but Martin plays a central role in both. I work with this blurriness throughout the thesis by using televisual evidence from *Game of Thrones* and textual evidence from *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Because of the media specificity of the different forms and the different points in the narrative that each text has reached, there are some types of evidence that cannot be placed in dialogue. When this occurs, I privilege whichever text is more relevant to my analysis of masculinity and violence in the series.

The books are chronological, although each chapter is told from the point of view of a specific character. Perspective chapters are almost always given to the series' most important characters, with occasional chapters from minor characters. This format allows Martin to show different ways of looking at the world, as well as vastly different physical locations, while retaining an omniscience third person narration. The series contains multiple narrators and hundreds of named characters, but it privileges three families: the Starks, the Lannisters, and the Targaryens.

Each family is involved in one of three central plotlines, although there is considerable overlap. The first concerns Daenerys Targaryen, the dispossessed leader of Westeros and Mother of Dragons, and her quest to reclaim the Iron Throne; the second focuses on the events in Westeros's political capital, King's Landing, and the intrigues of court; and the third is an army of the living dead, known as "wights," "Others," and "white walkers," who are gaining numbers in the icy north of Westeros with the intent of bringing about an apocalyptic everlasting winter. These plotlines are loosely based on real history, especially the War of the Roses (Larrington 2016). The narrative is set in pseudo-medieval Westeros (the fictionalised West) and Essos (the fictionalised East).

The popularity of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* reflects a broader renaissance in non-realist genres, namely fantasy, paranormal romance, and superheroes, in the last three decades. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the creation of two highly popular fantasy texts: J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels and their film adaptations, and Peter Jackson's adaptation of J.R.R Tolkien's seminal fantasy epic, *The Lord of the Rings*. Both the first *Harry Potter* film and the first *Lord of the Rings* film were released in 2001, the same year as the terrorist attacks on New York known as "9/11." Frances Pheasant-Kelly (2016) and Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla (2010) argue that the disaster and the ensuing debates around terrorism and security led to an unprecedented interest in the fantasy genre, with its epic battles between good and evil taking on new relevance. Since 2001 the fantasy genre has dominated the United States and worldwide box-office in terms of gross earnings (Durks 2019a, 2019b), but it has also changed dramatically. Here and throughout the thesis I define the fantasy genre and its texts as those that explicitly contain magic (see Mobley 1974). Although the notion of realism is, of course, complex (Morris 2004), fantasy fiction often makes use of realist frameworks, such as gravity, time, and the pseudo-medieval feudal system (Wilkins 2011). However, unlike the genre of magic realism, fantasy fiction actively discourages the idea that it is presenting a realist view of the world through para-texts such as maps (Ekman 2013) and by privileging the fictional creation of new worlds, or world-building, more than characterisation and plot (Wilkins 2016). In this sense, magic unifies the diverse spread of cultural products that I view as fantasy, but also leaves room for openness. Jes Battis (2007, 9) argues that fantasy is "a fraught term, a kind of position or gesture that seems just as open ended as "queer." The genre's openness—and its queer potential—have been taken up by authors who push its generic boundaries, including authors such as Martin.

As a long-time fantasy author and script writer,⁴ Martin has an expert grasp of fantasy genre expectations and skillfully revises them in unexpected ways; for example, many fans were shocked by the death of Eddard Stark in the first book/season because he was established as a central protagonist, a character who is not usually killed this early in a fantasy series. While there are no in-depth studies on Martin's willingness to diverge from genre norms in his fiction, many critics have noted it in passing (Battis and Johnston 2015, 2; Lowder 2012, xvi). Fittingly, given the importance of magic to fantasy, Martin compares the slow increase of magic in his series to cooking "the crab in the pot": "with each book that I write, the level of magic rises a little. It's a gradual introduction. [...] you put him in cold water and you gradually heat it up – the hot water is fantasy and magic, and the crab is the audience" (Itzkoff 2011). The strategy has been extremely successful with audiences, drawing many dedicated fantasy fans as well as those who do not usually enjoy the genre.

A Song of Ice and Fire met with moderate critical success with the release of the first few books, all of which are published by Voyager, a fantasy and science fiction oriented imprint of Harper Collins Publishers. This reception changed when the series was adapted for television as *Game of Thrones* by D. B. Weiss and David Benioff. Conversations between the producers and Martin began in 2006, and the television series premiered on Home Box Office (HBO) in 2011 to widespread popular and critical acclaim. As the series develops, Martin continues to play a major role in the show's creation as a scriptwriter and co-executive producer. The viewership of the season seven finale was twelve million, with an estimated thirty million streaming the episode after its initial release. Yet the viewership is likely larger, as the series has been the most pirated television show since 2012; the premiere episode of season seven was pirated almost 100 million times (Musso 2017). Alongside these staggering numbers, *Game of Thrones* has also been well received by critics. The series has won the most Emmys of any television drama (Nickalls 2016), and scores extremely highly (over 90%) with review websites such as Rotten Tomatoes and Metacritic. *Game of Thrones*' popularity has in turn attracted an even large readership to the novels (see Gjelsvik and Schubart 2016, 3-4); those published after the television adaptation have each made the *New York Times Bestseller List* (Orr 2011).

⁴ Martin has a master's degree in journalism and worked for many years in this profession alongside publishing short stories. He later became a story editor, consultant, and producer for television series such as *The Twilight Zone* and *Beauty and the Beast*. However, he found the television genre too restricting at that time and returned to writing fiction.

Game of Thrones has been overtaking aspects of the narrative in *A Song of Ice and Fire* since its fourth season, and as of season six it has completely surpassed the novels. But neither iteration of the series has reached its conclusion, meaning that the arguments I make are solely in relation to the book series as it stands at the end of *A Dance with Dragons*, and the end of season seven of the television series. I have chosen not to include the teaser chapters from *The Winds of Winter* because they are still in flux; their placement in the novel, and relation to other chapters, is yet to be determined. By contrast, the published novels and seasons in the saga are complete in and of themselves. This is not to say that the story cannot change with revelations and re-readings, but rather that, as one of the characters in *Game of Thrones* says of his visions of the past, “the ink is dry” (S6E3 “Oathbreaker”).

Existing research on the Martinverse has tended to focus on femininity, most prominently in the publications *Women of Ice and Fire* (Gjelsvik and Schubart 2016) and *Women in Game of Thrones* (Frankel 2014). The latter overviews the series’ engagement with controversial issues, such as sex and female nudity, and examines its engagement with archetypes, tropes, history, and gender roles. *Women of Ice and Fire* continues this analysis with chapters exploring adaptation, rape, video games, genre, motherhood, and fan recaps, among other things. This research has provided valuable insights into how dominant ideas about femininity and the female body are reproduced and re-examined in the series. But their publication also emphasises the relative lack of attention to masculinity and the male body in the Martinverse, which is a common phenomenon in a range of contexts because of the supposed universality and invisibility of the male body (Drummond 2011; Thomas 1996).

While there has been no substantial research on masculinity in the Martinverse, several scholars have recognised the importance of masculinity to the series, and its critique of patriarchal masculine discourses. Stephanie Genz (2016, 248) observes that “these sudden male deaths also underline that here, masculinity is in crisis, and, more broadly, that patriarchy—as a political, cultural, economic, and sexual/sexist institution and discourse—is as damaging and dangerous for men, as it is for women.” As a result of this treatment of male characters, Genz argues that the series reveals “the fragility, hollowness, and vulnerability of a paternalistic gender order in which male rule is based on acts of gendered strength—and, therefore, at least to some extent, performative” (248). This reference to the performative “acts of strength” and their connection to weaknesses within patriarchal masculinity are, as I will show, continually emphasised in ways that highlight the inability

of patriarchal violence to produce anything but destruction. In the same vein, Joseph Young (2017, 48) notes that when a warrior “dismisses a minor injury as ‘only a new scar to boast of to my son’ (Game 647) [...] the wound festers and reduces him to a flyblown wreck who will not be telling his son anything” (679). The warrior’s patriarchal rejection of his own vulnerability ironically stops him from entering the system of reproduction, whether of his own body through heterosexual kinship or through teaching his son to adopt this masculine performance. While neither Young nor Genz analyse masculinity in depth, they highlight the complex critiques of patriarchal masculinity within the Martinverse, which I will elaborate in relation to violence. The series’ narrative structure and focus on “cripples and bastards and broken things” (GoT 237) forces the audience to consider a diverse set of ideas and practices relating to power and gender, and thereby constitutes a textual space in which destructive masculine norms are often critiqued and non-normative masculinities are foregrounded.

In exploring both types of masculine performance, I consider how both patriarchy and genre represent important structures in the Martinverse. Both are revealed as contingent and tenuous through denaturalisation. While drag performances serve this function in Judith Butler’s gender theory (explored in chapter one), in the Martinverse patriarchy is exposed as unnatural by association with repeated performances and circuitous narrative structures, whereas genre is revealed as unnatural through the over-burdening of certain textual moments with contradictory genre conventions. In the series, two types of high fantasy fiction conventions are primarily employed to create this tension, which I refer to as classical and postmodern. I explore this distinction in more depth in chapter one, but it is worth mentioning here that I understand classical fantasy and postmodern fantasy as two ends of a spectrum rather than dichotomous categories. Classical fantasy promise a conflict between good and evil, romanticism, chivalry, and a happy ending, among other things. In other words, it is a type of fantasy that stems from an urtext, *The Lord of the Rings*, and which remains faithful to the series’ logics. In contrast, postmodern fantasy fictions embrace moral ambiguity and “gritty” (Young 2015b) material realities, are playful with genre conventions and content, and must often be assembled by the reader from numerous characters’ perspectives. The Martinverse is an ostensibly postmodern narrative and employs all of the aforementioned features, but some scenes are also narrated in ways that cite classical fantasy. The conventions contradict one another, and tension is placed on the narrative. I argue that this tension, like drag performances in Butler’s gender theories, can be used in an ideological project, which I explore in this thesis in

relation to the subversion of patriarchal violence. Over the course of five chapters, I explore the ways in which *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* complicate the relationship between masculinity and violence through genre, embodiment, and abjection.

In chapter one I contextualise my arguments in relation to existing scholarly debates around ideology, genre fiction and fantasy, on the one hand, and gender and abjection on the other. One of my main arguments is that violence in the Martinverse is more complex than has been previously acknowledged, and I situate this complexity within larger debates around ideological ambivalence in genre fiction. These studies argue that it is necessary to place gendered acts and genre conventions in dialogue with gendered structures and genres, in order to account for the relationship between genre, ideology, and ambivalence. However, existing work in fantasy studies has focused on either the representation of specific ideologies or fantasy structures, and is complicated by definitional issues. To chart a path through these issues, I suggest a new way of defining high fantasy—as a spectrum from classical to postmodern—and argue that while Martin’s series is postmodern, it occasionally makes use of classical genre conventions. Where this occurs, the scenes overburden the narrative and lead to subversive tension. Such subversion is focused on gender, and enactments of masculinity in particular. Although it might seem the obvious framework to use, masculinity studies is less useful for an analysis of the Martinverse than Butler’s poststructuralist gender theory, a point I make by analysing the two existing short studies on masculinity in *Game of Thrones*, each of which makes use of one of these approaches. As I demonstrate, the emphasis on structures and typologies in masculinity studies offers a less effective basis on which to explore the frequent collapsing of categories and positions in this series.

In contrast, because Butler’s performativity theory focuses on how specific enactments relate to broader social structures, it offers a way of analysing the prevalent ideological ambivalence and subversive dynamics in postmodern fantasy texts, including *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*. For Butler, subversion occurs from within the law, when accepted ideas are turned against themselves for political effect, a framework I employ to show how, in the Martinverse, the law is thematised and personified through characters who repeat patriarchal violence in life but are later killed in ways that echo their own violence. Yet Butler has been critiqued for focusing on the discursive body rather than the material one, and bodies (bloodied, mutilated, and permeable) are a prominent feature of the series. To attend to this feature of the texts, while remaining focused on the relationship between enactments, structures, and the mechanisms of subversion employed in the

Martinverse, I use Butler's theory in relation to body-centred psychoanalytic theories: Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject (1982) and Barbara Creed's notion of the "monstrous feminine" (1993). The former explores the subject's violent rejection of acts, other people, and parts of the self that represent an interruption of personhood, structure, or law, while the latter posits a set of images that are employed in the popular horror film and are established as images of the female reproductive system that must be violently rejected. I propose that moments of abjection are the mechanism by which the Martinverse signals a reversal akin to the one that Butler discusses in relation to gender subversion: the closed, classical male body that supports the symbolic order is opened up with both positive and negative consequences. By combining attention to generic forms and gendered performances, I present a view of the law as both genre and patriarchy. I explore how overburdening the text with classical and postmodern fantasy and offering circuitous and repeated presentations of the same gender performance function to subvert destructive masculinities and to instead offer enactments of masculinity that make the world a more livable place.

The main body of the thesis is split in two parts, the first of which focuses on normative masculine characters and their relation to patriarchal violence, and the second of which investigates non-normative masculinities and how they repeat and rework patriarchal society by using violence to empower others. The difference is by no means absolute: there are characters I discuss in the second part of the thesis that replicate some of the practices of those in the first, and some characters I investigate in terms of their patriarchal violence in the first part of the thesis are later refigured by their performances of violence in the second. However, the distinction enables more emphasis upon the moments when characters turn the law against itself, and the effects of this reversal.

The first part of the thesis charts the multiple ways in which patriarchal violence in the Martinverse is presented as abject and monstrous when it is used to aid the individual perpetrating the violence and occurs at the expense of others. Regardless of its immediate outcomes, violence proves to be part of a destructive cycle where the violent acts that characters use in life are twisted and turned against them as they die or come into contact with the abject and are consequently unable to reproduce the paternal law. The second half of the thesis shifts from masculinity and violence enacted by normative male bodies to consider how female and disabled masculine characters also deploy violence. I argue that even when masculinity is separated from male bodies, patriarchal violence leads characters to become monstrous; but this separation also opens up space for exploration of enactments of masculinity that break free from the destructive loop I have

charted, and thus to explore openness to the Other and alternative kinship bonds outside of the repetition of an alleged original that the patriarchy/symbolic law demands.

Chapter two, “Some Knights are Dark and Full of Terror,” explores some of the Martinverse’s most monstrous characters—Joffrey Baratheon, Gregor Clegane, and Ramsay Bolton—who are explicitly referred to as “evil” because of their violence. I argue that such references draw on moral binaries (good and evil) derived from classical fantasy promises, overburdening the scene and creating narrative tension around each character’s gendered and sexualised violence. Accordingly, although this violence is enacted within the terms of a particular law that is reflective of social norms (patriarchy), another law (genre) denaturalises the violence and strains the narrative at moments when the men are critiqued through imagery that connotes the abject and the monstrous feminine. I build on Kristeva and Creed to illuminate these images and their links to what I have termed, adapting Creed’s term, “the queer monstrous feminine.” The queer, like the feminine, becomes a monstrous mode: that is, not monstrous in and of itself, but according to heteropatriarchal culture. Within this dynamic the queer monstrous feminine represents a subversive reversal as masculine characters use violence to dominate women, but it is turned against them as their own bodies become feminine and queer while they use violence, and while they are killed in ways that highlight their inability to reproduce the symbolic order.

The problematisation of patriarchal violence is not contained to “bad” male characters and their use of violence. In chapter three, “The Sovereign Sword,” I show that, even when ostensibly noble characters use legal and legitimate sovereign violence, the repetition fails because it relies upon systems that are both patriarchal and heteronormative, that is, those that disempower women and queer subjects. As in the critique of violence by the monstrous male characters discussed in chapter two, sovereign violence is criticised and rejected in two ways: through abjection, which gives rise to feelings of revulsion, and through narrative circularity, which demonstrates that patriarchal violence only ever leads to a destructive cycle. The repetition of fantasy promises is central to this process. Each act of sovereign violence is presented in a way that highlights the citation of those that came before it. However, this citation creates tension in the narrative because sovereign violence is informed by classical fantasy promises. The tension that the generic overburdening produces is linked to the proliferation of sovereign violence, wherein the act leads to failed repetitions that disassemble the structures they are intended to support: a firm and closed male body and a prosperous kingdom. I interpret these failed repetitions as moments in which the male symbolic

order and the law of the land are revealed to be fragile. Masculine characters may use sovereign violence to reinforce their own power and disempower others, but the repetitive structures in the texts show that these acts are part of a disastrous pattern that harms the perpetrators as much as their victims.

Chapter four, “The Bear and the Maiden Fair,” considers masculine female characters, specifically the Queen (and later Queen Regent) Cersei Lannister and the knight Brienne of Tarth. Both characters cite patriarchal figures in their performative acts of violence, and these disclose the women’s violence as masculine, although it is practiced in different ways. Cersei uses violence to dominate others and maintain her power as Queen, and her repetition of patriarchal violence is critiqued via abjection and monstrosity, including with respect to the bastardised form of queer kinship into which she enters with Gregor Clegane. Rather than using this bond to contest the patriarchal power structures that limit her agency, Cersei uses violence to empower herself by harming others and for this reason her bond with Gregor is made monstrous: both characters are linked with the monstrous feminine and disrupt accepted ideas about identity, bodies, and subjectivity. In contrast, Brienne uses violence in aid of her chivalric efforts to protect others, and when she is faced with the abject, it is her attempts to empower others that allows her to maintain her constitutive borders. From this position Brienne is able to pass her chivalrous violence, and her knowledge and identity practices, onto other knights through queer kinship without being trapped inside a destructive loop.

Chapter five, “Knights of the Mind,” turns to disabled masculine characters who represent non-normative forms of embodiment: sites for imagining a masculinity that can be separated from patriarchal society. As in the female masculinity chapter, this separation does not necessarily lead to a complete rejection of patriarchal violence, but rather makes space for such a rejection to occur. I analyse three of the major disabled characters in the Martinverse: Brandon Stark, Jaime Lannister, and Tyrion Lannister. As with the monstrous, sovereign, and female masculine characters, each of these disabled characters cites a patriarch as the model on which they base their masculine performance. Consequently, the character repeats patriarchal violence, but this violence leads them to an encounter with the abject wherein their identity (both embodied and psychological) comes undone. Yet in this moment of undoing, each character undergoes a symbolic rebirth that signals their relinquishing of patriarchal violence and their acceptance of a new and unconventional citation point, a figure who encourages them to embrace the Other. This leads them to enter a system of

queer reproduction wherein their subjectivity proliferates through alternative kinship bonds. Sometimes the reproduction is narrated in ways that link it to sexual violence and it is described with imagery that, as in chapter two, connotes the abject and the monstrous feminine, but at other times it is presented as heroic. The starkly different outcomes of these two types of violence stem from whether the kinship relations are forged for individualistic or mutually beneficial ends and whether the characters use violence to maintain patriarchal logics or to protect others or make the world safer for them.

The conclusion of the thesis, “Queer Magical Violence and Gender Fluidity,” looks toward characters who refuse to be limited to, or who move between, masculinity and femininity, and how they can be seen to re-stage, from a queer perspective, the forms of violence I examine in the body of the thesis. Some characters embrace their connections to animals, such as the skinchanger Varamyr Sixskins, but like Ramsay, Joffrey, and Gregor, Varamyr uses violence to dominate women, and has this violence turned against him in death. In contrast, Daenerys Targaryen and the tomboy Arya Stark can be seen to rework or reimagine enactments of patriarchal violence, including those perpetrated by Cersei and Eddard Stark. The implications of these reenactments depend on whether the violence actively empowers others. These queer characters therefore complicate the critique of patriarchal violence by suggesting that revenge and sovereign violence are heroic under certain circumstances. At the same time, these enactments resonate with my argument that violence that is used to empower the self or at the expense of others is coded as disgusting and terrifying in the Martinverse, whereas violence that is used to raise other characters up is valorised.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*, monstrosity is not necessarily bad, and nor is masculinity. The series offers a way of thinking about masculinity that does not begin by assuming that it is a problem to be overcome, a crisis to be averted, or an epidemic to be treated. Rather, it is the way that masculinity interacts with other subjects and structures that determines whether it is critiqued or valorised in the Martinverse. Fantasy fiction is uniquely suited to creating a context for moving away from kinship relations that support patriarchal law, for it provides generic technologies such as magic that can be used to defamiliarise and thereby radically privilege interpersonal connections by imagining them as taking place through an array of magical entities and acts. In the remainder of the thesis, I argue that when masculine characters find their violence turned against them, they are forced to either embrace or reject the Other. Integration with others provides connections that allow characters to secure their borders, whereas rejection leads them to become

temporarily borderless and to later be killed in moments of narrative circularity. The textual echo suggests that despite its short term benefits, patriarchal violence produces nothing but destruction and devastation, regardless of its legality, moral intent, or legitimacy. In contrast, when violence is used to challenge oppressive discourses and empower other characters, the destructive cycle is broken and replaced with queer reproduction of these new methods of masculine performance.

Chapter One: Genre and Gender and the Undoing and Remaking of Ideology

This thesis is centrally concerned with both genre and gender: terms that are not only phonetically similar, but shape our interactions with the world (Eagleton 1989, 55). In academia, genre and gender have also experienced a similar trajectory in which they have moved from the side-lines of scholarly debate to the centre. Extending Barbara Creed's analysis of horror genre conventions, femininity, and patriarchal structures in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) to the fantasy genre and masculinity, I argue that the repetitive conventions that constitute genre are similar to the repetitive gendered practices that Judith Butler describes as constitutive of subjectivity. In the same way that genre fictions are recognisable because of a set of codes and conventions, Butler (1993, 95) notes that gender "performance" is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiteration under and through constraint." Both genre and gender are subject to policing and freedom, which can have a potentially repressive or progressive function, and gaps and ruptures in expectations can be used to forge new expressions of a genre as well as disrupt the normative gender regime. In this thesis I examine how gender and genre work together in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* to denaturalise and re-envision the relationship between masculinity and violence.

The introduction began the task of situating the Martinverse within broader debates about ideology in popular texts. Gender is a key focus of such debates, and in this chapter I continue this exploration by charting ways of analysing gendered acts and patriarchal structures alongside fantasy genre conventions the fantasy genre—text and structure—in Martin's series across six related areas: ideology and gender in popular fiction; fantasy and ideology; fantasy and gender; masculinity studies; Butlerian poststructuralism; and psychoanalysis. Popular culture is recognised as ambiguous in relation to its representation of ideologies, especially gender, yet fantasy studies has tended to focus on the genre as a whole as opposed to its conventions. As a result, existing definitions of and theoretical frameworks for exploring the genre inadequately integrate ideological content and genre structure. To explore both text and structure with regards to genre and gender, I separate fantasy into what I term classical and postmodern iterations. Masculinity is significant in both, as demonstrated through its emphasis upon battles, quests, and phallic weaponry, which Kim Wilkins (2016, 206) refers to as "masculine action." I contribute to the field of fantasy studies by extending the existing work on gender to the first in-depth study of masculinity in the Martinverse, and demonstrate that the genre's conventions as they are cited in the series often operate in ways that

contest normative masculine discourses relating to patriarchal violence, emotion, reproduction, and embodiment.

The two existing studies of masculinity in the Martinverse, a book chapter by Dan Ward (2018) and an article by Brooke Askey (2018), suggest two theoretical frames for analysing gender: masculinity studies and Butlerian poststructuralism. The second half of this chapter weighs the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches. While masculinity studies may seem like an obvious choice for teasing out the construction of men, masculinity, and maleness in the series, as I will demonstrate, this approach does not adequately account for the ambivalence, imagery, and alternative kinship formations within the Martinverse and encourages a focus on the structures that inform and shape masculinity, to the detriment of analyses on the gendered acts through which it materialises. By contrast, Butlerian poststructuralism and specifically the theory of gender performativity offers a means of viewing gendered acts as what constitute gender, and gender as constituted by acts. Butler's theory also provides a way of interrogating the subversive value of moments in the text that are overburdened by genre conventions as coming from within the terms of the Law, which provides a framework for understanding both the reproduction of patriarchal authority and its disruption through acts of citation. Yet Butler's theory has been accused of being more interested in the discursive body than the material one, and for this reason I support her theory with psychoanalysis, namely Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject and Creed's work on the monstrous feminine, as a means of illuminating the mechanism of critique and subversion of patriarchal violence in the Martinverse. Like poststructuralism, psychoanalytic approaches encourage exploration of both text (internal world/unconscious) and structure (phallogocentric culture/stages of development), and thus map well onto Butler's theory while allowing me to place emphasis upon bodies within the series: its focus on corpses, blood, and vomit, as well as magic ice zombies, bestiality, and auto-cannibalism. Many of these disruptions take place when bodies come undone, and their value can be illuminated through Butler's politicisation of the abject—the process of rejecting the Other through which the subject comes into being—because it emphasises how the act of repudiation is often ideologically motivated but that these motivations are not static and can be changed. Built on these related frameworks of popular genre and gender theories, this thesis will respond to the critical gap in attention to the ways in which masculinity is constructed and critiqued in the Martinverse and the importance of violence as a textual site of ideological negotiation in this series.

Ideology and Gender in Popular Fiction

One of the central claims of this thesis is that the dialectic between masculinity and violence in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* is more ideologically complex than has been previously acknowledged, and that this complexity stems from its engagement with both genre and gender. In making this argument, I draw on a prominent debate in the formation and development of cultural studies around the ways in which ideologies are represented, repeated, and resisted in cultural texts and their progressive or conservative function. Although it is now, typically, assumed that popular genres and texts contain complex messages, the increasing consideration of masculinities in this context has enabled a rich consideration of the ways in which genre fiction negotiates dominant and subversive masculine discourses, even as these insights have seldom been applied to fantasy. Early popular culture scholars such as F. R. Leavis (1948) and Dwight MacDonald (1961) view popular texts as pure ideology with no aesthetic value; later scholars, particularly Jonathan Fiske (1989), Stuart Hall (1997), and Paul Willis (1978), dispute this approach and emphasise popular culture's subversive and evasive potential (Humble 2012, 100). Hall (2006, 443) argues for a middle ground between these positions and theorises "the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it." Popular culture is recognised as housing this "double stake" in contemporary scholarship. David Glover and Scott McCracken (2012, 12-13) contend that the very existence of popular fictions in which desires and wishes are fulfilled indicates that the "comforts of familiarity and the possibilities of change" allow popular texts to contain multiple and often contradictory meanings at the level of text and structure. I suggest that the Martinverse is similarly ambivalent in terms of its depiction of the relationship between masculinity and violence, and in so doing I extend the existing body of research on how genre fiction provides important clues as to how identity categories, including gender, are being understood, repeated, and challenged in contemporary culture.

Femininity has often been the focus of these studies of gender in genre fiction, where structures such as the patriarchy are supported or contested as they are placed in dialogue with genre conventions and produce an array of ideological functions. The simultaneous analysis of genre structures and conventions and gender structures and acts indicates that popular fictions reproduce normative discourses that privilege masculine subjects over feminine subjects (Deffenbacher 2014; Mumford 1995), but also have a vital role in (re)coding these discourses, and the effects of this dynamic are debated. Scholars such as Phyllis Betz (2011, 14), Anne Cranny-Francis (1990), and

Laura Stempel Mumford (1995, 114) demonstrate how feminist resistance at a textual level may be effectively subdued at the level of genre structure, and caution scholars to avoid praising subversive meanings without considering their potential function as a social “safety-valve” (Eagleton 1981, 148). Mumford suggests that release and containment may stand in the way of larger social change, calling textual feminist defiance “a fictional substitute for social action” (Mumford 1995, 114). Like Cranny-Francis (1990, 207), Mumford has little optimism for the subversive potential that contradictory meanings may impart, viewing them as a textual subversion that has no effect on larger social structures. Scholars such as Andrea Barra (2014), Lisa Fletcher (2013), and Janice Radway (1984) identify a complex mediation between the romance genre, women readers and writers, and the patriarchal conditions under which heterosexuality is (re)produced because marginal identities (woman) and practices (reading romance fiction) are reclaimed through the genre’s structure. In a similar vein, Cranny-Francis (1988) and Glenwood Irons (2015) show how detective genre fiction has been (re)imagined by feminist authors, while Elyce Helford (2000b, 2000a), Veronica Hollinger (1999), Lorna Jowett (2014), and Jessica Royer (2000) demonstrate science fiction’s capacity to defamiliarise and thereby challenge accepted norms relating to femininity and the female body. Cranny-Francis (1990) notes that this is no easy task, as it requires a careful balance between maintaining generic features so as to be recognisable, and interjecting new ideas that may challenge this framework—that is, balancing textual and structural resistance alongside intelligibility.

The process of balancing the familiar and the radical may be tenuous, yet these studies prove that genre fiction can function to reject or reinforce dominant ideologies, and it is often genre conventions which shape these discourses because they bridge text and structure. Women, femininity, and femaleness are subject to negotiation and ambiguity, like other ideologies in popular culture, and I contribute to these arguments throughout the thesis by exploring how normative masculine discourses are also subject to affirmation and interrogation in this sphere at the textual and structural level. The *Martinverse* is home to many such contradictory ideas because of the way its genre conventions function, and I view the expression (albeit temporarily) of subversive ideas about masculinity in the series as crucial to the struggle for social change.

The critical interest in women in genre fiction is pivotal to feminist cultural studies, although the field of masculinity studies has also brought attention to masculinity in these texts. Studies of masculinity in genre fiction and film show that these texts are a critical site for re-envisioning masculine discourses. Scholars such as Brian Baker (2008) and Berthold Schoene-Harwood (2000)

undertake broad analyses of masculinity across several genres, and through their analysis of gendered acts and genre structures they agree that genre fiction reveals important insights into masculinity. Baker (2008, vii) claims that “these popular fictions and films negotiate, or more properly renegotiate, forms of masculinity that express something about the cultural, social, and political formations of their period of production.” Engagement with masculine discourses takes place in genre texts, which can function in conservative and progressive ways. Certain genres have also been analysed in depth in relation to how they re-work masculine norms and genre structures, such as noir (Abbott 2002; Krutnik 2006), detective (Ebert 1992; Forter 2000; Gates 2006), western (Mitchell 1996), gothic (Anthony 2005; Brinks 2003; Gentile 2009; Smith 2017), horror (Creed 2005; Davies 2007) paranormal romance (McCracken 2007; Evans and Pettet 2018; Lindén 2013), and to a lesser extent, fantasy (Evans 2018; Ward 2018; Askey 2018). The latter two genres are the most pertinent to my investigation of patriarchal violence in the Martinverse, for they reveal that non-realist genres possess unique potential for re-imagining accepted ideas about masculinity through magic.

I am interested in how fantasy genre conventions are used to complicate the relationship between masculinity and violence in the Martinverse, and studies in the related field of paranormal romance fiction have found that changes to its genre conventions function in ways that paint an ambivalent picture of dominant masculine discourses. In her analysis of masculinity in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga, Claudia Lindén (2013, 234) notes that the construction of vampire masculinity has shifted: “Edward is part of this tradition when his masculinity manifests itself as fragile, temporary and changeable,” which suggests that “vampires seem to understand the importance of changing gender constructions as a condition of love’s fulfilment.” Similarly, in *Seduced by Twilight* (2011) Natalie Wilson finds that the vampire Edward “engages with changing conceptions of masculinity, suggesting that emo-vampires with great listening skills are perhaps even *hotter* than the traditional masculine tough guys” (Wilson 2011, 105, original emphasis). The “emo-vampires” are, for Wilson, a genre convention that posits an alternative to “traditional masculine tough guys” even as these characters are still integral to the narrative: genre conventions, gendered acts, dominant masculine discourses, and the paranormal romance genre structure interact with one another with ambiguous results. Alongside the vampire, the werewolf genre convention is a site in which masculinity is interrogated: Madeline Pettet and I (2018, 77) argue that “*Teen Wolf* invites viewers to recognise and affirm a changing relationship between masculinity, aggression, and lycanthropy,

although it refuses to break free from the cycle altogether.” Paranormal romance genre conventions—the werewolf and the vampire—are a site through which masculinity is negotiated, and function in progressive and conservative ways. Placing gendered acts and genre conventions in dialogue with the structures that inform them reveals that these fictions are home to a complex mediation between normative and resistant gender discourses, an insight that is reflected in the other studies of gender and genre fiction I have noted. I build upon this idea in relation to masculinity and fantasy genre conventions in the Martinverse.

Fantasy and Ideology

In arguing that the relationship between masculinity and violence in Martin’s series is re-worked and paying attention to conventions/acts and genre/patriarchal structures simultaneously, I expand existing research on gender and genre by applying it to a genre (fantasy) and gender (masculinity) that have seldom been analysed in tandem. Genre fiction is recognised as ideologically ambivalent, and as I will demonstrate, fantasy fictions like the Martinverse are especially so, even as they have the potential for subversion. However, fantasy studies’ focus on the genre’s structure, and its lack of a stable definition that can separate conventions from the overarching genre structure while speaking to both, necessitates a re-theorisation of fantasy into its distinct clusters, postmodern and classical.

Fantasy is a genre where there is a specific debate about ideology, including gender, but it is complicated by definitional issues and a focus on structures that is less applicable to my interest in how text and structure work together to critique the equation of normative masculinity with violence in the Martinverse. The major recent scholarly works on the fantasy genre, such as *Theorizing the Fantastic* (Armitt 1996), *Strategies of Fantasy* (Attebery 1992), and *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Mendlesohn 2008), are concerned with how fantasy—broadly speaking—should be defined, how its structures operate, and how it can best be theorised. There has also been a shift away from the broad definition of fantasy, as any non-realist fiction, into a tighter focus on popular fantasy as it has appeared since the early 2000s (Pheasant-Kelly 2016; Sánchez-Escalonilla 2010). As I noted in the introduction, 9/11—the event and its aftermath—has become an important reference point for the field.

In this new fantasy landscape, and beginning with Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), politics are a central topic of debate, and I contribute to this body of work by analysing masculinity and violence and their interplay with fantasy genre conventions in the Martinverse. Jackson postulates that fantasy fiction is a "literature of desire," (Jackson 1981, 3) expressing repressed thoughts and feelings that find no voice in dominant ideologies. While she believes that genre fiction "function as conservative vehicles for social and institutional repression" (Jackson 1981, 155), her alignment of fantasy with subversion is significant and may also be applied to genre fiction. Jackson understood this as a subversion of reality,⁵ but the idea that fantasy fiction may be used to contest prevailing discourses has been central to many subsequent analyses (Betz 2011; Eşberk 2014; see Saxena 2012). Several scholars have criticised Jackson's contribution in terms of her inconsistent application of theory and her inattention to details such as the correct spelling of character names (Attebery 1992; Suvin 2000). Nonetheless, the subversion of reality that Jackson identifies has implications for analysing genre and the ideologies that conventions express, even though she did not implicitly or explicitly examine genre conventions, nor engage with the concept of genre other than dismissing it outright. While *Fantasy* is certainly flawed it presents several important contributions to the field, particularly the idea that fantasy is inherently subversive (Jackson 1981). Following Jackson, scholars have begun the work of examining race (Young 2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b), queerness (Battis 2004, 2006, 2007; Balay 2012; Moyce 2018; Pugh 2008), disability (Ellis 2014; Newman-Stille 2013), gender (Balay 2010; Evans 2016, 2018; Roberts and MacCallum-Stewart 2016; Patel 2014), and growth and boyhood (Saxena 2012). While these studies make a critical contribution to the field of fantasy studies, they often repeat Jackson's insufficient engagement with the operations of genre conventions and ideological structures even as they demonstrate how the former can function in progressive and conservative ways. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and the Martinverse are among the most discussed fantasy texts within this recent scholarship, and I push this debate in a new direction by analysing the depiction of violence and masculinity in the latter.

Debates around fantasy and ideology are complicated by the many unresolved theoretical issues within the field, many of which stem from the lack of a stable definition of the term "fantasy." Kim Selling (2008, 5) observes that this definitional muddle renders "the main body of critical work

⁵ Fantasy at that time was understood as the antithesis of realism and the real, so this was the frame through which Jackson understood its subversive potential.

on the subject impenetrable to anyone unfamiliar with the genre” (see also Attebery 1992; Ormond 2011; Mendlesohn 2008; Angelskâr 2005; Selling 2008). “Fantasy” has either been under or over theorised, argues Laurie Anne Ormond (2011), resulting in sweeping definitions encompassing any non-realist fiction (including science fiction, utopian/dystopian, horror, fairy-tale, and gothic) or the assumption that the genre is pure formula. Some scholars favour a broad definition (Armitt 2005, 1-2; Betz 2011), while the view of the genre as formulaic is typically taken in contrast to literary fantasies (Jackson 1981). Both of these positions are problematic either because they do not sufficiently identify fantasy as it is understood by readers and publishers or because they position all fantasy novels as repetitions of J. R. R. Tolkien’s seminal fantasy trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. These problems stem from over or under-theorisations that disconnect popular fantasy from the world in which it is read, its “genre world” (Fletcher, Driscoll and Wilkins 2018). Yet fantasy and the expectations that attach to its genre conventions are critical to the Martinverse and its complex representations of masculinity and violence, and neither a broad or narrow definition offer a means of attending to the series’ play on genre conventions nor their subversive ideological possibilities, which other studies of gender and genre have shown to be crucial.

Considering that neither of these major definitional paradigms adequately theorise fantasy, especially as it is cited in the Martinverse, I agree with Jane Moble’s (1974) argument that there is one convention that both unifies and differentiates the fantasy text: magic. As I note in the introduction, fantasy promises the explicit use or presence of magic in a narrative that makes no claim to realism. Most fantasy tropes are imbued with magic, which is the key convention through which readers are invited to consider how gender relations in the genre (and by extension, the real world) can be transformed. Magic is both integral to the structure of the fantasy text, where problems often arise and are solved through magic, and the textual level, where magic shapes characters, action, and events. However, fantasy fiction is not the only form of literature to carry radical potential within its conventions. What is unique to the genre is its capacity to present these subversive ideas through magic and the conflict between good and evil.

The generic tension in the Martinverse occurs because it plays with conventions that are informed by different fantasy structures, and for this reason it is necessary to define the clusters of promises upon which it draws: classical and postmodern fantasy. I do not mean to suggest that these are the only possible iterations or that they are dichotomous, but that these are the main ones that are utilised in this series. Nikolajeva (2003, 149) defines postmodern fantasy as fantasy that is playful

in its execution of both genre conventions and subject matter, lacks a clear distinction between good and evil, lacks justice, and makes use of multiple perspectives and ambiguity in characterisation. Martin's books can be seen to occupy the postmodern end of this spectrum in precisely these ways: as I have noted in the introduction, Martin skilfully manipulates genre conventions, assembles the narrative through different perspective character chapters, and foregrounds the harsh realities he creates. While his work has not been theorised in relation to its postmodernism, Wilkins (2016, 209) argues that "in comparison to the honour and heroism of Tolkien's medieval masculinities, Martin is invested in the chaotic, irrational and uncivilised possibilities of masculinity prompted by the medieval period." Chaos and challenges to the law abound in Martin's series, but they are not isolated to it: they represent a larger cluster of promises that produce and are produced by postmodern fantasy as one end of one high fantasy spectrum. Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* (1977-1979), Joe Abercrombie's series *The First Law* (2006-2008), and the Martinverse are examples of postmodern fantasy, promising a complex moral world through their multiple misfit narrators, "gritty" realism (Young 2015), and lack of moral clarity.

The Martinverse embodies all of these postmodern traits, although some scenes are narrated in ways that cite another end of this high fantasy spectrum, those that are linked more closely to fairy tale and modernism. Nikolajeva refers to this period of fantasy literature, in the 1950s, as "Golden Age," but I prefer the term "classical fantasy." Classic is less time-bound and less suggestive of a peak of achievement and reflects an adherence to convention. I recognise that it can indicate antiquity, but I am not reaching this far back to define modern fantasy. Rather, I begin with *The Lord of the Rings* as the originator of classical fantasy because it is where the good/evil structure, promises of medievalism, heroism, the natural world, and the hero become crystallised and popularised. Wilkins (2016, 210) argues that "Tolkien, the quasi-modernist, is interested in the pastoral, the mythical and the heroic," and I would extend this claim to classical fantasy that follows, which pledges moral absolutism, seriousness in relation to its conventions, clearly defined protagonists and antagonists, and takes place in stable world/s. Its conventions include, but are not limited to, knights in white, shining armour; courtly love; honour and virtue; explicit magic; and the moral hero. These conventions are typically excluded from the Martinverse: Wilkins (2016, 210) comments that "Martin is more interested in the way power is experienced at a material and local level." However, I would add that certain scenes within the series cite classical fantasy,

overburdening them and creating tension that can be put to political purposes, especially in relation to masculinity, violence, and embodiment.

As I have noted in the introduction, I do not view classical and postmodern high fantasy as dichotomies but as two ends of a spectrum along which certain genre conventions are arranged. Other genre spectrums are at play in the Martinverse, such as that between fairy-tale and high fantasy, between realism and non-realism, and between gothic and high fantasy. However, the movement between classical and postmodern is the most relevant to my analysis of the (mis)uses of violence and bodily autonomy. Classical fantasy texts often posit violence as chivalrous, sanctioned, moral, and heroic because it is only ever used in the service of protecting others against evil. In contrast, postmodern texts are interested in violence as a morally ambiguous act used by morally ambiguous characters and with effects that are not necessarily just or fair. In other words, classical and postmodern fantasy have a different view of how power operates and so have different expectations around violence and masculinity. The idea of a spectrum between these two positions allows me to analyse the often-ambivalent representation of violence in the Martinverse with attention to its equally ambivalent position in relation to genre and gender. Such fluidity between these two positions is why some acts of violence are presented as heroic where others are monstrous. Certain characters are attached to classical notions of power in the postmodern world and the rigidity of this positioning leads them to be trapped within a destructive cycle. By contrast, other characters embrace the brutal and unjust realities of their world and the ambiguous ways in which violence is performed in this context. Because of their willingness to adapt and embrace the Other, such characters are celebrated in ways that cite classical fantasy. The high fantasy spectrum between postmodern and classical allows me to recognise the fluidity of any position and to question the effects of moving between them, as Martin moves occasionally from postmodern to classical in ways that introduce tension into the narrative and thereby foreground certain acts of violence. The distinction that I draw between classical and postmodern fantasy allows me to attend to genre structures and genre conventions simultaneously, which will enable me to tease out the ambiguity within the Martinverse as it relates to masculinity and violence. Both classical and postmodern iterations of the fantasy genre are centrally concerned with gender.

Fantasy and Gender

Research on gender in fantasy fiction offers insights into how gender is negotiated at the level of gendered acts and genre conventions, although this prevents it from placing these insights in dialogue with patriarchal systems and the broad fantasy genre. I extend this research, and that which focuses on fantasy structures, by placing text in dialogue with structure in my analysis of masculinity and violence in the Martinverse. Most research on gender in fantasy has stemmed from feminism, so the representation of women has been a key concern and men have seldom been discussed. Women characters' experiences of sexual violence have been noted by several critics (Ferreday 2015; Ormond 2011; Prater 2014; Selling 2008), and their ideological implications are debated. Jane Tolmie (2006, 151) argues that by reproducing the message that women "shall overcome" sexual violence and patriarchal structures, the fantasy heroine "provides a backwards affirmation of an undesirable general condition" rather than (re)imagining sexual violence and inequality in the neo-medieval world. For Tolmie, the continued use of the patriarchal pseudo-medieval setting combined with the presence of one exceptional heroine reifies women's subordination to men. Anne Balay finds a similar privileging of the masculine over the feminine in her study of cross-dressing girls in fantasy, though she is more optimistic about the genre's potential: "these books give girls an expanded sense of their imaginary options: not only to choose masculinity instead of femininity, but also to persistently, deliberately choose both, *and* to choose to refuse entirely" (2010, 20, original emphasis). Balay's attention to the fantasy genre's ambivalence is extended in more recent work; the edited collection *Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Popular Fantasy: Beyond Boy Wizards and Kick-Ass Chicks* (Roberts and MacCallum-Stewart 2016) highlights fantasy's ability to straddle both subversive and normative depictions of gender and sexuality: "magical queering, symbolic or metaphoric queering made available by the conventions of the genre, are often more radical than the literal engagement with sexualities carried out by these texts" (Prater 2016, 32). In other words, fantasy's conventions are at the heart of its subversive potential in its classical and postmodern forms, even as it repeats oppressive structures. Placing gendered acts and genre conventions in dialogue with patriarchal structures proves as fruitful for analyses of femininity/queerness in fantasy as it is for other genres. Yet fantasy's subversive potential stems from its genre conventions, which indicates that it is necessary to give equal weighting to genre/gender structures. The reproduction of a sexist and patriarchal medieval world is complex, especially as it attaches to violence, and it is problematic that fantasy authors such as Martin continue to maintain this type of oppressive world through their use

of the patriarchal pseudo-medieval setting amid other, dramatic changes to the same generic framework. I expand these debates throughout the thesis by demonstrating how the repetition of patriarchal structures alongside conflicting genre structures in the Martinverse is a part of its critique of patriarchal violence as a gendered act.

Debates around violence and its link to emotion in fantasy fiction add to existing scholarship on gender in fantasy to show that the subversive potential within the genre's conventions is applicable to masculinity as well as femininity, although these studies focus on gendered acts rather than genre or gender structures. Fantasy conventions, particularly the hero's violence during their quest and their feelings about it, are a site where masculinity is re-imagined within the genre, an insight I expand in relation to the Martinverse and the ways that patriarchal violence is critiqued and other forms of violence work the weakness in the norm to create a more liveable world. When violence is undertaken by protagonists during their quest, feelings and emotions are a critical aspect of their violence: the characters excel in all forms of combat (especially swordsmanship), but they feel negative about their own aggression, as has been argued by scholars such as Ulrike Horstmann (2003) and Margaret Hammitt-McDonald (2003). I utilise the definition of feelings as "a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled" and emotions as "the projection/display of a feeling" (Shouse 2005, para. 3-4), both of which are essential to fantasy violence in the Martinverse. "The young hero," Horstmann (2003, 94) argues, "is in keeping with modern sensibilities by both hating to kill and being aware of the moral dubiousness of depriving anyone of life, while at the same time getting really good at it, because the kind of world the novels are set in demands its heroes to be strong fighters" (94). Violence is attached to the quest convention, but so is a negative emotional reaction to that violence. The hero "must learn to fight but it is all right if you do not like it. Sensitivity towards a person or a situation and the ability to empathize may be more important than aggressiveness or skill with weapons" (Horstmann 2003, 100).

The centrality of feeling to fantasy fiction violence is also noted by Hammitt-McDonald (2003, 166), who contends that in Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, a lack of feeling during violence leads to horror, as "Covenant's emotional numbness causes him to perform heinous rather than heroic acts." The heinous act is raping and impregnating a young woman, violence that is critiqued through its intense, ripple-like effect on the trilogy, which is accompanied by Covenant's rejection (and eventual transformation) of his patriarchal masculine

violence. While neither Hammitt-McDonald nor Horstmann examine violence and masculinity in depth, their observations suggest that fantasy and masculinity have divergent expectations with regards to how masculine people should feel about their violence. Neither feeling nor emotion are appropriate responses to violence according to dominant masculine discourses (Brody and Hall 2008; Jakupcak, Tull and Roemer 2005; Oransky and Marecek 2009; Seidler 2007), but these discourses are challenged through fantasy conventions that stage a complex negotiation between feelings, violence, and manhood. The affective register of fantasy fiction is influenced by a broader emphasis upon affect in the West, as noted by scholars such as Lauren Berlant (1997) and Sarah Ahmed (2013). Emily Ryalls (2013) has shown how young men appropriate feminine practices such as emotional earnestness to claim victim status against young women who have rejected their sexual advances (also see Sally Robinson 2000, 2001, 2002), and Jonathan Allan (2016) argues that men's rights activists similarly make use of affective claims. These changing affective discourses influence fantasy fiction, wherein subversion takes place on the level of genre convention/gendered act, but because Hammitt-McDonald and Horstmann do not consider patriarchal/genre structures, it remains unclear why patriarchal violence is employed if it is to be critiqued. As I will show in the rest of the thesis, feelings in the Martinverse—and specifically caring for others—is often the fulcrum between patriarchal violence and less destructive forms, such as chivalric violence, because they represent a point where text and structure intersect in relation to both genre and gender.

The dialectic between ideological containment and resistance in genre fiction, and specifically through fantasy genre conventions, is apparent in relation to sexual violence in the Martinverse, which repeats a relationship between masculinity and violence at the level of gendered act/genre convention and fantasy/patriarchal structure, even as sexual violence is punished and linked with monstrous men, as explored by scholars such as Alyssa Rosenberg (2012) and Caroline Spector (2012). Rosenberg (2012, 17) claims that “where the ability to kill is a sign of manhood and even honour, it's sexual misconduct that signals monstrosity,” an argument I expand in chapter two. Scholars such as Anne Gjelsvik (2016) and Joseph Young (2017) agree; Gjelsvik notes that “rape is used to distinguish detested characters” (61) and identifies Ramsay Bolton and Gregor Clegane as two examples—an insight I extend in chapter two—and Young observes that “violence makes the Westerosi inhuman; sex encourages and guides speculation as to which of them might be salvageable” (52). Rosenberg (2012, 27) considers how masculine violence affects men within the narrative, commenting that sexual violence “serves as a powerful indication, and indictment, of

corruption and inhumanity.” While Rosenberg does not consider the relation between men, masculinity, and violence in depth, her comment highlights how the relation between masculinity and violence is a point of negotiation in the Martinverse. Her focus not only on acts of violence but also on their consequences for masculine characters allows her to oppose the popular assessment of the series as unproblematically promoting violent content. In other words, her focus on gendered acts and dominant masculine discourses reveals a deeper level of complexity in the Martinverse’s depiction of violence. I suggest that when gender and genre are both analysed in relation to text and structure, it is possible to see how the critique of patriarchal violence comes from within the fantasy genre/patriarchal structure, as they are turned against themselves and then subverted at the level of the citational act/genre convention. I take the same focus as Rosenberg, but with a queer feminist conceptualisation of masculinity, that is, I separate masculinity from male bodies and analyse the imagery that surrounds characters when they use violence, viewing it as instances where they come undone and/or become monstrously feminine. This approach reveals a complex dialogue between normative masculinity, violence, and the fantasy genre.

The Martinverse’s specific deployment of fantasy genre conventions is uniquely suited to a critical engagement with dominant masculine discourses because many of these conventions attach to violence, and that violence is a useful site where ideologies are negotiated in genre fiction. While there have been few studies on violence in the Martinverse, and none of them in great depth, they demonstrate that the fantasy genre’s popularity and its politics make it of critical importance as scholarly debates on gender and genre develop. As in other studies of gender and genre that show that the simultaneous analysis of text and structure is a useful approach, I analyse the text in tandem with its structures, which has seldom been attempted in studies of gender in fantasy because of the field’s focus on either the fantasy structure or its representation of gendered acts, and its definitional issues. In the remainder of the chapter, I critically engage with gender theories, namely masculinity studies, Butlerian gender performativity, and feminist psychoanalysis, to determine which can provide a framework for analysing gendered acts and structures alongside fantasy genre conventions and the genre structure as I explore the complicated relationship between masculinity and violence in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*.

Masculinity theory may appear to be an obvious choice for analysing these critiques of violence in Martin's series, but the field's sociological emphasis and focus on structural typologies presents impediments for analysing the series' tension and ambiguity and for approaching acts/conventions alongside genre/patriarchy, all of which I have shown to be essential to analyses of gender in genre fiction. The emphasis in the prevailing frameworks for masculinity studies is on typologies whereas fantasy fiction—particularly the Martinverse—is concerned with the collapse of binaries and positions. For example, Raewyn Connell's hierarchy of masculinities (2005), which theorises distinct categories of masculinity based on power in relation to women and men, has been used to analyse masculinity in *Game of Thrones* in a study by Ward (2018), who examines the character Jon Snow and his relation to hegemonic masculine heroism but does not elucidate his ambivalent relation to gender and violence. Ward compares Jon to several other characters in the series, and concludes that “at once hegemonic and resistant, [Jon] is a contradictory figure [...] who promises change even as he typifies the heroic archetype” (119). Ward uses Connell's theory to locate Jon's masculinity as simultaneously hegemonic and marginal, an expansion of the hierarchy of masculinities that contradicts Connell's logic, where men can move between categories but not occupy two positions—let alone two seemingly disparate ones—at the same time. Nor does Ward's theoretical framework allow him to explore the political implications of Jon's ambiguity, an essential aspect of genre fiction. Ward focuses on gendered acts rather than fantasy structures, but he attempts to use a theoretical framework that offers tools for analysing the structures of masculine power relations, with the result that his argument contradicts the theory he uses. Masculinity theory proves to be less applicable to a fantasy world where binaries are continually broken, and to the question of ideology in genre fiction, which has long been recognised as ambiguous and centrally implicated in the operations of text and structure. I intend to analyse masculinity as part of a structure, like Ward, but I am interested in the citation and reproduction of gendered acts that often (but not always) privilege masculine subjects over feminine subjects, and for this reason I focus on the patriarchy as a gender structure and fantasy as a genre structure, and patriarchal violence as an act/genre convention, an approach that is better supported by feminist poststructuralism, which can support an analysis of text and structure, unlike masculinity studies.

Masculinity studies is interested in typologies and structures for lived experiences, whereas the Martinverse privileges ambiguity and uncertainty, and my analysis of violence in the series demands equal focus on acts/conventions and genre/patriarchy. Masculinity studies is a broad academic field encompassing literary studies, popular culture studies, anthropology, sociology, education, criminology, and law, among others, but is most often sociologically oriented (Beasley 2014, 2013; Berggren 2014a, 10). The field's main theoretical concerns have centred on violence, fatherhood, popular cultural representation, educational pedagogies and policies, race, class, health, workplace equality, sexuality (including rape), disability, and relations with women and children (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). In other words, masculinity studies is interested in the external world, rather than the interiority and subjectivity that are privileged in the Martinverse through its use of multiple characters' perspectives. Kalle Berggren (2014b, 247) argues that "the dominant theories within critical studies of men are insufficient when it comes to conceptualizing subjectivity" because they are oriented towards sociological accounts of how lived experience is structured rather than cultural studies and the poststructuralist emphasis upon discourse. While some areas in masculinities scholarship use feminist theories to denaturalise the connection between male bodies and masculinity that persists in the broad field of masculinity studies, and to critically engage with masculinity from new angles, such as phenomenological feminism (Berggren 2014b, 247) and queer and trans*⁶ masculinity studies (Halberstam 1998, 2005), the broad field's sociological emphasis means that it has yet to apply gender theories of ambiguity or representational subversion to its theoretical frameworks, nor to offer a means of bridging its valuable work on dominant masculine discourses with the way they interact with gendered acts. Instead, it offers tools for examining external manifestations of gender, such as relationships between bodies, which are less easily applied to fantasy fiction and especially the Martinverse, which privileges the interior of masculinity through its use of multiple characters' perspectives to structure the narrative. Masculinity studies offers tools for illuminating structures, but a focus on patriarchal structures and the fantasy genre alongside gendered acts and genre conventions is necessary for analysing the intersection of gender and genre, particularly as it is expressed in relation to the series' treatment of masculinity and violence.

⁶ I use the word "trans*" throughout the thesis to reflect the openness of non-cisgender identifications—transgender, transsexual, transwoman, transman, and so on.

This is apparent in two of the major theories in masculinity studies: inclusive masculinity and hegemonic masculinity, although their emphasis upon clear categories prevents them from being applied to the Martinverse, and their privileging of masculine hierarchies over gendered acts makes them unsuited to analysing text and structure concurrently. Hegemonic masculinity, as theorised by Connell as a part of the hierarchy of masculinities she develops in her seminal book *Masculinities*, is one of masculinity studies' major theoretical frameworks and has been for over three decades (Sadowski 2010; Wedgwood 2009). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinity as, "the culturally most honoured way of being a man" (832) and emphasise that the concept is not monolithic and ahistorical but actively adapts to maintain the oppression of women and non-hegemonic men. Connell postulates a masculine typology, which includes hegemonic, complicit, marginalised, and subordinated masculinities, and is historically variable and context specific; it is not a rigid structure intending to reduce complex gender relations into understandable categories (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 841). It is this versatility that makes the hierarchy of masculinities, and particularly hegemonic masculinity, an important concept in masculinities studies. More recently, the theory of inclusive masculinity has gained salience in the field. Inclusive masculinity, as conceptualised by Eric Anderson, is performed by young men who reject sexist or homophobic discourses: "men who subscribe to inclusive masculinity have been shown to behave in effeminate ways and to be less defensive about their heterosexuality, all with less or without fear of social stigma" (Anderson 2008, 606). Inclusive masculinity and hegemonic masculinity are different but both focus on typologies and are mainly suited to exploring social dynamics and problems in the context of a heteronormative society.

This is not to say that masculinity studies has not made important contributions to the field of gender studies; its emphasis on masculinity as a gender rather than an unmarked norm has radically altered the way that gender is understood in the academy and the real world. Inclusive and hegemonic masculinity theories both point to masculinity studies' broad contribution to gender studies: that if gender equality is to be achieved, it is essential to examine men, maleness, and masculinity alongside femininity. Analysing how masculine subjects operate in the world, whether in veneration of an unrealistic hegemonic image or resisting homophobic discourses, reveals a more complex picture of contemporary gender relations. Masculinity proves to be narrowly conceptualised in the real world and in popular culture, giving men few options for agency. For this reason it is essential to expand masculine discourses (Shuttleworth 2004), a project that is taking

place in genre fiction. Yet as I have demonstrated, studies of gender in genre fiction are best served by attention to both conventions/acts and gender/genre structures, and this is especially true of the Martinverse, where patriarchal violence is critiqued precisely because its structures are turned against themselves through its textual features. This dialectic between text and structure, and the ambiguous results it produces, make masculinity theory a less applicable framework.

The ambiguity and generic tension within the Martinverse mean that masculinity studies and its major theoretical tools are less relevant to fantasy fiction, and the Martinverse in particular, because of their interest in movement between categories and strange kinship relations that are enabled through genre conventions such as magic. Moreover, masculinity studies' valuable focus on structures prevents it from engaging with gendered acts and dominant masculine discourses simultaneously, which is necessary to studies of gender in genre fiction, especially in the Martinverse when text and structure are both utilised for subversion. Connell's hierarchy of masculinities acknowledges movement between, for example, hegemonic and complicit masculine positions, but does not account for the spaces in between, nor for how they proliferate and are undone through discourse. Likewise, inclusive masculinity is interested in classifying positions and is based around sexuality—especially an acceptance of homosexuality—which is seldom dealt with explicitly in the fantasy genre (Prater 2016) or the Martinverse (Nel 2015). The non-normative kinship relations in the series and in fantasy are also at odds with these major theories, which are concerned with gender structures rather than acts, and with sexuality and the heterosexual family. In other words, masculinity theories are less suited to teasing out the ambiguity, generic tension, simultaneous operations of structure and text, and non-normative kinship formations that are critical to the Martinverse's representations of violence. Instead, I suggest that the violence in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* can be illuminated through queer feminist poststructuralism because it is discursive, accommodates ambivalence, interrogates the politics of kinship, and can account for the interaction between text and structure.

Butler and the Martinverse

One of the only other in-depth analyses of masculinity in the Martinverse, Askey's (2018) article on eunuchs and masculinity in *Game of Thrones*, indicates that Butler's poststructuralist gender theory offers a means of bringing gendered acts into dialogue with dominant masculine discourses while

also highlighting the ways in which ideological ambiguity can be put to subversive uses. Analysing three of the major characters who are labelled eunuchs—Grey Worm, Varys, and Theon Greyjoy—Askey (2018, 16) argues that “the characters in *Game of Thrones* who undermine normative conceptions of gender and sexuality highlight the way in which eunuchs and women are forced to fight for an identity not based on sexual organs in a world where power is defined by manhood, and manhood is defined by having a penis.” Butler’s theory of gender performativity allows Askey to identify the categories that are evoked at the level “eunuchs and women,” “manhood,” and “penis” as well as their normative relation to power structures and the ways that they are blurred and challenged. The feminist poststructuralist framework offers a way of understanding how the Martinverse’s phallogentric imagery is highlighted without reinforcing its connection to the male body. I argue that this theoretical lens is useful for analysing masculinity and violence in the series because Butler offers a framework where ambiguity, representation, and subjectivity are foregrounded, and text and structure can be interrogated in tandem. Subjectivity in particular proves relevant because of the character-focused narrative style, which emphasises seeing the interior of masculinity. However, because studies of gender in genre fiction indicate that it is necessary to foreground gender and genre simultaneously, I expand Butler’s performativity theory to incorporate genre as well as gender. Where Askey is interested in gendered acts and the phallogentric structures that inform them, I intend to analyse the patriarchy and the fantasy genre as two interconnected structures, and both the gendered acts in the novel and the genre conventions that enable them at the level of the text.

My focus on genre tension necessitates a means of analysing genre conventions alongside gendered acts, as I have noted, and I argue that Askey’s successful use of Butler’s performativity theory proves that this framework is suited to the task. Pivotal to queer feminist scholarship, the impact of Butler’s critical work has been felt in numerous academic disciplines, including philosophy, cultural studies, history, science, and literary studies (Jagger 2008; Salih 2002), and she has been called the “Queen of Queer” for the contributions she has made to queer theory (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 2002). Butler’s main three texts on gender are *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (Butler 2004); the central thrust of all three being a deconstruction of sex, gender, and the body. *Gender Trouble*, Butler’s most well-known text, sees her undertake a genealogical analysis of gender following on from Michel Foucault’s work on sexuality (1979). She also draws upon the work of Simone De Beauvoir, Sigmund Freud, Georg Wilhelm

Friedrich Hegel, Jacques Lacan, Kristeva, Gayle Rubin, Monique Wittig, and others, to argue that both gender and sex are discursively produced in aid of the “heterosexual matrix,” the system of power in which heterosexuality is enforced (47-106). In the text, Butler (1990, 25) argues that “gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.” Butler contends that there is no doer behind the deed, or no “sovereign self” behind gender (Butler 1990, 159). Rather, the subject is discursively produced *through* gender and cannot be intelligible as human without being sexed and gendered (Butler 1990, 22). Gender is produced through gendered acts which come to be seen as the reality of gender, but for Butler they are one and the same. This idea has proven to be highly transferable, as demonstrated by its uptake in diverse disciplines and its application to other identity categories, such as race (Warren 2001) and disability (McRuer 2006). I suggest that gender performativity can be applied to genre: genre conventions, like gendered acts, are citational practices that are seen to be an effect of the genre (or structure), but they are what constitute the genre.

Butler’s is one of the first queer theories and there have been substantial developments in this field since; her work is part of a tradition of theoretical work on heteropatriarchal structures, gendered/sexual acts, and ambivalence. As a poststructuralist body of scholarship that grew out of lesbian and gay studies and proliferated mainly in the early 1990s, initially through the work of Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993, 1990), queer theory offers a complex range of critical tools for examining identity, particularly compulsory heterosexuality, by revealing dissonances and instabilities between sex, sexuality, and gender. Queer theory offers ideas around the political implications of these dissonances and instabilities, which have been reflected in studies of gender performativity (Butler 1990), cross-dressing (Garber 1993), female masculinity (Halberstam 1998), locating queerness in literature (Sedgwick 2015, 1993, 1990), the relationship between sex and citizenship (Berlant 1997), queer culture building (Berlant and Warner 1998), and many others, the diversity of which attests to queer theory’s indeterminacy and its applicability not only to the specific concerns of the LGBTQI* community but also to general concerns about the human condition (Berlant and Warner 1995, 349). Queer theory’s operation at both of these levels attests to its ability to consider texts and structures concurrently. More recently queer theory has also focused on questions of temporality (Halberstam 2005), geography (Binnie 1997; Hemmings 2013; Kazyak 2012; Oswin

2008), failure (Halberstam 2011), the figure of the child (Edelman 2004), and archives (Drabinski 2013; Manalansan and Martin 2014).

Poststructuralism, and queer theory in particular, is a more appropriate framework for fantasy fictions like the Martinverse because it offers tools for investigating acts/conventions and gender/genre structures, the collapse of categories, non-normative kinship, and the political implications of ambiguous representation. The poststructuralist approach that is privileged in queer feminist theory is in many ways a development of the psychoanalytical one in its concern with representation and ambiguous power relationships, and presents a fitting paradigm for studies of genre and gender and, specifically, for a fantasy genre that is always already de-constructing itself. Poststructuralism offers a means of investigating the effects and materialisations of heteronormativity, including the alignment of sex, sexuality, and gender, and the ways in which queerness is policed but also reproduced. It also provides several theoretical frameworks, including Butler's, that are useful for analysing text and structure, both of which are critical to the Martinverse's depiction of masculinity.

However, poststructuralism may appear to be inapplicable for my analysis of the law of patriarchy and of genre and, specifically, with the concept of patriarchal violence that I explore throughout the thesis. As I have noted in the introduction, I define patriarchal violence as that which empowers the self at the expense of others, reifies existing power imbalances (especially those between men and women/non-binary people), and is invested in the reproduction of the paternal law/family. It is a categorical tool necessary for clarity and scope, and I use poststructuralist insights about the harm that binaries pose, and the value of ambiguity, as I apply it to the Martinverse's depictions of violence. I do not place patriarchal violence within a binary pair, instead investigating many of the other acts that can be used to make the world a more livable place, including chivalric violence and queer kinship. I analyse instances in which patriarchal violence collapses categories, in the sense that it is used by a wide range of characters, such as those who are antagonists (chapter two), respected sovereigns (chapter three), queens (chapter four), and those who are disabled (chapter five) and queer (conclusion). In other words, poststructuralism allows me to conceive of patriarchal violence in a way that attaches violence to a defined set of effects, but can be employed by any subject. This application makes patriarchal violence applicable to the Martinverse and its interest in ideological ambivalence and category-collapsing, which also characterise fantasy fiction more broadly.

Queer theory is useful for analysing fantasy because in the genre, magic frequently shifts from masculine to feminine in ways that contest characters' assumptions about the world: it can, as Balay (2012) and Jes Battis (2006) have argued, be read as a queer force at the level of fantasy and fantasy convention. Battis argues that magic is "both *gendered* and *transgendered*" because it incorporates gendered constraint and subversion (2006, para. 2, original emphasis). Similarly, Tison Pugh (2008, 222) contends that Frank L. Baum's *Oz* series (1900-1920) queers sex and gender through magic, as "it is within the magical abilities of many creatures to turn themselves into the other sex." For this reason both Battis and Pugh agree that gender and sexuality are connected with magic in fantasy fiction. Magic signifies departures from gender norms, particularly when female characters are associated with conventions like the (phallic) magic sword, while also (re)inscribing those norms when women's magic is used to aid male heroes (Battis 2006, para. 2), sexualise the female body, or place women in positions where they must be saved by men. Battis (2006, para. 22) points to magic's ideological malleability by claiming that "magic operates both as an *indicator* of gender and a *transgression* against gender, marking both male and female characters even as it creates imaginative possibilities for breaking gender codes." Their arguments reflect the idea that popular culture texts are never ideologically resolved but remain a battlefield between conservative and progressive ideas, an ideological ambiguity that is also typical of queer readings. By attending to both genre conventions (magic) and the fantasy genre and gendered queerness, queer theory offers a way of bringing text and structure into dialogue in a fantasy context. This integration is integral to analyses of gender in genre fiction, especially the Martinverse, where the law is turned against itself with subversive effects. Queer theory offers nuanced critical tools for illuminating ideological ambivalence, kinship, and desire, making it well suited to my analysis of masculinity and violence in the Martinverse.

Following Askey, I continue to use Butler because her theory of gender performativity offers a means of analysing the structure of authorisation alongside its subversion. The concept of performativity has been hugely influential in feminist theory and criticism; if gender is constructed rather than essential, there can be no support for claims to a natural patriarchy or women's natural inferiority (Petersen 2003, 56-57). Furthermore, as Butler herself notes, if gender is constructed it may well be constructed differently (Butler 1990, 110). Butler's gender theory is complex, but her key concerns can be summarised as the performativity of gender, the strength of the regime of compulsory heterosexuality, and the discursive production of sex and bodies, subversion, and

intelligibility—the subject’s recognition as human (for an overview, see Salih 2002; Jagger 2008). This theoretical position allows for radical changes to and criticisms of the current gender order, which I investigate in relation to masculinities in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*.

Butler claims that it is only because deviations occur *within* the normative frame that they can challenge that frame, an assertion that is useful for analysing genre and gender in the Martinverse at the level text and structure. This is why abject masculine bodies possess radical potential: they are normative, but they are also Other. Butler understands subversive acts as those that reveal gender to be tenuous, imitative, and malleable; in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* she argues that subversion is “the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be ‘real,’ what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality” (xxiv). *Gender Trouble* (1990, 107-193) sees Butler theorise gender subversion at length, using drag performances as an example wherein the signs of femininity are displaced onto the male body, rendering gender unnatural and revealing its contingency. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993) returns to the question of subversion, where she clarifies that drag is neither the only form of gender subversion nor gender subversion par excellence. She explains that “drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality” (1993, 85). While films such as *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959) may suggest that gender is performative, Butler argues that they maintain the heterosexual matrix and do not challenge or attempt to reformulate the current gender order. In other words, drag is not necessarily subversive, but has the capacity to be so, much like generic tension. Subversion is more fully achieved when gender performativity is not only revealed but reconstructed or critiqued, offering a potential transformation. Subversion is found in “the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (1990, 192).

For this reason Butler (1990, 93) argues that subversion occurs “when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself.” In other words, subversions come from within the psychoanalytic law of the father and as part of the exercise of the law. Subversion stems from structure, and its effects are felt at the level of dominant gender discourses and gendered acts: Butlerian subversion bridges the lacuna between them, making it ideally suited for analysing gender in genre fiction, and particularly for the Martinverse where genre tension is critical to the

(re)envisioning of the relation between masculinity and violence. As I will demonstrate throughout the thesis, this is why particular models of masculinity in the Martinverse are enacted in the context of a law—both of unmitigated or unconstrained patriarchy and of constrained and “good”/legal patriarchy—and both are rejected, whereas other models of masculinity are able to work by reference to the same constraints: repeating the link between masculinity and violence through reference to phallic weapons, but using this violence to forge connections to others.

While Butler’s gender performativity theory is useful for analysing masculinity, genre, and violence in the Martinverse, her work has also been critiqued. Since the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Butler’s deconstruction of gender has been both celebrated and condemned. She has been criticised for her inaccessible prose style and quietism (Nussbaum 1999), for positing performativity as the foundation of gender (Hood-Williams and Cealey-Harrison 1998), for misreading Freud’s psychoanalytical work (Prosser 1998, 4), for not engaging with the body (Bordo 1992) or with agency (McNay 1999), and for her “opaque” conceptualisation of subversion (Bordo 1993, 292-295) and political change (Bordo 1992; Salih 2002, 148-149). A number of the criticisms against Butler stem from a misunderstanding of concepts like “performativity,” “performance,” and “performative” (De Baerdemaeker 2010, 5-6). Sara Salih (2002, 44) argues that these concepts have been “theoretically ‘reduced’ through decontextualisation and simplification,” and over-used to the extent that Butlerian ideas—if not explicit use of her work—has become the norm in critical gender analyses in cultural studies. This is certainly true in literary studies of gender, in which “the model of the performative... provide[s] a model of language that suits an analysis of literature better than competing models” (Culler 2000, 507). Her performativity theory has also been vehemently criticised by scholars in trans* studies; Jay Prosser (1998, 32) comments that Butler’s notion leaves no room for trans* individuals “who seek very pointedly to be non-performative, to be constative, quite simply to be,” and has led to suspicion that Butler is an anti-trans* feminist (Namaste 1996, 188). Williams (2014, 37) herself vehemently rejects this claim: “I only meant to say that we should all have greater freedoms to define and pursue our lives without pathologization, de-realization, harassment, threats of violence, violence, and criminalization.” Butler’s active engagement with her critics reflects this goal, and continues to inform her work as it evolves.

Butler’s ideas are often adapted in ways that do not pay attention to the specifics of her argument, but I contend that these specifics, especially relating to kinship and the phallus, are particularly relevant to the Martinverse’s negotiation of masculinity and violence, where text and

structure are both pivotal. The fantasy genre is often ambiguous and privileges desire and kinship. These features are foregrounded in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* because of the subversive tension that ensues when the text is overloaded with meaning through the contradiction between classical and postmodern conventions, as discussed earlier in this chapter. As in the drag performances that Butler identifies as subversive of gender norms because they force the male body to signify too much—masculinity and femininity at the same time—clashing genre conventions create tension, and I argue that it is put to political use. As Ward (2018) notes, masculinity in the Martinverse is contradictory, and Butler’s gender performativity theories account for this simultaneous presence of normativity and subversion within both individual identity practices and broad cultural matrices: performativity effects daily life as well as the ways that societies are structured and operate. In short, it offers a way of combining text and structure and locating the moments within them where subversion takes place through the dialectic between Other/self. In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* Butler emphasises the idea that gender is constraining, resulting in precariousness, instability, and psychic excess; further, and most crucially, it is open to subversion. Butler’s theoretical work on gender provides the foundation upon which masculinity is understood in this thesis because it accommodates norms and challenges to them, highlights the importance of stylised acts, and stresses the importance of intelligibility, all of which are critical aspects that arise during the Martinverse’s depictions of violence.

Butler’s re-theorisation of the phallus in *Bodies That Matter* is useful for illuminating violence in the Martinverse, for one of the main fantasy genre conventions that attaches to violence—the sword—can be read as both an overburdened generic image and a denaturalised gendered act. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the phallus is a privileged signifier, the symbolic and imaginary representation of the erect penis (Lacan 1977). Men “have” the phallus, a symbolic position that links masculinity to heterosexuality, in contrast to women who “are” the phallus and signify their own alleged lack. Returning to these arguments, Butler (1993, 52) argues that the “lesbian phallus is a fiction, but perhaps a theoretically useful one, for there are questions of imitation, subversion, and the rearticulation of phantasmic privilege that a psychoanalytically informed reading might attend.” Butler focuses on this rearticulation, claiming that “the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to male morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization” (53). The phallus can be seen as a text and phallogocentric culture as the structure that enables it, but the relationship between them is flexible and can be re-worked on both levels.

For Butler the reterritorialisation can take the form of phallic body parts or “purposefully instrumentalized body-like things” (55), and I would add that in the fantasy genre, conventions such as swords, knives, hammers, dragons, and direwolves can be read as phallic “things” that may disrupt the phallogocentric logic of patriarchal violence. For example, swords are part of the patriarchal/genre law, but this law is made visible and can be subverted when the sword is overburdened with classical and postmodern ideas, or when it is denaturalised because it is wielded by masculine characters with female or disabled bodies, which I explore further in chapters four, five, and the conclusion.

Some—but not all—of the female, disabled, and queer characters I examine turn the law “against itself” in the way Butler (1990, 93) describes in order to foster queer kinship, which she later (1993, 95) calls “the resignification of the family.” Butler argues that “a cultural reelaboration of kinship”—such as that which occurs in drag balls when “men ‘mother’ one another, ‘house’ one another, ‘rear’ one another”—turns these normative terms “toward a more enabling future” that “binds, cares, and teaches, that shelters and enables” (Butler 1993, 95). Many characters in the Martinverse similarly choose to embrace the Other, a process of undoing that allows them to withstand confrontations with the abject, for they are already undone as individuals and remade in productive ways, as part of a community. Butler (2004, 19) notes, “we’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact.” Connection to others necessitates an undoing of the self, and yet embracing these connections allows certain characters in the Martinverse to retain their subjectivating borders when they use violence and come face to face with abjection. This is also true of genre: placing different genres in dialogue within one text irrevocably changes them, but in so doing it creates new genres, or productive tension, as I argue is the case in the Martinverse. Butler’s theory offers a way of placing gender and genre in dialogue at the level of structure and text. The subversion of normative masculinity through gender and genre abjection in the Martinverse forces masculine characters to either accept a more open and connected body and subjectivity, and to foster queer kinship in those terms, or to refuse and be destroyed through their own circular violence.

While Butler’s performativity theory is of critical importance to my argument about patriarchal violence in the Martinverse, as well as cultural studies more broadly, I agree with Susan Bordo (1992) that Butler’s focus is more on the discursive than the material body and address this

issue by using a body-centred psychoanalytic concept: Kristeva's embodied concept of the abject and Creed's expansion of its gendered forms to illuminate the "unsanitariness" (Young 2017, 47) in the Martinverse. In other words, the grotesque elements within the narrative have great meaning and ideological potential, depending on the exact form they take. These disgusting forces often bring about situations wherein masculine characters are encouraged to either reject or embrace the Other, and the former leads to the critique of patriarchal masculinity as characters lose their bodily borders and undergo a circular demise, whereas accepting the Other leads characters' borders to be restored and for them to enter a system of queer kinship and reproduction.

Abjection and the Monstrous Feminine

I use psychoanalysis as a way of bridging the divide between Butler's attention to discursive bodies and the Martinverse's interest in disgusting bodies, and as a means of exploring the structure of critique from within the law. Butler takes a poststructuralist approach, but she also engages at length with psychoanalytic theory, and this means that her work can easily be adopted alongside feminist psychoanalysis. Feminist queer and psychoanalytic theories are useful for analysing masculinity within the Martinverse because they offer tools for unpacking the series' moral ambiguity, its play with generic tension, and the nature of the representations of masculine bodies. The two approaches work well together because much of the foundational work in queer theory, especially Butler's and Sedgwick's, makes use of psychoanalytic work. Yet psychoanalysis is also arguably a queer approach: Tim Dean (2000, 269) argues that "a psychoanalytic perspective on sex [...] should be regarded as a queer theory." Psychoanalysis offers a different way of connecting gendered acts and genre conventions to dominant gender discourses and genres, viewing the internal world/psyche as text and the unconscious/stages of psychosexual development as the structure. Throughout the thesis, I use queer theory to understand gender and sexuality, supported by a feminist psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious as it relates to imagery in the fantasy genre.

Psychoanalytic approaches have only recently entered scholarly debates around the fantasy genre, and their shared interest in text and structure, especially as they relate to primary and secondary/internal and external worlds, desire, and family relations, has proven valuable (Armitt 2005, 203-210). Battis (2007) uses Butler's and Freud's work on melancholia and mourning to analyse the connections between queerness, mourning, and the supernatural. They argue that "most

fantasy epics organize themselves around a scene of psychic lack that can only be recuperated through mythical discourse” (2007, 10), placing “psychic lack” and “mythical discourse” into productive dialogue that offers a means of illuminating the genre’s imagery. I take a similar approach to the images in the Martinverse, though I use Creed and Kristeva rather than Butler and Freud to unpack them because they offer a way of thinking about specifically gendered acts and structures. Butler’s writing on psychoanalysis is also used by Askey (2018), as I have noted, although she focuses on the concept of the phallus and the way that castrated characters navigate phallogocentric culture. Psychoanalytic theory proves to offer a useful set of critical tools for unpacking the relation between imagery and gendered power in the fantasy genre and *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*.

Where Butler is interested in how gendered bodies materialise through discourse, the Martinverse is interested in the grotesque human body and the filth that it encounters within the pseudo-medieval world. Young (2017, 47) observes that “one of the most striking features of Martin’s subcreation is its unsanitariness; he seldom misses an opportunity to work some reference to odor, ordure, or squalor into his tale.” One of the most well-known theorisations of “unsanitariness” is Kristeva’s concept of the abject. As a psychoanalytic theory that has been widely taken up by feminist scholars, the abject offers a way of analysing text and structure from a new angle: that of the material body and the way that its purported undoing is enabled through psychic structures. I argue that it is useful to merge Kristeva’s embodied concept, that is, her attention to corpses, blood, and shit and their effects on subjectivity, with Butler’s politicisation of the abject. Combining these theories allows me to tease out the way in which confrontations with disgusting matter leads to a rejection, acceptance, or ambivalent depiction of patriarchal violence in the Martinverse.

Kristevian abjection refers to that which is expelled to produce the subject and allows them to move from the mother to the father and the symbolic order: it is a process that contests stable systems and binaries between, for example, the self and Other, inside and outside, human and animal, masculine and feminine. Kristeva (1982, 4) defines the abject as an object, a place, or process that “disturbs identity, system, order [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” It is “a terror that disassembles” (Kristeva 1982, 4) the distinctions between the meanings that sustain a sense of self and order, such as the binaries “self/other, me/not me, living/dead, male/female, infant/child, and citizen/resident” (Goodnow

2010, 6). The sexed body is central to Kristeva's understanding of the abject: while she does not explicitly discuss gender or identify as a feminist (see Tyler 2009), she associates the abject with "those aspects of bodily experience which unsettle singular bodily integrity: death, decay, fluids, orifices, sex, defecation, vomiting, illness, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth" (Tyler 2009, 80). The latter three experiences are commonly seen to be linked to women and femininity even if Kristeva does not consider their gendered implications, a point to which I shall return.

One of the most important aspects of Kristeva's theory for the thesis is her claim that the corpse is the most abject signifier because it encapsulates so many affronts to identity, order, and the binaries through which subjects make sense of their lives. The corpse is, for Kristeva, "what I permanently thrust aside in order to live [...] the most sickening of wastes [...] a border that has encroached upon everything" (3). Its presence forces subjects to "behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders" and represents "death infecting life [...] something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (4). I take this to mean that the corpse is a text that is informed by life/death, animate/inanimate, or rather, by these structures coming into crisis. There are a great many corpses in the Martinverse, and when corpses are produced through a masculine character's violence, these cadavers cause an encounter with the abject that will unravel the perpetrators of violence, whether permanently or temporarily. Yet the series also demands an expansion of Kristeva's abjection theory, for it exaggerates the corpse's abjection through magic and pseudo-medievalism: an army of supernaturally re-animated corpses is one of the series' major plotlines, human corpses are disfigured after death or merged with animal corpses, and characters come back to life through sorcery, often bearing the marks of death. To understand what these magical corpses mean, I take Kristeva's arguments about the corpse's abjection but push them further; a living corpse moves from "death infecting life" to death mocking life, not only erasing borders but actively disassembling them. The text is expanded alongside the structural collapses it provokes. As I will show throughout the thesis, when characters use violence they often produce corpses, and the outcome of this contact with the abject is dependent upon whether their violence is patriarchal or makes their world a more liveable place. The former leads characters to come undone and lose their subjectivating borders in a cycle of destruction, while the latter allows characters to enter a system of queer reproduction.

Many of the disruptions to normative masculinity in the Martinverse take place when bodies come undone through contact with corpses and other abject signifiers, and their value can be illuminated through Butler's politicisation of the abject, wherein she argues that banishing the Other is political, but it is also open to change. Butler's work on abjection is useful for considering the political and psychoanalytic ramifications of these relationships because it can be applied to text and structure, as well as ideological ambivalence. The law demands that Others be rejected, a process that can be understood when Butler builds on Kristeva's work to expand the abject into the political realm. In this "most politicized notion of abjection" (Thomas 1996, 198), Butler (1993, 76) argues that "subject positions are produced in and through a logic of repudiation" and this rejection—this abjection—is the "mode by which Others become shit" (1990, 182). Butler (2004, 23) expands this idea in *Undoing Gender*, noting that "the attempt to foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration, is surely also to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way." For this reason it is necessary, for example, to begin "resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy" (Butler 1993, xxviii), to critically question and rework dominant ideas about gender and sexuality, to view abjection as productive. The notion of "resignifying" the exclusions that marginalised groups face is a useful one for gender analyses, but it is also useful for genre studies: the reversal of abjection is at the heart of genre fiction, which must strike a balance between accepting new innovations (the Other) while maintaining intelligibility as a genre that inherently privileges certain textual practices and ideological positions (the self's constitutive borders). This is the mechanism through which new genres are created, and existing genres remain relevant, and the reason why ideological ambivalence is present and politically useful. Butlerian performativity, particularly abjection, is applicable to this dynamic in genre fiction, and particularly for the Martinverse, where disgusting imagery, like masculinity and monstrosity, is not necessarily negative, and can be used to further numerous political projects.

Kristeva's treatment of the body as a site, experience, and process of abjection makes her formulation relevant to analysing how the Martinverse's patriarchal violence is enacted on and through the site of the body and is mobilised in ways that reject this discourse. The desire to expel the abject and restore the borders of the "clean and proper body" (Kristeva 1982, 71) is a powerful force, although in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* it often leads to further horror because it is achieved through patriarchal violence. In contrast, characters who embrace the Other are, as

Butler (2004, 19) would say, undone, but in the Martinverse this undoing means that they are re-made through connections to others and can therefore withstand new unravellings as they come into contact with the abject. For this reason it is useful to merge Kristeva's abject with Butler's, wherein experiences with the abject can be political and productive, ideological ambiguity can be enabling, and gendered acts, genre conventions, patriarchy, and fantasy structures can be considered concurrently.

Scholarly critiques of Kristeva's theory are also rectified by adopting the abject alongside Butler's performativity theory. Kristeva has been accused of being apolitical, inaccessible, and too focused on the psychoanalytic and postmodern to be of use in solving "practical, immediate feminist issues" (Caputi 1993, 32). The notion that the maternal body is inherently disgusting has been particularly divisive among feminist scholars, and Tyler (2009) argues that continued use of Kristeva's theory threatens to reinscribe women's reproductive capabilities as a source of horror. In other words, Kristeva's lack of attention to gender represents a privileging of textual representation over gendered structures that creates significant problems with her theory and to its application to the Martinverse, where grotesque bodies are often bound up with gender, and where text and structure work together. This feature of her work would seem to prevent an amalgamation of her arguments with Butler's, given the latter's emphasis on gender.

A politicised version of the abject such as Butler's has productive potential for examining—and undoing—dominant masculine discourses, as scholars such as Calvin Thomas (1996, 2008) and Annette Wannamaker (2008) have shown. The repression of abject signifiers, Thomas (1996, 199) claims, "functions in the constitutive exclusions that found and reproduce normative masculinity." Likewise, Wannamaker (2008, 150) argues that "highlighting the ways abjection functions in narratives for and about boys is one way to mark those spaces where borders are formed, a way to make visible the gaps, contradictions, and paradoxes." Although Kristeva does not consider gender adequately, she has been adopted by many theorists who do, and who do so specifically in relation to masculinity. Pushing Kristeva's text-focused theory to consider text and structure proves useful for elucidating how normative masculinity depends upon borders that are formed through a rejection of its own fluids and openings (Thomas 1996), especially the anus (Thomas 2008; Bersani 1987), and it is through these rejections that the "symbolic male body is [or becomes] discrete, firm, closed and classical" (Creed 2005, 128). When the abject is expanded to consider text and structure, it reveals that the masculine body is tenuous and the moments when it becomes open, disgusting, and/or

undone in the Martinverse can be used to contest both patriarchal claims about the superiority of normatively masculine men and to broaden the existing discourses around what it means to be masculine.

The abjection framework that I use with relation to masculinity and male bodies in the Martinverse is the monstrous feminine because it accounts for the way that grotesquery takes a feminine form and is projected onto, and later used to destroy, characters who use patriarchal violence. The concept of feminine monstrosity is useful for analysing the gendered meanings and fears behind certain images in the Martinverse, and Creed's focus on gender and genre is valuable for considering how gendered acts and fantasy conventions can be analysed in equal balance with patriarchal structures and the fantasy genre, though it is necessary to merge her theory with Butler's to accommodate subversion within this dynamic. Creed politicises the visceral abject in her study of femininity in horror films, where she uses Kristevian abjection to theorise the monstrous feminine as the prototype for all monstrosity. She argues that while women have conventionally been viewed as the victim in horror films, their boundary crossing abilities, particularly in relation to reproduction and castration, are behind all figures of the monstrous. For Creed (1993, 166), images of monstrous femininity "provide us with a means of understanding the dark side of the patriarchal unconscious, particularly the deep-seated attitude of extreme ambivalence to the mother." In other words, the abject has ideological utility for revealing the patriarchal views behind filmic representations of women and untangling their embeddedness within horror genre conventions: it can be applied to genre conventions and gendered acts, as well as horror genre and patriarchal structures. Integrating Creed's theory with Kristeva's and Butler's also serves to ameliorate the inadequate attention to gender in the former by highlighting the ways in which the abject is gendered and, specifically, operates because of a psychic attempt to banish the feminine. In tandem, the three theories offer a way of elucidating the way that masculinity and violence are negotiated in the Martinverse with attention to the relationship between genre conventions and gendered acts as well as the structures that inform them, namely the patriarchy and the fantasy genre.

The abject and monstrous feminine can be applied to both text and structure, as in Butler's performativity theory. Creed focuses on filmic imagery, arguing that monsters such as the archaic mother, the witch, and the Medusa represent fears of the female reproductive body, especially the toothed vagina or *vagina dentata* and the womb. When characters use patriarchal violence against women in the Martinverse, the feminine is often turned against them, and the monstrous feminine is

useful for illuminating their descent into abjection and monstrosity as specifically feminine. Creed's work on the monstrous feminine has been widely taken up in cultural studies, in areas as diverse as disability studies (Shildrick 2002), horror (Kilker 2006) and science fiction⁷ film studies (Bellin 2006), studies of new digital genres such as memes (Massanari and Chess 2018), and regularly features in film theory textbooks. While Creed applies her theory to male bodied and masculine monsters in *Phallic Panic* (2005), her work in this text is less applicable to my analysis because she does not engage with masculinity. Rather, she claims that "the male monster is made monstrous when he enters the domain of woman" (Creed 2005, 17). For Creed this "entering" means that male monsters effectively become women, but I find that a less clear transformation takes place in the Martinverse, to which I shall return in chapter two.

Kristeva's and Creed's psychoanalytic theories are productive tools for deconstructing dominant masculine discourses about the body and subjectivity. I make use of their political potential throughout the thesis, and I also apply it to my theorisation of a queer monstrous feminine in chapter two. Neither the monstrous feminine/queer, nor the abject, are inherently conservative or damaging for the representation of marginalised characters, even though they are often assumed to be so in popular culture and among scholars. Rather, they are two modes through which characters are undone, and what emerges from the incoherence can be put to productive as well as destructive ideological uses. In the Martinverse the body's fluids and openings are continually highlighted, making normative masculinity's "constitutive exclusions" (Thomas 1996, 199) all but impossible, and creating space for subversion. Butler's gender performativity theory offers a way of placing gendered acts and heteropatriarchal structures in dialogue, and can be applied to gender and genre even as it focuses on the former and is primarily interested in the discursive body. Kristeva's body-centred abjection theory supplements Butler's focus on the discursive, and her lack of attention to gender structures is supported by Butler. Creed's notion of the monstrous feminine provides a way of bridging the two, and for placing text in dialogue with structure, which I have shown to be essential for analysing masculinity and violence in the Martinverse because it is often ambiguous, uses genre tension to create subversive meanings, and does so by turning patriarchal violence against itself.

⁷ Joshua David Bellin's book *Framing Monsters* (2006) is about fantasy film, but he defines fantasy through its broadest possible sense and his case studies are almost all science fiction. He makes brief mention of *The Lord of the Rings* films, but only in relation to their racism.

Conclusion

By understanding subversion to operate within the law, it is possible to place genre conventions and gendered practices in dialogue with patriarchal structures and the fantasy genre as they are used to interrogate the relationship between masculinity and violence in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*. There has been little scholarship that connects these two perspectives, in considering how structural features—especially genre conventions and genre formations more broadly—shape textual, including ideological, meanings. As noted earlier, studies on other popular genres, such as romance (Radway 1984), soap opera (Mumford 1995), and detective (Cranny-Francis 1988), show that genre conventions are an integral part of the ideological meanings that texts proffer, and that the relationship between genre conventions and gendered acts, as well as patriarchal and genre structures, is key in this process. Yet these insights have not been sufficiently applied to fantasy fiction, where either structures or ideologies have been analysed. Conventions are as critical in fantasy as they are in any other genre, especially when they cause tension within the narrative. This thesis responds to the critical gap in attention to the way that masculinity is (re)imagined in the Martinverse and the way that the relationship between masculinity and violence is interrogated through conflicting genre conventions. Throughout the thesis I argue that the law is patriarchy and drag is a citational act that subverts it by showing that there is no natural subject; and the law is genre and the overburdening of it with different fantasy conventions does the same. The fantasy genre conventions in the Martinverse, specifically the tension between the different structures that inform them, overburden the text at certain moments in the narrative, and I argue that it is this tension that facilitates a critique of patriarchal violence. When classical fantasy promises are utilised within a postmodern text, as is the case in the Martinverse, generic tension ensues and this, I argue throughout the thesis, is one of the ways in which patriarchal violence is made visible and opened up to critique.

Butlerian gender performativity, supported by Kristevian abjection and Creed's monstrosity theory, is a useful framework for analysing violence and masculinity in the Martinverse because it illuminates how gendered acts and genre conventions operate together in fantasy fiction with attention to its ambivalence. This theoretical framework reveals how masculinity and violence fit into the broader critical debates over gender and ideology. The fantasy genre proves to be an invaluable arena for negotiating harmful masculine discourses, and I demonstrate how violence in genre fiction is a useful site where ideologies are contested and confirmed. The former is the focus

of the next chapter, where I argue that patriarchal violence is critiqued through the queer monstrous feminine and the repetitive structures in the narrative.

Chapter Two: Some Knights are Dark and Full of Terror

In the Martinverse, violence is intimately connected with the body, and with male-embodied masculinity in particular. While many scholars and media commentators have decried the series' depictions of violence, my focus on intersections of fantasy genre conventions and representations of violence and male embodiment indicate a more complex negotiation of normative masculinity than has been acknowledged in existing scholarship. Throughout the thesis, I argue that patriarchal violence is presented as monstrous and as part of a destructive cycle, whereas forms of violence that make the world a more liveable place allow characters to share their ideas and practices through a system of queer kinship. This chapter contributes to my discussion of monstrosity and cyclical patterns of destructive violence through a psychoanalytic, feminist, and queer reading of Martinverse constructions of monstrous masculine violence as it is perpetrated by some of the series' most abhorrent characters: Joffrey Baratheon, Gregor Clegane, and Ramsay Bolton. The representation of these characters indicates how patriarchal violence is critiqued by association with the monstrous feminine, imagery that actively prevents men from reproducing the symbolic law and patriarchal family. This critique involves a circularity of horror wherein these monstrous men both enact abjection and are subjected to it, a process that reveals the inability of heteropatriarchal violence to produce anything but destruction.

To elucidate the mechanisms of this critique within the Martinverse I draw on Barbara Creed's theory of the monstrous feminine, but argue—following Dallas Baker (2010)—that the monstrous feminine is better considered as part of the monstrous queer when enacted on male bodies. To say that becoming queer functions as a means of critique is not to suggest that queerness itself is monstrous. Just as Creed (1993, 7) argues that the “presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or subjectivity,” the queer monstrous feminine is evoked in the Martinverse in response to horrifying depictions of heteronormative masculinity because the feminine and the queer are that which the characters seek to banish with their aggression. As a result, the queer monstrous feminine ruptures the idea that patriarchal violence can be used to seamlessly gain power over feminine subjects. In a similar way to Judith Butler's argument that drag is a confrontation with the citational and performative basis of what we take to be natural, attempts in the Martinverse to banish the Other expose the unnaturalness of the subject by forcing a revisitation of the Other upon the monstrous male

characters. Accordingly, when symbols of monstrous femininity such as the *vagina dentata* and the archaic mother (or prostheses that signify them) are projected onto male bodies in the Martinverse, patriarchal violence—not the feminine or the queer—is presented as monstrous and as part of a destructive cycle through the repetitive structures within the text.

Monstrous Feminine as Queer

Creed's description of the forms of the monstrous are useful for illuminating the imagery that surrounds patriarchal violence throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*: the unstable reproductive body, the archaic mother, the *vagina dentata*, the bloody mouth, and birth, all of which are coded as disgusting and terrifying. Certain characters use patriarchal violence to dominate the feminine, but they end up being linked with, and then consumed by it. Joffrey's female victims regularly have blood on their mouths and he dies choking on red wine and vomiting blood. Gregor is continually splattered in gore that links him to the natural world and birth, and he is reborn as a Frankensteinesque monster, enslaved to Cersei Lannister in a bastardised form of queer kinship. Ramsay uses dogs as prosthetic toothed vaginas, and is eaten by them in turn. The narrative circularity asserts the horrific consequences of characters using patriarchal violence to bolster their own masculinity and reinforce existing power structures. In the Martinverse, patriarchal violence never takes place without taking a pound of flesh.

The prosthesis—in the form of prosthetic phalluses and prosthetic *vagina dentata*—adds to the queerness of the monstrous feminine when it is projected onto male bodies and illuminates the horrifying implications of patriarchal violence in the Martinverse. I understand prostheses to be objects, characters, or animals who allow a character to perform acts that they would not otherwise be able to achieve. Charul Patel (2014, 238) argues that Cersei uses men as prostheses that allow her to access a knightly body: “her lovers become a political prosthesis, a prosthetic phallus: the armouring of her ‘vagina dentata’ or ‘purse’, a literal weapon through which she can control them and rule the throne.” Prostheses allow characters in the Martinverse to perform both masculinity and femininity simultaneously, and in this chapter I argue that monstrous masculine characters use or become prostheses in ways that initially allow them to banish the feminine and the queer through violence, but ultimately have the queer monstrous feminine projected onto their bodies and later are destroyed by it.

Baker's (2010) argument that when male bodies become monstrous, they become queer, offers a way of conceptualising monstrosity and maleness that can include femininity and masculinity concurrently. For Baker, "it is the effeminate male that is chosen as the template for the monster [...] because he refuses traditional masculinity; because he is somehow not a man at all [...] he signifies an abject (queer) desire; he transgresses the border between normal and abnormal genders and sexualities" (2010, 5-6). Baker uses Kristevian abjection to bridge the gap between the monstrous feminine and the queer monster: "queer and gender ambiguous individuals resemble – in that they share certain aberrant characteristics – the abject figures of discourse that much of Kristeva's work attempts to define" (Baker 2010, 7). In other words, the queer is a monstrous mode because it disrupts the binaries that inform gender and sexuality. Baker focuses on the latter, which allows him to demonstrate how antagonists in fairy tales are often informed by stereotypes about lesbian, gay, and bisexual subjects, but prevents him from considering how gender ties into monstrous queerness. For this reason his theoretical framework does not account for the ways that the symbols of monstrous femininity that Creed describes (and that are highly useful for analysing the images in the Martinverse) remain relevant and maintain their intelligibility as feminine even as they are transposed onto male bodies. I expand Baker's and Creed's work by theorising a mode of monstrosity that emphasises queer enactments of gender, which will help to illuminate the feminine imagery that is projected onto male bodied and masculine characters as a subversive reversal of their heteropatriarchal violence.

Depictions of masculine monstrosity in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* are intimately bound with images that signal the monstrous feminine, such as the various bloody mouths and births with which patriarchal violence is aligned. For this reason I build on Baker's insight that feminine monstrosity does not necessarily make male or masculine monsters feminine. I argue that it can produce a queer monstrous feminine in which the forms of feminine monstrosity that Creed outlines can be projected onto masculine and/or male characters who retain their male body/masculinity but also become temporarily or partially feminine. In the same way that Butler (1993, 95) describes the structures of gender subversion, the queer monstrous feminine resignifies "the very terms which effect our exclusion and abjection" and becomes "an appropriation of the terms of domination that turns them toward a more enabling future." In the Martinverse, the queer is presented as a solution to heterosexual and patriarchal violence: both as terrifying because of the imagery with which it is associated, and as a satisfying punishment for these evil characters, an

instance of subversion coming from within the terms of the law. The dynamic is key to disrupting the simple and problematic equation of queerness with monstrosity. I will further pursue the “enabling future” of queerness in my analysis of female masculinities (chapter four), disability (chapter five), and gender fluidity (conclusion), where it is presented as positive or ambivalent.

Monstrous Interpellations

As explored in the previous chapter, the key to opening up space for a critique of heteropatriarchal masculinity in the Martinverse is a process of citational tension wherein the enactment of classical fantasy conventions in a postmodern narrative creates a structure for the critique. All of the characters discussed in this chapter are explicitly referred to as “evil,” casting their gendered and sexualised violence in terms of moral binaries that derive from classical fantasy. However, because these conventions are evoked in a postmodern narrative they disrupt the supposed naturalness of these violent acts, the male characters’ masculine performances, and the fantasy conventions through which all three are articulated.

Joffrey Baratheon, the sadistic boy-king of Westeros, is referred to as a monster but this characterisation is presented in such a way as to evoke classical fantasy genre conventions and thereby overburden the scene. In *A Game of Thrones*/season one Joffrey is betrothed to Sansa Stark, a naïve and idealistic young woman who enjoys “needlework, romantic poems, songs of chivalry and heroic deeds, and pretty things” (Larsson 2016, 31). Sansa’s character can be seen as a meta-textual reference to femininity in classical fantasy, especially when compared with her little sister, the tomboy Arya. Unlike her sister, Sansa is incredibly naïve: she betrays her father’s plans to escape the Queen’s clutches, and believes that Joffrey is her true love and gallant prince right up until he executes her father. She claims that, “in the songs, the knights never killed magical beasts, they just went up to them and touched them and did them no harm, but she knew Joffrey liked hunting, especially the killing part” (GOT 457). Later Sansa says that Joffrey is a “cruel king who had been her gallant prince a thousand years ago” (SoS2 260). Sansa touches upon the major problem with Joffrey’s violence—he uses it to satisfy his own personal desire for carnage—but she fails to reconcile this attitude with his good looks and royal blood because she is characterised as expecting his handsome exterior to be an expression of a moral heart. Sansa’s characterisation as slowly awakening from naïveté, yet still insisting upon viewing the world through classical fantasy promises,

means that when she does position Joffrey as “a monster” (SoS1 87; S3E2) who is “evil and cruel”⁸ (SoS1 87), the interpellation exposes the unnaturalness of the citational acts that tie masculinity to particular genre conventions.

Ramsay Bolton is also interpolated into monstrosity through classical fantasy conventions, specifically through the princess in a tower figure, which strains the narrative.⁹ In *A Dance with Dragons* two Northern men, Robett Glover and Wyman Manderly, explain Ramsay’s misdeeds to Stannis Baratheon’s representative. Glover claims that “the evil is in his blood” and Wyman, gesturing toward Ramsay’s status as a bastard,¹⁰ says, “Was snow ever so black? [...] Ramsay took Lord Hornwood’s lands by forcibly wedding his widow, then locked her in a tower and forgot her. It is said she ate her own fingers in her extremity. . . .” (DwD 456). The words “evil” and “black” signal the moral absolutism of classical fantasy, which is further foregrounded through the image of the woman “locked [...] in a tower,” an act usually performed by a villain. However, the fact that the damsel in distress “ate her own fingers” reflects the graphic violence and gritty realism of postmodern fantasy, a jarring textual pivot that foregrounds the monstrous interpellations, the damsel, and the auto-cannibalism. The classical fantasy concept of the damsel in distress is woefully out of place—outmoded and naive, like Sansa and her stories—and their incongruity exposes their unnaturalness, which extends to Ramsay’s violence.

Gregor “the Mountain” Clegane’s interpellation into monstrosity—“the real monster in House Clegane” (FFC 511)—explicitly creates a conflict between classical and postmodern fantasy promises when the characters who discuss him are revealed to be out of (generic) place. In *A Feast for Crows* four characters comment on Gregor’s¹¹ violence. Three of them represent the promises of classical fantasy, Ser Lyle “Strongboar” Crakehall and two noble women, Lady Amerei and Lady

⁸ For other examples of characters calling Ramsay a monster, see CoK 824 and SoS2 144.

⁹ Ramsay is also described as “mad and cruel, a monster” (DwD 291; also see “Book of the Stranger” [S6E4] and “The Door” [S6E5]).

¹⁰ In Westeros bastards are given a generic last name based on where they were born. “Snow” is the last name associated with bastards in the North.

¹¹ Strongboar, Lady Amerei, and Lady Mariya believe that it was Gregor’s brother Sandor who perpetrated the violence because the perpetrator was sighted wearing a Sandor’s trademark snarling dog helm, but before the interpellation is made Jaime explicitly states that “what they were describing sounded more like Gregor’s work than Sandor’s” (FFC 511). Since the chapter is narrated from Jaime’s perspective and he knows Gregor and Sandor better than the other characters, his account is positioned as the most accurate.

Mariya, where the fourth, the knight and the Queen's twin brother Jaime Lannister, creates tension by reflecting a sceptical and pessimistic attitude characteristic of postmodern fantasy. Lady Mariya comments that Gregor's violence "was the work of some fell beast in human skin,"¹² to which Strongboar claims that it was "evil work" and vows to "return to hunt down [Gregor] and kill him for you. Dogs do not frighten me" (FfC 512). Strongboar's casual vow to "kill him for you" and the word "evil" suggest a simple expectation that as a "good" character, Strongboar will easily defeat Gregor, as would be the case in classical fantasy. This genre structure's logic is further emphasised when Lady Amerei names Strongboar "a true knight [...] to help a lady in distress" (FfC 512). Jaime highlights the fact that his companions' beliefs and values are misaligned with the narrative world, thinking: "*at least she did not call herself 'a maiden'*" (FfC 512). By emphasising the roles they have assigned themselves, namely damsel in distress and knight in white, shining armour, Jaime's interior monologue makes the characters' naiveté and generic incongruence visible. The meta-textual commentary represents a dialogue between Martin's postmodern fantasy and classical fantasy in which the moral absolutism of the latter is revealed as radically disconnected from both the novel's and the reader's world.

Performative constraint produces this overburdening of genre conventions, as it does gender performativity and abjection, as I have noted in chapter one. Joffrey, Ramsay, and Gregor use heteropatriarchal violence as a part of their explicitly embodied masculine performativity. Yet, just as the abject body haunts the intelligible one, their violence is turned on them when it is aligned with iconography that signals the queer monstrous feminine. This reversal is critical because it represents subversion coming from within the terms of the law, which for Butler is the only way in which dominant discourses can be contested. While the characters temporarily bolster their own masculinity by trying to forcefully banish the feminine, the violence is made horrifying through bloody mouths, images of birth, womb-like spaces, and snarling dogs, which evoke the horror of the female reproductive body, the *vagina dentata*, and the abject.

¹² The same phrase is also used to describe the character Rorge, one of Ser Gregor's men, in the same novel (FfC 722), and with similar effects.

The Bloody Mouth

Joffrey's patriarchal violence is often critiqued through its association with bloody mouths, which recall both the abject and the *vagina dentata*. Creed (1993) contends that "fear of the castrating female genitals" (105) is part of the "iconography of the horror film, which abounds with images that play on the fear of castration and dismemberment" (107). She identifies "menacing, toothed mouths," "the barred and dangerous entrance," and the "animal companion with open jaws and snapping teeth" as hallmarks of the toothed vagina (1993, 107-108). Spaces, places, or animals that could be considered vaginal or womb-like in their form or function become *vagina dentata* when they are linked with violence, such as the bloody mouths that Joffrey's patriarchal violence causes. According to Creed (1993, 107), "a trace of blood" on the lips connotes the toothed vagina but it also carries the added weight of abjection because the mouth represents one of the body's most mutable openings (Conrich and Sedgwick 2017, 103).

The bleeding mouth is thus doubly abject, creating intense horror as it enters the narrative when Joffrey uses patriarchal violence against female characters. Joffrey uses prostheses, namely his Kingsguard (highly skilled knights who act as his personal bodyguards), to access violence in public because his youth¹³ and lack of military training, which would feminise him if not for his sovereign status. When he orders his Kingsguard to beat Sansa, "her lip split and blood ran down her chin, to mingle with the salt of her tears" (GoT 724-725; S1E10 "Fire and Blood"). Joffrey's violence is narrated in ways that position it as disgusting and unsettling, in part because of the mixture of abject liquids and in part because of the jarring image of the innocent Sansa being beaten. The violence is coded as a hyperbolic act of domination because of Joffrey's comments: he claims that "women are all weak" and in response to a snide remark from Sansa, he says that "a true wife does not mock her lord" (GoT 724). Joffrey's patriarchal attitudes are highlighted, and the violence is coded as (hetero)sexual: Tyrion comments that Joffrey's violence against Sansa is often objectifying, "*a matter of some pretty teats*" (CoK 480). Given Joffrey's status as king and his betrothal to Sansa, his sexualisation of her body through violence takes on deeper significance: once they marry, he will reproduce the symbolic law and the law of the land through their children. These statements reveal Joffrey's violence to be informed by sexism and heterosexuality, and indeed his insecurity, themselves a part of his normative masculinity.

¹³ Joffrey is twelve years old at the beginning of *A Game of Thrones* and sixteen at the beginning of season one.

Joffrey's sexism reveals that his violence is an attempt to reinforce his familial class power, where that power is specifically patriarchal, heterosexual, and masculine. His patriarchal violence is also critiqued through the bloody mouth when he murders the prostitute Ros in "The Climb" (S3E6). The scene begins with a long shot of Joffrey lounging on a chair with his legs open, crossbow jutting between his thighs as a demonstration of his phallic power (fig. 1). The camera follows Joffrey as he walks from the room and past Ros's corpse, which has been strung to a bedpost and riddled with arrows. The corpse is disconcerting because of the abjection that it embodies, as I have noted in chapter one, and also because of its lingering sexualisation. The cadaver's sheer dress reveals considerable skin, and the viewer's eye is drawn to Ros's crotch and breasts because they sport arrows and occupy the middle of the frame. Joffrey attacks commonly fetishized parts of the female body, highlighting the sexual aspect of his patriarchal violence. As the camera pans past Ros's partially exposed breasts to a close up of her face, blood is visible on and around her mouth (fig. 2). The single uninterrupted shot between Joffrey's phallic crossbow and Ros's sexualised corpse with its bloody mouth connect these images together. The link between the crossbow and the abject corpse reveals Joffrey's violence as an attempt to place a border between his phallic masculinity and the feminine through violent heterosexuality. Rather than making Sansa and Ros monstrous through this citation of the *vagina dentata*, the shots present Joffrey at the true horror. The narrative makes the comment without having to project the abjection onto Joffrey's body—at least, not initially.

Figure 1: Long shot of Joffrey sitting with his crossbow after shooting Ros (S3E6 "The Climb")



Figure 2: Close up of Ros's face and breasts after she has been killed by Joffrey (S3E6 "The Climb")



Joffrey retains his maleness and masculinity while having his patriarchal violence critiqued as his own mouth becomes spectacular and feminine, and in this way he is linked to the queer monstrous feminine. Sansa links his lips to worms and thereby inscribes the horror of the queer monstrous feminine upon his body because he is male, masculine, and feminine at the same time. Literal worms often evoke disgust because they are culturally linked to sickness, death, and renewal; their consumption of corpses makes them abject (Hall 2007). When combined with the mouth, worms take on an additional level of horror. Lips and mouths have often been used as euphemisms for female genitals in Western culture (Linfoot-Ham 2005), and Creed (1993, 109) notes that “the *vagina dentata* is a mouth [...] Fear of the *vagina dentata* and of the oral sadistic mother could be interrelated, particularly in view of the complex mythological and linguistic associations between the mouth and the female genitals.” This association is evoked when Sansa observes that Joffrey’s “lips were as soft and red as the worms you found after a rain” (GoT 718), and describes him smirking with “fat wormlips” (GoT 725). Sansa’s narration occurs in direct relation to Joffrey’s violence, one or two lines before/after Joffrey orders Ser Meryn to beat her for challenging his heteropatriarchal power. Consequently, Joffrey becomes grotesque in multifarious ways: worms are an abject animal, the worms and mouth combined mix various body parts (human/animal and male/female), and the mouth is where the inside of the body and the outside world come into contact and movement (Conrich and Sedgwick 2017, 103). While Joffrey is not effeminate, Sansa’s narration of his lips as vulva-like certainly “transgresses the border” between male and female, in similar ways to the Monstrous Queer that Baker (2010, 5-6) describes. Sansa’s naiveté makes the appearance of

abjection on Joffrey's body suspect, although she does not cite classical fantasy as she did when calling him a monster, and for this reason her claims are presented as more accurate.

The queer *vagina dentata* and the bloody mouth through which Joffrey's masculine violence is problematised are turned against him during his death. Joffrey is poisoned at his wedding to Margery Tyrell, a demise that forcibly stops him from accessing patriarchal reproduction through heterosexuality and foregrounds his mouth as he ostensibly chokes on a piece of pigeon pie after being characterised as petulant child throughout the feast. The novels and television series both connect Joffrey's death to the queer monstrous feminine because imagery that evokes the monstrous feminine is projected onto his male body. In *Game of Thrones* this is achieved through blocking and costumes, and in *A Song of Ice and Fire* Joffrey's uncle Tyrion describes the boy's face as covered in wine. Joffrey snorts/spits out wine in mirth as during the wedding entertainment: he is described as "red and breathless" and "snorting wine from both nostrils" (SoS2 253), later drinking so quickly that "wine ran purple down his chin" (SoS2 256). When he finally begins to choke, "all the wine came spewing back out" (SoS2 257), leaving his face covered in red liquid. Joffrey's death is narrated in such a way as to emphasise the abject fluids and his bodily instability, which are presented as disgusting. The wine on and around Joffrey's mouth echoes the bloody lips he gave Sansa and Ros, and in this way the novels connect his violence and his death to the *vagina dentata* and project it onto his male body, a linking that cites the queer monstrous feminine and is at once horrifying and satisfying because of the depiction of an "evil" character being punished.

Joffrey's patriarchal violence is also reversed in *Game of Thrones* when his death is visually aligned with the feminine he sought to banish, but in this case he is shown dying in his mother's lap, in close proximity to her genitals. Soon after Joffrey begins to choke he falls down and his body spasms. Cersei runs over and drops to the ground beside him, turning him over so that he is lying face up on her thighs (fig. 3). Because of the ways that Joffrey's violence has previously evoked the *vagina dentata*, the fact that he dies in his mother's lap suggests that, as in the novels, he is killed by the monstrous feminine with which his violence was once aligned. Joffrey's corpse remains onscreen in an extreme close up for six seconds, and a total of thirty seconds is spent on his increasingly lifeless face and his mother's dress beneath his head. The corpse is literally foregrounded, as are the mother's reproductive capabilities and genitals.

The close ups/extreme close ups create an uncomfortably short distance between the abject corpse, the queer monstrous feminine, and the viewer, making Joffrey's body spectacular and

feminising him as an object of the camera's "male gaze" (Mulvey 1989). Viewers are forced to linger over this grotesque final image of Joffrey being destroyed by the feminine that he once used patriarchal violence to disempower: subversion comes from within the law, when it proliferates in unexpected ways. The scene evokes disgust, but also satisfaction and relief because of Joffrey's petulance, aggression, and sexism, all of which were highlighted to a hyperbolic degree earlier in the episode. The queer monstrous feminine that is threaded through Joffrey's death brings a rare moment of justice wherein his violence is turned against itself.

Figure 3: Close up of Joffrey's face as he chokes to death, lying on his mother's dress (S4E2 "The Lion and the Rose")



The Monstrous Birth

Blood is also used to critique the primary act of violence with which Gregor is associated, the rape of Princess Elia of Dorne, Rhaegar Targaryen's wife, although in this case blood cites a different facet of the queer monstrous feminine: male birth. Creed (1993, 58) argues that "the act of birth is grotesque because the body's surface is no longer closed, smooth and intact – rather the body looks as if it may tear apart, open out, reveal its innermost depths." The pregnant body giving birth is abject for both Kristeva and Creed: women's reproductive capabilities are understood as a mark of the natural world that defies "the paternal symbolic" (Creed 1993, 49). And yet Gregor's births are empty—they fail—because his patriarchal violence cannot produce anything but horror, and so he is unable to reproduce his subjectivity, as the law demands.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire* Gregor's body becomes covered in blood because of his excessive heteropatriarchal violence, which marks a link to the natural world and female reproductive

capabilities. Like a woman in the aftermath of birth, Gregor becomes covered in gore and blood because of his excessive violence, which forces his victims' entrails to "pass from inside to outside bringing with [them] traces of its contamination" (Creed 1993, 49). Gregor's rape and murder of Elia is said to have occurred with her infant son's "blood and brains still on his hands" (SoS2 337). The scene is re-told in ways that evoke disgust but also draw attention to the horror of pseudo-medieval heterosexuality. Gregor was ordered to kill the children but he made the decision to sexually assault Elia, a form of violence that is constructed as masculine in the West (see Helliwell 2000). Rather than bringing forth new life, Gregor's violence gives birth to horror as his own body is marked as a part of "the natural world of the mother" (Creed 1993, 49) because it is covered in a child's blood. The infant's blood represents Gregor's lack of futurity: he rapes Elia but murders her moments later, his own patriarchal violence stopping him from accessing even illegitimate heterosexual reproduction. While this is Gregor's seminal act of heteropatriarchal violence, "the one act that defines his monstrosity [...] when he stepped over the line [...] into overt villainy" (Rosenberg 2012, 22), it is one of many instances in which Gregor becomes partially or fully "splattered with gore from head to heels" (SoS2 400). The unstable female reproductive body is projected onto Gregor's male body because of his blood-drenched visage, and in this way the queer monstrous feminine and its promises of terror and abjection are used to critique his patriarchal violence.

In *Game of Thrones* Gregor becomes associated with the unstable female body through a conflation of birth and death, now cited through camera angles as well as his blood-stained body. The episode "Mockingbird" (S4E7) sees Cersei ask Gregor to be the state's champion during Tyrion's trial by combat. Her walk through the palace grounds to find Gregor is intercut with shots of him practicing his deadly swordsmanship on prisoners, which highlights Gregor's prowess. Gregor's violence is patriarchal because it is entirely individualistic: he kills scores of men because he wants to hone his skills. The violence also shores up the connection between masculinity and violence, for his strong, muscular chest and arms are emphasised, and low angle shots are used to make him and his body appear gigantic and powerful. Yet as Ann Davies (2007) notes in her study of masculinity in Spanish horror films, "the assertion of overt, muscular masculinity always implies not only its possible dissolution but also the horror of the regression of virility into abjection" (142) because once it becomes spectacular, the masculine body is also "open to the possibility of decay and abjection" (143), an argument that has been widely made by film studies scholars.

Gregor's body succumbs to abjection because his patriarchal violence is linked with the monstrous feminine: as he slashes a man's stomach his entrails appear to fall from his groin in a medium shot of the lower half of his torso (fig. 4). The framing connotes childbirth as the man's bowels, like a baby, "pass from inside to outside" (Creed 1993, 49), seemingly from between his legs. But it is another empty birth, for nothing is produced but gore, as in Gregor's murder of Elia. Multiple layers of abjection work to code this moment as disgusting and terrifying: the blood, birth connotations, and the blurring of male and female reproductive capacities. The abject horror is not confined to Gregor's victim; by the end of the scene Gregor's chest is covered in blood, which cites the unstable reproductive body (as it does in the novels). Through the alignment between Gregor's heteropatriarchal aggression, birth, and blood, Gregor evokes horror as his body becomes entwined with the queer monstrous feminine.

Figure 4: Gregor killing an unnamed man in King's Landing and blood pours on the ground between the victim's legs (S4E7 "Mockingbird")



When Gregor's patriarchal violence takes the form of forced cannibalism in *A Feast for Crows*, he is made monstrous through the queer archaic mother. Both Kristeva (1982, 77-79) and Creed (1993, 16-30) discuss the archaic mother, whose "generative power" promises to incorporate the life it once created. Just as Gregor's violence is aligned with birth, he also reflects the archaic mother's incorporation when he forces his political hostages to consume human flesh, a warped moment of maternal feeding. When Jaime arrives at Harrenhal looking for Vargo "the goat" Hoat, a minor villain, he is presented with the man's head only to find that "the Goat's lips had been sliced off, along with his ears and most of his nose" (FfC 452). The mutilated head is grotesque, and is

compounded when Jaime and the reader learn that the head has been “sliced” because Gregor forced his hostages to eat it: “One of the captives was always begging food [...] so Ser [Gregor] said to give him roast goat. [...] Ser took his hands and feet first, then his arms and legs” (FfC 453). Gregor feeds human flesh to his victims and uses cannibalism as a torture strategy: “Ser, he said to see that all the captives had a taste. And Hoat too, his own self. That whoreson ‘ud slobber when we fed him, and the grease’d run down into that skinny beard o’ his” (FfC 453). Gregor’s forced cannibalism can be seen as patriarchal violence because it is used to make him more comfortable—it stops the captives from their irritating “begging”—and represents an attack on the feminised “whoreson,” Hoat. The word “slobber” is suggestive of a baby, reinforcing Gregor’s twisted maternal monstrosity: his symbolic attempts to enter the system of heteropatriarchal reproduction. The forced cannibalism and the language with which it is described are marked as revolting, as is Gregor’s heteropatriarchal violence, because he is the originator of the cannibalism.

The traditionally maternal desire to nourish and care for others is paired with traditionally masculine violence, and in concert they connote the horror of the queer archaic mother: Gregor is a “cannibalistic parent” (Creed 1993, 23) but rather than incorporate his dependents he forces them to consume themselves. Through imagery that evokes incorporation and motherhood, Gregor becomes “the cannibalizing black hole from which all life comes and to which all life returns,” promising the “deepest terror” (Creed 1993, 25). The figure of the queer archaic mother marks the horror that a loss of boundaries produces, and in so doing critiques Gregor’s patriarchal violence.

As in Joffrey’s violence and its critique, the bloody mouth is also used to make Gregor’s excessive violence monstrous through the queer *vagina dentata*, although in this case camera angles make this act visible as a domination of less powerful men. This queer evocation of the monstrous feminine takes place in relation to Gregor’s violence in the season one episode “Cripples, Bastards and Broken Things” (S1E4) when he kills Ser Hugh of the Vale, who is marginalised by his youth and class. Gregor kills Ser Hugh by ramming his tournament lance into the younger man’s neck (fig. 5). The attack is highly self-serving; Gregor wants to win the tilt and knows that the surest way is to murder his opponent. He affirms the correlation between masculinity and patriarchal violence by using phallic weapons to further his own ends, and the dramatic military music adds to the masculine atmosphere. Importantly, the patriarchal violence is not condoned: as Ser Hugh lies dying, blood bubbles up from his mouth and runs down his chin for eleven seconds of screen time. The

length of the shot, the corpse, and the blood are presented as unsettling, and are linked explicitly to Gregor's violence.

Figure 5: Close up profile shot of Ser Hugh's face and neck as he spits up blood (S1E4 "Cripples, Bastards and Broken Things")



A similar connection between Gregor's patriarchal aggression and bloody mouths is made in *A Storm of Swords*/"The Mountain and the Viper" (S4E8) during Tyrion's trial by combat, wherein Gregor represents the state and kills Tyrion's champion, Oberynt Martell, who volunteered to fight as a state-sanctioned means of avenging his sister Elia. Despite the battle's legality, it is positioned as a masculine power play. Before the fight Tyrion and Oberynt compare fighting with sex—"size does not matter when you're flat on your back" (S4E8)—and the battle itself is overlaid with references to Elia's death. Heterosexual horror becomes the scene's focus, with Oberynt repeating the phrase, "you raped her, you murdered her, you killed her children" (SoS2 397-399; S4E8). Oberynt's dialogue resurrects the feminine that Gregor sought to banish through heteropatriarchal violence, a visitation that is partly enabled through his familial connection to Elia and partly through Oberynt's existing characterisation as Other because of his open bisexuality and Dornish ethnicity. When Gregor kills Oberynt, he punches his face and blood trails from his ruined mouth before Gregor crushes his skull in his hands while saying, "Elia Martell. I killed her children. Then I raped her. Then I smashed her head in like this" (S4E8; SoS2 401; fig. 6). The statement is more horrifying in reversing the order of events, and the skull-crushing is extremely graphic, evoking visceral disgust whilst overlaying Oberynt's death with that of his sister. Elia's rape and murder, Oberynt's death, and the bloody mouth are conflated into a single narrative moment, revealing Gregor's violence as an act of

heteropatriarchal domination over the feminine and the ethnic other. Both Oberyn's and Ser Hugh's deaths are shot in ways that foreground the bloody mouth in the very centre of the frame, and thereby link Gregor's excessive violence to the queer *vagina dentata* and its promise of horror.

Figure 6: Close up profile shot of Oberyn's face and chest as blood trails from his mouth and Gregor grabs his neck (S4E8 "The Mountain and the Viper")



The figures of the monstrous feminine with which Gregor's excessive violence is aligned in life are cited and turned against him when he dies and his body becomes pregnant with abjection. Gregor is fatally poisoned in the battle with Oberyn, and as he dies his body transforms, revealing "the mutable nature" of his flesh, just as pregnancy does to women's bodies (Creed 1993, 50). However, unlike the female reproductive body, Gregor becomes heavy with abject fluids, another empty birth like the ones that were linked to his patriarchal violence. The maester (doctor) who tends him, Qyburn, tells the royal council that Gregor's "flesh mortifies and the wounds ooze pus [...] even maggots will not touch such foulness [...] The veins in his arms are turning black (SoS2 425). Later in the series Gregor's health further deteriorates: Qyburn reports that the knight's "veins have turned black from head to heel, his water is clouded with pus, and the venom has eaten a hole in his side as large as my fist" (FfC 124).

Gregor's bodily decay is presented as grotesque not only because of his rotting skin, but because of the heteropatriarchal violence that caused it. In the lines before and after Qyburn's report, he and Cersei explicitly refer to the Martells: first through references to a magic "spell" that must have "thickened" the poison, and later when Cersei remarks that she must give Gregor's skull to the Dornish prince in compensation for Elia's death (FfC 124). Couched between these implicit

references to Gregor's rape and murder are descriptions of his body expanding by oozing pus in his wound and urine, contracting as venom eats his flesh, and transforming as he festers and his blood darkens. Gregor's body follows "the great cycle of birth, decay and death" (Creed 1993, 47) that marks women's relationship to nature: just as his flesh was once covered in his victims' blood as a means of marking his connection to the natural world and the female body's generative power, so too he now generates filth and decay in death.

The reproductive body is further emphasised when Gregor is reborn in a bastardised form of queer kinship with Cersei, becoming her prosthetic *vagina dentata*, a patchwork of corpses, a disjointed body which threatens the phallogocentric symbolic order. In the *Game of Thrones* episode "The Children" (S4E10), Qyburn inspects Gregor's wounds for the first time and claims that he can save the knight's life despite the fatal poison. The maester begins collecting medical instruments from around the room, which is small, dark, and filled with tubes and vials: as in other films where a male scientist creates life, the laboratory "re-creates an intra-uterine mise en scène, a maternal landscape" (Creed 2005, 43). Just as Gregor's patriarchal violence was made monstrous because it was presented as a queer birth, he is given life in a violent appropriation of women's reproductive power in Qyburn's prosthetic womb-laboratory, born into "a body without soul, a non-body, disquieting matter" (Kristeva 1982, 109), the ultimate form of abjection (Kristeva 1982, 4) and queer monstrosity. Gregor becomes a living dead monster, a fitting intertextual reference to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) that highlights his own failed attempts to reproduce through heterosexual kinship.

Gregor re-enters the narrative after a significant amount of time—almost two books have passed, and one season of the television series—and the scene is figured as a queer double birth for he and Cersei wherein they become one in a terrifying version of alternative kinship. Butler (1993, 94-95) argues that non-normative kinship can have enabling effects, and I expand her idea to suggest that queer kinship—like the queer monstrous feminine—is a mode that can have numerous ideological functions, including destructive or enabling ones discussed in chapter four, five, and the conclusion. However, with respect to Gregor and Cersei's relationship the bond is not consensual or equal, and for this reason it is presented as monstrous. When Gregor next appears in the narrative, visual signs that suggest birth are presented upon Cersei's body: she is naked, crying, and bloody, covered in filth and other abject fluids because she has just endured a walk of penance through King's Landing (Patel 2014). Cersei's body visually evokes the (re)birth that she and Gregor have

experienced, particularly when she returns to the palace, is wrapped in a blanket, and Gregor carries her away, his size making her seem like an infant and he a protective father (S5E10 “Mother’s Mercy”). Similarly in the novel, Cersei is presented as a newborn child: she feels “a pair of armored arms lifting her off the ground [...] as easily as she lifted Joffrey when he was still a babe” (DwD 1000).

Where Cersei’s body is visually coded as newborn, Gregor’s intellect and identity are wiped afresh and he is completely dominated by her in the same way that he once attempted to dominate the feminine. Gregor cannot talk, like a baby, and in the novel he is (re)named Ser Robert Strong, delivered into a new identity that is intrinsically fused with Cersei’s (DwD 1001; S5E10). Gregor’s/Robert’s dependence upon Cersei is signalled when Qyburn explains the knight’s inability to speak as “a vow of holy silence [...] he will not speak until all of His Grace’s enemies are dead and evil has been driven from the realm” (DwD 1001; S5E10). Gregor/Robert exists only to serve Cersei, but he cannot consent to the bond and Cersei dominates him completely. They are (re)born as one: a queer interconnection that turns the heterosexist violence Gregor/Robert used in life to a means of serving a different royal woman in (living) death.

More specifically, Gregor’s/Robert’s connection to Cersei is presented as terrifying in terms of him becoming her prosthetic phallus and being forced to use patriarchal violence on her behalf. Gregor/Robert is external matter that Cersei uses to compensate for what she perceives to be her lack: her non-warrior body. Gregor/Robert-as-prosthetic-phallus is one of the ways that the queerness of the monstrosity is emphasised, and his violence in (un)death cites the queer toothed vagina and archaic mother, which are used to empower Cersei. As Creed (1993) argues, many features of the archaic mother—“the mother as primordial abyss” (17)—also evoke the *vagina dentata* because they are the sites where extreme violence takes place, including “womb-like imagery, the long winding tunnels leading to inner chambers” (19) and “spider webs, dark vaults, worm-eaten staircases, dust and damp earth” (20). Gregor’s/Robert’s violence occurs in dark, enclosed areas such as tunnels or dungeons, and features “barred and dangerous entrances” (107). This iconography “is coded to suggest a monstrous, cannibalistic maternal figure which also represents the threat of the *vagina dentata*” (Creed 1993, 23).

Almost every act of patriarchal violence that Gregor performs on Cersei’s behalf takes place in these yonic spaces, signaling his lingering connection to the queer monstrous feminine. In the season five episode “No One” (S5E8), the Faith Militant attempt to seize Cersei in a dark corridor

beside a palace courtyard and she is told that if she resists, they will use violence. Cersei says “I choose violence” in a close up, after which one of the soldiers moves toward her. Gregor rips his head off with his bare hands, and his strength and graphic violence are marked as frightening because of the gore and because it does not affect him. As blood trails across the stone floor, the camera shows a high angle shot from the inside of one of the palace grates. The top half of the frame shows the grate’s intricate pattern, which resembles rows of teeth with a small hole in the middle. The bottom half reveals blood dripping down the dark walls, an image that connotes both blood trickling down a throat as it is being consumed and blood passing through the vagina during menstruation or after rape (fig. 7). The mouth-like grate, the blood, and the architecture signify the *vagina dentata*, which is connected back to Gregor’s patriarchal violence in life. The bloody mouth and womb-like spaces continue to be central to his violence and his monstrosity, although now they signal Gregor’s abjection and subservience to the feminine as he becomes a prosthetic phallus and *vagina dentata* in his queer kinship with the Queen, and in the same palace where he raped and murdered Elia.

Figure 7: Blood running through a palace grate after Gregor beheads one of the Faith Militant (S5E8 “No One”)



The Hounds

Ramsay’s patriarchal violence is critiqued through the queer monstrous feminine when his mouth is described with language that likens it to female genitals. A similar process occurs with Joffrey, although in Ramsay’s case his mouth is not described as worm-like but as fleshy and wet. He is referred to as “a fleshy young man with fat moist lips” (CoK 473), having “a fleshiness to him that

suggested that in later life he would run to fat,” and a “wet-lipped smile” (DwD 192) that is often a sign of impending violence. Ramsay’s servant Reek notes that “his lordship’s smile, the way his eyes were shining, the spittle glistening at the corner of his mouth” are “signs” that he has seen “before” (DwD 306; see also DwD 569). The intense textual focus on Ramsay’s “wet,” “moist,” “fleshy” “lips” when he is perpetrating or contemplating patriarchal violence presents him as a frightening character. It is significant that Ramsay is characterised as an antagonist through references to his flesh; the sigil for House Bolton is a flayed man, so the emphasis on Ramsay’s horrifying body is connected to patriarchal reproduction. More specifically, Ramsay’s excess of flesh marks his manic desire to enter the feudal patriarchy through reproduction because he was born a bastard and only becomes legitimate as an adult, but finds this position tenuous as his father marries a younger woman whom he soon impregnates. The descriptions of Ramsay’s flesh, wetness, and mouth (a border-crossing organ, as I have noted) connote the abject, suggesting that he lacks firm boundaries between the inside of his body and the outside world.

It is implied that Ramsay’s mouth is a site where both violence and sexual arousal are displayed, their interconnection foregrounding the fact that Ramsay enjoys violence. This kind of emotional response to violence is similar to Joffrey’s and is unacceptable in fantasy fiction, as noted in chapter one. The connection between Ramsay’s mouth, violence, and (hetero)sexual pleasure is made on multiple occasions. In “Kill the Boy” (S5E5), Ramsay threatens his lover Myranda by asking, “you’re not going to bore me, are you, Myranda?” In response she kisses him and then bites his lower lip before saying “Never.” Wiping blood from his mouth, Ramsay is clearly aroused by her oral sadism. In a similar vein, Ramsay orders his servant Theon to orally rape his new bride before he consummates the marriage. During the act Ramsay’s mouth is figured as a vulva: Theon observes that “Ramsay smiled his wet smile” (DwD 582) and “spittle glistened on his lips” (DwD 581). The scene is physical and psychological violence for Theon and Jeyne, as Ramsay rapes both characters as a means of bolstering his own (hetero)sexual, familial, and class power. The fact that Ramsay’s mouth is linked to his violence and pleasure positions his sexuality as oral rather than phallic, and hence non-reproductive: neither acts of sexual sadism nor oral sex can produce the heir he needs to cement his position in the feudal patriarchy. Conversely, the emphasis on Ramsay’s mouth relates his violence to female genitals, projecting the monstrous feminine onto his male body and marking him as a queer figure. In this way Ramsay’s violence is presented as terrifying because it prevents him from reproducing and because it evokes the queer monstrous feminine, which promises the

blurring of identity categories and the horror that ensues when these constitutive borders are broken.

Ramsay's violence often takes place in dark rooms with barred entrances, images that connote the *vagina dentata* and thereby critique his patriarchal violence. Creed (1993, 107) claims that "the barred and dangerous entrance" is a visual motif that represents the toothed vagina as well as the archaic mother. Many such entrances and passageways are present during Ramsay's patriarchal violence in *Game of Thrones*, such as when he walks through a doorway lined with sharp spikes while he and one of his cronies discuss his penchant for sadism (S4E2 "The Lion and the Rose"; see fig. 8). More sustained instances take place in relation to Theon Greyjoy's torture. Theon betrayed his allies, the Starks, by seizing their home in an effort to support his estranged father's rebellion—to secure his status as heir to the Iron Islands—and after he loses the castle Ramsay takes him prisoner. Ramsay's physical and psychological assaults on Theon are patriarchal in the sense that they are performed for the sole purpose of giving Ramsay sadistic pleasure and creating a faithful servant who can be manipulated to gain political power for the Bolton family. Right after Theon has been captured, Ramsay pretends to free him and take him to his sister, claiming to be Ironborn (S3E4 "And Now His Watch Is Ended"), that is, pretending to share Theon's attachment to heteropatriarchal reproduction. During their supposed escape Ramsay leads Theon through a labyrinth of locked doors and tunnels, emphasising the castle's womb-like structure. Rain and thunder are audible when the men are outside, and the wetness, overgrown plants, and somber music create a sense of looming danger. Ramsay unlocks a barred entrance to a dark tunnel, an image that evokes the female genitals, especially the toothed vagina (Creed 1993, 20) (fig. 9). After they (re)enter the castle Ramsay leads Theon into a contact with settings that connote the dangerous female reproductive system, namely a "long winding tunnel" and "damp earth" (Creed 1993, 19-20) (fig. 9 and 10). Following this uncanny journey, Ramsay returns Theon to the room in which he was originally restrained—a small, dimly lit dungeon. Ramsay's male body and his patriarchal violence are visually associated with imagery that connotes the monstrous feminine, which in turn becomes queer.

Figure 8: Ramsay and Locke walking through a doorway with spikes shown in silhouette (S4E2 “The Lion and the Rose”)



Figure 9: Long shot of Ramsay unlocking a secret door to the Dreadfort with Theon in tow (S3E4 “And Now His Watch Is Ended”)

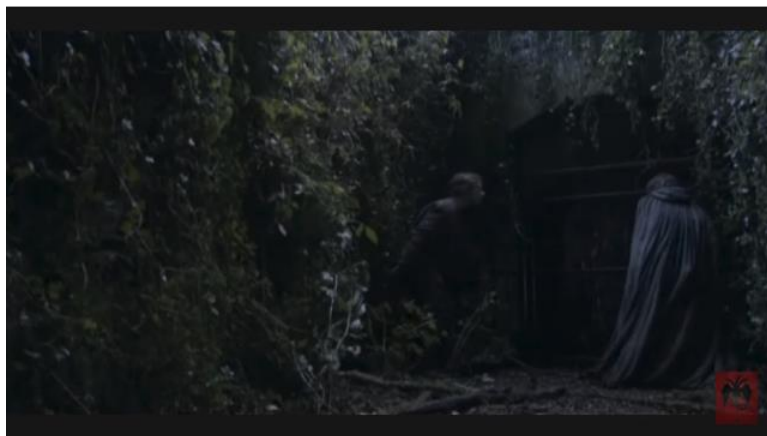


Figure 10: Long shot of Ramsay and Theon walking through a tunnel underneath the Dreadfort (S3E4 “And Now His Watch Is Ended”)



The queer monstrous feminine is similarly projected onto Ramsay’s violence in season six when he murders his step-mother Walda Frey and his newborn half-brother in order to secure his patriarchal position as Lord Bolton: he leads the woman into the hounds’ kennel via a tunnel (fig. 11) and a locked gate, the top half of which resembles a constellation of square mouths (fig. 12). Ramsay unlocks the door and leads Walda and son into the kennel where his dogs are housed, during which time his eerie theme music becomes progressively louder. The music, dark passageways, barred entrances, and guard dogs evoke the danger of the violent womb, and hence the archaic mother and the *vagina dentata*, and the ominous tone that these images create is used to critique Ramsay’s heteropatriarchal violence. Ramsay’s theme plays when they enter the kennel, and his complete control over the hounds is foregrounded. As he enters the kennel he silences the dogs with a verbal directive, and later commands them to kill Walda and son with a high-pitched whistle. Ramsay’s violence is patriarchal because it is entirely self-serving and reproduces the patriarchal system, but it also deforms this same system because the son repeats the violence his father taught him, but uses it to usurp his position as patriarch. In this way Ramsay both succeeds and fails in reproducing the law of the father, and this ambivalence is reflected in his violence. The hounds function as Ramsay’s prosthesis, allowing him to secure his status as the male heir to House Bolton while inadvertently evoking the monstrous feminine. Ramsay and the patriarchal system of reproduction become nightmarish as the queer monstrous feminine is projected onto his male body.

Figure 11: Ramsay leads Walda and her son to the dog kennel through an archway (S6E2 “Home”)



Figure 12: Ramsay opens the door to the dog kennel so that he, Walda, and her son can enter (S6E2 “Home”)



In the novels Ramsay’s patriarchal violence is critiqued because it prevents him from reproducing, and also because it evokes the *vagina dentata* in a similar way to Gregor and Joffrey, wherein Ramsay’s victims are described as having bloody mouths because they are forced to consume their own flesh. As noted above, Ramsay’s first wife, Lady Hornwood, was found “dead with her mouth all bloody and her fingers chewed off” because “after their wedding, the Bastard had locked her in a tower and neglected to feed her” (CoK 474). Ramsay marries and rapes Lady Hornwood, but his decision to starve her—his attempt to reject the feminine through patriarchal violence—leads to her death and his failure to produce a legitimate heir, that is, to reproduce the

patriarchal law. Likewise, Ramsay's torture of Theon is linked to a failure to reproduce: after being tortured Theon "had tried to bite his own ring finger off once, to stop it hurting after they had stripped the skin from it" (DwD 193). Theon tried to consume his own ring finger, an appendage that is specifically linked to patriarchal reproduction through marriage in Westeros. Later, Ramsay looks at Theon and observes, "there's blood on your mouth [...] have you been chewing on your fingers again, Reek?" (DwD 193). Ramsay's patriarchal violence intervenes in the reproduction of the paternal law, and this leads to images of monstrous femininity. The pictures these scenes paint, a woman with "her mouth all bloody" and a man with "blood on [his] mouth" are grotesque, and all the more so because they are caused by self-cannibalism, blurring the boundary between self and other, inside and outside the body, animate and inanimate. When the cannibalism leads to a bloody mouth, itself a symbol of the *vagina dentata*, Creed (1993, 23) argues that it connotes the fear of the archaic mother, who threatens to destroy and consume the life she created. Importantly, the frightening images are linked back to Ramsay, rather than his victims, because he is presented as the mastermind behind the auto-cannibalism. The act is attributed directly to "the Bastard" in Lady Hornwood's case, signalling Ramsay's failure in the patriarchal reproductive system, and implicitly to Ramsay in Theon's case, as he and his minions are the "they" who performed the flaying. The images of the monstrous feminine—the bloody mouth, the *vagina dentata*, and the archaic mother—and the disgust, fear, and dread that they evoke are projected onto Ramsay's male body and his patriarchal violence.

The cannibalistic *vagina dentata* is further used to highlight Ramsay's monstrosity when he attempts to punish Theon with queerness by pretending to eat Theon's severed and cooked penis as an exercise in psychological torture, but Ramsay's violence is turned against him when citations of the monstrous feminine are linked to his own male body. Theon is castrated in the season three episode "The Bear and the Maiden Fair" (S3E7) after he is seduced by two of Ramsay's concubines, an act that is only hinted at in the novels.¹⁴ Ramsay chooses to castrate Theon because both men view the penis and phallus as a defining feature of heterosexual manhood: its violent removal makes a man feminine and queer, and these positions become part of the punishment. While there is little

¹⁴ For example, Reek describes himself as "docile as a dog" and thinks, "If I had a tail, the Bastard would have cut it off" (DwD 190, original emphasis). Later in the novel Reek/Theon claims that Ramsay "has taken only fingers and toes and that other thing, when he might have had my tongue, or peeled the skin off my legs from heel to thigh" (DwD 303, original emphasis). It is implied that the "tail" and "other thing" are Theon's penis, which is all but confirmed when Ramsay orders Theon to sexually stimulate his new bride: "For a moment he did not understand. 'I . . . do you mean . . . m'lord, I have no . . . I . . .'" (DwD 583). Theon's confusion and reference to his lack—"I have no . . ."—suggests that his penis has been removed.

doubt in *Game of Thrones* as to whether Ramsay went through with the castration, it is confirmed three episodes later in “Mhysa” (S3E10). The scene begins with a close up of a plate containing a long cooked sausage, a knife, and a medieval feasting fork (fig. 13). The sausage is focalised for seven seconds of screen time, giving the viewer the opportunity to make the connection to Theon’s castration. Ramsay lifts the sausage to his mouth and the camera follows the motion of his hand, ending in a close up of his face as he places the meat in his mouth. In the foreground of the frame Ramsay chews with his mouth open. The sound of mastication is audible, along with subtle notes of Ramsay’s theme music (see Misra 2015).

Figure 13: Close up of a sausage on a plate that Ramsay is about to eat/ use to taunt Theon (S3E10 “Mhysa”)



Both the chewing mouth and the implied cannibalism are coded as disgusting and shocking, which are in turn linked to the queer monstrous feminine as a critique of Ramsay’s violence. In the middle ground Theon is visible, restrained in the centre left of the frame (fig. 14). Because Theon is in the middle ground and Ramsay is in the foreground, Theon’s crotch is level with Ramsay’s mouth, which looks large enough to consume his victim—a poignant framing decision that evokes cannibalism. Ramsay’s chewing mouth is also connected with Theon’s penis through movement in the frame, as Ramsay’s mouth and the fire in the background are the only things that move, creating a visual line that brings the viewer’s eye directly over Theon’s crotch. If these framing devices suggest that Ramsay is eating Theon’s severed penis, it is soon confirmed when he says, still chewing, “those girls weren’t lying. You did have a good sized cock” (S3E10 “Mhysa”). The phrase “good sized cock” can be read as a homosocial praise or mocking, highlighting Ramsay’s awareness

of, but lack of fidelity to, heteropatriarchal reproduction, for he literally severs and pretends to eat Theon's reproductive organ.

Figure 14: Close up of Ramsay eating a sausage with Theon restrained in the background (S3E10 "Mhysa")



Ramsay's words can also be read as expressing a homoerotic and sadistic pleasure in Theon's "good sized" genitals: forcing Theon to become queer, as was Ramsay's intention in castrating him, but also inadvertently entering this category himself. This subversive reversal can also be seen in the next shot, in which the camera moves to a close up of Theon's clothed crotch and then, at medium speed, pans up his muscular torso to his face. Theon is obviously distressed, but his half-naked body splayed on the rack and the camera's movement up his body nonetheless suggest a narrative rupture in which Ramsay and Theon may be read as having a queer relationship between their bodies. Homoeroticism is linked with horror for a full six seconds in which viewers are encouraged to believe that Ramsay is literally eating Theon's penis, but the horror that Ramsay intended to inflict is turned against him as he too becomes part of this queer scene.

As a terrifying *vagina dentata*/castrator/pseudo-cannibal whose male body is foregrounded, Ramsay's patriarchal violence is reversed and he is aligned with the queer monstrous feminine, which in this instance promises to threaten patriarchal civilisation by revealing that the borders between homosexual/heterosexual, queer/normative, human/animal, self/other, and male/female are easily breeched. The framing and dialogue connote the cannibalistic *vagina dentata*, but it is a specifically queer incarnation of this monstrous figure because it is linked to a male bodied and masculine character, and because of the homoeroticism inherent in the image of Ramsay eating the

phallic sausage. The latter is emphasised when Ramsay caresses Theon's chest and neck like a lover just before he renames him "Reek" (fig. 15). The intimacy between the men is presented in such a way as to emphasise the sexualisation of Ramsay's patriarchal violence. In this moment and those that foreground the sausage, "the fragility of the law" (Kristeva 1982) is foregrounded and multiple borders are disrupted. The phallogentric symbolic order comes under stress as the phallus is reduced to a fleshy and vulnerable penis that can be severed, cooked, and consumed.

Figure 15: Medium close up of Ramsay talking to Theon and touching his chest (S3E10 "Mhysa")



The lens of the *vagina dentata* and the archaic mother are also useful for viewing the prosthesis-like relationship between Ramsay and his hounds as a critique of his patriarchal violence. Creed (1993, 108) argues that in paintings of beautiful women, the "animal companion with open jaws and snapping teeth" represent the toothed vagina: "the creature represent[s] her deadly genital trap and evil intent." When masculine characters are likewise linked with snarling animal companions, this expands Creed's argument to reveal how masculine and male characters can be made horrifying through the monstrous feminine without becoming women. In the Martinverse Ramsay's hounds are used as a prosthetic *vagina dentata*: they are the queer "genital trap" he uses to hunt, harass, and kill women. They can also be seen to represent a bastardised form of queer kinship, like that between Gregor and Cersei, wherein their relationship becomes monstrous because it is not consensual or equal. In "The Lion and the Rose" (S4E2)¹⁵ Ramsay, Theon/Reek, and his paramour Miranda hunt a peasant woman called Tansy in the woods, using the hounds to trace their

¹⁵ Also see "Home" (S6E2), a scene I have already discussed in which Ramsay feeds his step mother and step-brother to his dogs.

victim's scent. The hunting scene is edited so that it consists of a series of very short shots, which work with Ramsay's eerie theme music to create an urgent and dangerous tone. These are combined with womb-like imagery during the chase: Tansy and the dogs run through a long dark tunnel, and each time she pauses to catch her breath it is within a muddy gully. When Myranda shoots Tansy through the thigh with an arrow, Ramsay orders his hounds to eat his victim alive, and her screams are audible over the sound of the snarling and barking animals. The imagery and sound evoke disgust and fear, but direct them at Ramsay. It is he who leads the chase—he literally pulls Myranda along behind him—and controls the hounds: Ramsay yells “Rip her! Rip her! Rip her!” as the animals kill on his behalf. The dogs and the womb-like *mise-en-scène* within the forest promise the *vagina dentata* and the horror of death, castration, and blurred borders that it represents, and these are in turn projected onto Ramsay's patriarchal violence as a means of critiquing the act.

Ramsay's violence is positioned as terrifying in a different way in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where he uses the hounds as a prosthesis that allows him to perform a failed version of patriarchal reproduction and his violence is made monstrous through association with the archaic mother. Theon/Reek explains that the “peasant girls Ramsay had hunted, raped, and killed” get to “come back as bitches” if they are entertaining prey; “the next litter to come out of the Dreadfort's kennels would include a Kyra, Reek did not doubt” (DwD 492). The hounds incorporate Ramsay's victims by eating them and giving birth to puppies that carry the women's names. Ramsay creates a cycle of birth and death in which the peasant women become part of his prosthetic *vagina dentata* and are forced into a relation of queer kinship with him, but this attempt at (illegitimate) patriarchal reproduction fails. Ramsay rapes and potentially impregnates the women, but like Gregor, he kills them before they can bear his children. Unlike Gregor, Ramsay does produce something—the puppies—but even these are marked as a failure because they are named after women, and he inadvertently creates a deformed matriarchy. Ramsay becomes what Creed (1993, 23-25) calls a “cannibalistic maternal figure [...] from which all life comes and to which all life returns.”

Ramsay's patriarchal violence is also positioned as monstrous when he uses his hounds to sexually abuse his wife but this act evokes the *vagina dentata* and prevents him from replicating the paternal law through heterosexual reproduction. In *A Dance with Dragons* Ramsay's second wife, Arya

Stark,¹⁶ implies that she has been forced to have sex with the dogs: “I’ll do whatever he wants . . . whatever he wants . . . with him or . . . or with the dog or . . . please . . . he doesn’t need to cut my feet off” (DwD 794). Arya’s offer to perform bestiality is horrifying, and this horror is directed toward Ramsay and the acts of heteropatriarchal terror he has inflicted upon his wife. Soon thereafter Theon/Reek observes that “her small pale breasts [are] covered with teeth marks” (DwD 795), although it is unclear who or what bit her. Ramsay uses the hounds as a prosthetic *vagina dentata* that allows him to satiate his own individualistic desire to abuse women and reinforce his power over them—an attempt to violently banish the feminine Other—but this violence inadvertently mocks his duty to reproduce the symbolic law/patriarchal line of succession because he forces his wife to engage in bestiality. Ramsay’s violence forecloses his ability to reproduce the law, as it does in the scene where he names his hounds after peasant women and those featuring Gregor’s deformed births.

Ramsay’s death is highlighted as a reflection and critique of violence because of the narrative tension coded within the queer feminine monstrosity that surrounds him. In the *Game of Thrones* episode “Battle of the Bastards” (S6E9) Ramsay is eaten by his own dogs, starting with his mouth. The scene begins with Ramsay tied to a chair in the dog kennel in a position of abjection and submission, beaten bloody by his nemesis Jon Snow. Ramsay appears in a close up, his skin making a squishing sound as he wriggles in his bonds, alternating shots of his face and fingers showing his bloody, filthy flesh: his own body has become abject matter. The dialogue in the scene emphasises Ramsay’s death as a permanent failure to reproduce the law/patriarchal family, an extenuation of the failures I have already noted. He tells his wife Sansa,¹⁷ “you can’t kill me. I’m part of you now,” alluding to the psychological and physical scars he has given her and the possibility of her being pregnant with his child. But Sansa rebukes his desire to reproduce: “your words will disappear. Your house will disappear. Your name will disappear. All memory of you will disappear.” Ramsay attempted to banish the feminine and the queer with his patriarchal violence, but it ultimately prevents him from perfectly—or imperfectly—reproducing the symbolic order/patriarchal law. Ramsay’s patriarchal violence is deployed against him in a subversive reversal, one which is highlighted throughout the rest of the scene. The hounds growl and Ramsay’s theme music plays—

¹⁶ The woman is actually Jeyne Poole, who grew up at Winterfell with the Stark girls. The Lannisters capture her in King’s Landing, claim that she is Arya Stark, and send her back to Winterfell to be married to the newly-legitimised Ramsay as a means of securing Roose Bolton’s status as Warden of the North.

¹⁷ In *Game of Thrones* the “real” Sansa Stark is wed to Ramsay instead of Arya/Jeyne Poole.

just as it did when he fed people to the dogs. The textual echoes connect the scenes together and in so doing suggest that patriarchal violence only ever produces destruction for those who use it. The circularity is foregrounded on multiple fronts: all of Ramsay's death is audible just as it was when he killed Tansy and Walda, and his "fleshy" mouth is centralised. One of the animals walks up to Ramsay and sniffs his bloody visage, moves back for a moment, then attacks him, biting his mouth and face (fig. 16), an eerie echo of the scene with Myranda. The dogs turn on their master: Ramsay is incorporated by his own queer *vagina dentata* as the narrative comes full circle, confirming his monstrosity while revealing his violence as part of a destructive cycle. The graphic scene is presented as disgusting and horrifying, as well as satisfying, as Sansa enacts her revenge. Ramsay, like Gregor and Joffrey, uses heteropatriarchal violence to bolster his own power and banish the feminine, but he is ultimately aligned with and then consumed by the queer monstrous feminine and is unable to fulfil his part in the reproduction of the patriarchal law.

Figure 16: Close up of Ramsay's face being eaten by one of his hounds in the dog kennel at Winterfell (S6E9 "Battle of the Bastards")



Conclusion

Violence is one of the stylised acts that constitute patriarchal masculinity in society and in fiction. However, in the Martinverse, patriarchal violence becomes grotesque and unsettling through the imagery that surrounds it. Creed's popular horror film application of Kristeva's concept of the abject, specifically her work on the monstrous feminine, helps illuminate how patriarchal violence by embodied male characters is rendered monstrous in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*. However, following Baker's concept of the Monstrous Queer I have explored how this occurs in a

specifically queer mode: wherein male bodies are aligned with symbols of monstrous femininity including the *vagina dentata*, birth, and bloody mouths. Ramsay, Gregor, and Joffrey all use violence to gain personal power and/or pleasure over women and less powerful men, to repudiate the feminine, and to repeat the heterosexist patriarchal law, but this violence is turned against them. Their violence ultimately stops them from being able to reproduce the law/patriarchal family: Joffrey is killed at his wedding, Gregor is continually linked to empty or failed births, and Ramsay is explicitly told that all signs of his life will “disappear” (S6E9). Patriarchal violence is shown to be the true horror in a brutal world. This is true of characters who are clearly marked as villains but it is also true of protagonists who use violence that is sanctioned by the law, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: The Sovereign Sword

In the first chapter of *A Game of Thrones* a young boy called Bran watches his father execute a man for desertion, an act described as “the king’s justice” (11/S1E1 “Winter is Coming”). As I explore in this chapter, the deed is not simply “justice.” While it is easy to condemn the monstrous acts of violence discussed in the previous chapter, violent punishments exerted for the purpose of “justice”—particularly in the King’s name—might seem sequestered from that critique in the pseudo-medieval context of the Martinverse. This chapter will argue, to the contrary, that this most legitimate, legal, and seemingly acceptable form of violence is critiqued via the same mechanisms as the horrific monstrous violence in chapter two because it is often (but not always) patriarchal in the sense that it is individualistic and empowers the self at others’ expense. In the case of the execution Bran watches, there are negative consequences at the level of plot: although in killing the man Bran’s father re-activates his power as the king’s representative by performing sovereign violence, he loses valuable political information that could have readied the kingdom for an oncoming invasion. But those consequences also extend to Eddard’s own death, and the death or abjection of the sons that imitate his performance of sovereign masculinity. In disclosing imitation as the means by which subjects are constituted and society is reproduced, performances of sovereign violence such as Eddard’s also become sites for critiquing these constructions by revealing their contingency and flaws.¹⁸

As with the monstrosity of the “evil” men discussed in chapter two, acts of sovereign violence are sites where classical fantasy promises clash with the Martinverse’s postmodernism. The tension exposes the citationality of the act and the structures that constitute subjectivity, which opens up a space in which the male symbolic order and the Law are revealed to be fragile and subject to revision. The textual conflict directs the audience’s attention to the proliferation of sovereign violence, wherein the act leads to parodic and/or flawed repetitions that disassemble the structures they are intended to support: a firm and closed male body and a prosperous kingdom. Masculine characters may use sovereign violence to reinforce their own power and disempower

¹⁸ Within this world, male-embodied masculinity is more explicitly and frequently connected to sovereignty than femininity, although I return to questions of authority, violence, and masculinity in relation to several female characters, namely Cersei Lannister in chapter four, and Daenerys Targaryen and Arya Stark in the conclusion.

others, but the repetitive structures in the texts show that these acts are part of a disastrous pattern that harms the perpetrators as much as their victims.

Sovereign power was most influentially theorised by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) as a technology of power wielded by the monarch over the body of the subject, and in the following analysis I make use of this definition while expanding it to consider its gendered and affective configurations in the Martinverse. Via the technology of sovereign violence, the monarch punishes a criminal with torture or death as a means of redressing symbolic injuries against the sovereign's "two bodies," namely, the "transitory element that is born and dies" and "the physical yet tangible support of the kingdom" and the law (Foucault 1977, 28). Although the notion of sovereign violence has been re-theorised in relation to twenty-first century contexts,¹⁹ Foucault's focus on the medieval period makes his original articulation of the concept most relevant to discussing sovereignty in fantasy fiction because of the genre's medievalism. Foucault discusses several grounding elements that sovereign violence promises, including the public ceremony (48-49), the multiple injuries to be avenged (48), and the battle (50-51). He hints toward its composition and contingency when he describes sovereign violence's "ruthlessness, its spectacle, its physical violence, its unbalanced play of forces, its meticulous ceremonial, its entire apparatus" (Foucault 1977, 49).

One area where it is necessary to adapt Foucault's formulation to the pseudo- rather than actual medievalism of the Martinverse is in terms of affect. Foucault's account of the affective dimensions of sovereign violence reflects the normative masculine approach to this act in medieval times, where anger and the enjoyment of defeating a challenger are appropriate. He suggests that the law works with feeling to justify violence, which is borne out of anger (the desire for revenge) or joy (victory and triumph), and leads to joy on the part of the sovereign and executioner. However, this affective register is less directly applicable to the modern era, as Foucault later demonstrates with relation to biopower and self-surveillance in the twentieth century (1977, 135-308). It is especially unsuited for the fantasy genre, where protagonists are expected to master numerous forms of

¹⁹ Writing before Foucault but in response to the first world war, Carl Schmitt (1985, 1) contends that in relation to the state, sovereignty is based on the ability to determine the exception to the law, meaning those acts that would be against the law in one context but are made permissible through the sovereign's will. Schmitt's premise is further explored by Giorgio Agamben (1998), who theorises sovereign power in modern democracy as the force between the exception and the production of human life, manifesting as the border of the political collective. Schmitt and Agamben's theories of sovereign power are useful in twenty-first century political contexts, because they are informed by, and speak to, those contexts.

combat as a part of their quest, but to dislike their own and others' violence, as noted in chapter one (Hammit-McDonald 2003; Horstmann 2003). In the Martinverse the enactment of sovereign violence should stem from a logical decision about what will be best for the community rather than personal feelings, as I will show, but characters are expected to feel negative about the act as a sign of their affective competence and moral judgement. Cultural discourses around feelings have changed significantly since Foucault theorised the affective elements of sovereign violence, as noted in chapter one, making it less applicable to the executions in the pseudo-medieval Martinverse.

The centrality of sovereign power to fantasy fiction has been noted by Kim Wilkins (2011), who argues that the genre's European roots lead readers to expect the feudal system and its technologies of power. Wilkins argues that "the representation of power in fantasy fiction sees that it exists only to pass from the hands of a tyrant to a true king (or queen) and back again; it does not get broken up and redistributed. It is monolithic" (Wilkins 2011, 137). I agree that the fantasy genre promises to privilege sovereignty as part of the pseudo-medieval aesthetic, and that repetition is central to this process. However, in the Martinverse, sovereign violence performs a more complex role relating to promises about the self/Other, the centrality of the phallus, affect, and its transformations as it is re-worked by characters such as Jon Snow who refuse to repeat its patriarchal logic. Patriarchal violence is reproduced, but as I will show, it is also critiqued by association with abjection and cyclical narrative structures.

While sovereign violence is practiced by many characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*,²⁰ I focus on four: Eddard Stark, patriarch and Warden of the North, and his three eldest sons: his heir Robb Stark, his ward Theon Greyjoy, and his ward and supposed bastard son Jon. In the Martinverse sovereign violence is comprised of a series of acts, promises, and intentions that the author and reader are aware of and which inform the narrative, including familial, affective, and phallic in the novels and elements of mise-en-scène and costuming in the adaptation. The series explicitly represents the imitative nature of sovereign violence through specific scenes showing a boy being trained to be a man through his exposure to patriarchal violence. The father-son relationships foreground the connection of sovereign violence to patriarchal reproduction. My combination of Judith Butler's, Julia Kristeva's, and Barbara Creed's theories of performativity, abjection, and monstrous femininity allow these characters' repetitions of sovereign violence to be understood as

²⁰ Other characters who use sovereign violence include, but are not limited to, Daenerys and her husband Khal Drogo in Essos, and Joffrey, Cersei, Stannis Baratheon, and the kingsguard in Westeros.

acts through which a particular feature of male-embodied masculinity is (re)produced, as well as the site where it may be undone when the repetition is flawed. The practice of citing past performances of sovereign violence to justify or inform those in the present is similar to the practice of judicial sentencing: “the judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names invariably cites the law that he applies, and it is the power of this citation that gives the performative its binding or conferring power” (Butler 1993, 171). As in chapter two, sovereign violence is haunted by narrative circularity wherein men are killed in ways that echo the sovereign violence they used in life, which leads to a critique of patriarchal violence. These moments of disgust and the repetitive structures within the narrative point toward violence as part of a destructive cycle in which individual masculine identities and patriarchal society more broadly are undone. Investigating sovereign violence in the Martinverse involves tracing the relation between repetition, failure, abjection, and circularity to demonstrate how these acts are presented as unable to support a coherent masculine identity or functioning society.

Sovereign Initiation

Sovereigns are not born knowing how to enact appropriate violence, and the processes through which it is taught—the acknowledgement that its familial, affective, and phallic promises are not natural—is key to disclosing its imitative function. Sovereign violence is presented as an initiation into adult masculinity in *A Game of Thrones* / “Winter is Coming” (S1E1). As noted earlier, the initiate is Bran, the second-youngest son of Eddard. At the beginning of the narrative Eddard executes a deserter from the Night’s Watch—a character called Gared in the television series and Will in the book—in front of his sons as an instruction in masculinity and sovereign violence. Placing his violence within the domain of the family, itself a self-reproducing system intrinsic to patriarchal systems, Eddard begins by also tying that violence to a broader tradition, stating that while other rulers hire a headsman, “our way is the older way. The blood of the First Men still flows in the veins of the Starks” (GoT 14). Sovereign violence is presented as an “older” practice, an acknowledgment that the act and the restoration of order that it promises works to the logic of classical fantasy through the idea that one “good” man can make the world “good,” logic that is out of generic place in the postmodern narrative. Dan Ward (2018) makes a similar point, arguing that “notions of chivalry and honour are integral to the images of normative masculinity that children of both sexes

grow up with in Westeros” (110), particularly in this scene as it emphasises “the weight of history and tradition on the Stark men” (111).

Eddard’s act of sovereign violence relies upon a simplistic and binary moral universe yet takes place in a postmodern narrative, and I argue that this overburdening of genre conventions denaturalises the act with subversive effects, much like the monstrous masculine characters in the previous chapter. In *A Game of Thrones* Bran repeatedly refers to his father as “his lord father” (11, 12), states that “it was the ninth year of summer” (11), refers to stories about “giants and ghouls” (11) and the “age of heroes” (12), and mentions his father’s “spell-forged” sword, named Ice. In *Game of Thrones* viewers see rolling green hills and misty air, which place the events within a tradition of classical Anglophile fantasy fiction that features lush green countryside. Other iconic texts that make use of this scenery include, for example, the novel and film versions of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series.

Bran’s access to sovereign violence is dependent upon his successful repetition of specific positions and acts—including those that relate to genetics, class status, blood, gender, and the body. Repetition is signalled early in the initiation, disclosing sovereign violence as a practice that proliferates through the knowing citation of previous acts. In the novels this is emphasised in an exchange between Bran and his half-brother Jon, who guides his initiation. Jon says, “Keep the pony well in hand [...] And don’t look away,” dialogue which is repeated back by the narrator: “Bran kept his pony well in hand, and did not look away” (12). Learning sovereign violence is comprised of repeated acts: controlling one’s steed and watching the execution without revealing fear or disgust. Through Jon’s instruction the reader receives the first building blocks of sovereign violence: imitation and control.

The reproduction of patriarchal systems through violence is implied in *Game of Thrones* through the characters’ costumes, which reflect the repetition through which classed subjects and the patriarchal feudal society are reproduced. Almost all of the characters wear one of two near-identical outfits: that of the garrison (helmets, brown hauberk, and grey boiled leather) and that of the nobles (black cloak with a light brown fur stole and brown leather jerkin with straps crossed over the chest). In one long shot Eddard’s sons, Robb, Jon, and Bran, appear as miniature reproductions of their father as their faces are obscured by distance and only their identical costumes and height are visible (fig. 17). The multiple levels of repetition in the genre conventions, costumes, and setting place Eddard’s act of sovereign violence within a world of imitation. Although

these repetitions work to effect a sense of naturalness, violence is not natural or inevitable, and for this reason its repetitions can be determined and turned against their originating aims in subversive ways.

Figure 17: Long shot of Eddard and his retinue as they assemble to observe Will's/Gared's execution (S1E1 "Winter is Coming")



In the novels the performance of sovereign violence also involves particular emotional constraints. Eddard tells Bran that when he has to carry out “justice” himself, “you must take no pleasure in the task, but neither must you look away” (GoT 14). Sovereign violence promises objective and engaged perpetrators: it should not be motivated by individualistic feelings or desires, such as revenge, power, love, or honour. The importance of enacting the violence in the correct emotional register is of particular importance within the fantasy genre because, as I have noted, the acceptability of violence is powerfully mediated by affect. Through the fantasy genre expectations that Eddard reflects, sovereign violence is embedded within the masculine domain, and emotional repression is further linked to manhood.

One of the ways in which acts of sovereign violence are shown to be concerned with power rather than justice is through the promise of the phallus. As discussed in chapter one, I view the phallus as the symbolic and idealised image of the erect penis that is intended to confer power. When acts of sovereign violence take place in the Martinverse, the sword is focalised as a phallic image during certain executions as a means of representing the sovereign’s personal desire for phallic power at the expense of safeguarding the realm, that is, its patriarchal elements.

“Swinging the sword” is one of many acts that produce the fantasy genre, and it is through the sword as genre convention that sovereign violence is revealed to be an act of power above all, and generative in multiple senses: it links masculinity with violence and judiciary power, sustains the family as a unit of social control, reinforces the able body as essential to all of these practices, and produces phallic power while making it essential to all of the aforementioned forces. Eddard says that “the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword” (GoT 12; S1E1 “Winter is Coming”) indicating that sovereign violence should only be performed by elite and able-bodied cisgender men. Because execution and judgement are so tightly wound, judiciary power and, by extension, morality are gendered as masculine, reflecting the patriarchal pseudo-medieval world that Martin reproduces.²¹ And because judgement and morality become masculine domains, the responsibility for fair sentencing must logically be assumed by men, and so the law becomes a paternal law through the operations of sovereign violence.

Bran’s initiation in *A Game of Thrones* provides a useful illustration of phallic sovereign violence through his observations about Eddard’s sword, which encourage the audience to see that the act is imperfect because it is about power rather than protecting the realm. Eddard uses Ice to perform the execution, citing familial legacy, class power, the fantasy genre, and the male sovereign as critical to producing phallic sovereign violence. Bran observes that the sword “was as wide across as a man’s hand, and taller even than [Bran’s fourteen year old bother] Robb. The blade was Valyrian steel, spell-forged and dark as smoke. [...] [Eddard] took hold of Ice with both hands” (GoT 12). Bran’s narration creates an image of Eddard as the ultimate sovereign and righteous enactor of sovereign violence: the “spell-forged” weapon is linked with classical fantasy heroism, and the “wide,” “tall,” “dark” sword that requires “two hands” indicates that Eddard’s phallic power is without equal but also all consuming: it is the focal point of the scene. When Eddard makes the “single sure stroke” (GoT 12) that severs the deserter’s head, his confidence in his own sovereign power, moral judgement, and phallic skill are entwined in a ceremony that produces sovereign power as much as it does phallogentric masculinity. Here the scene focuses upon the majesty of Eddard’s

²¹ As I have noted in chapter one, several scholars have questioned why fantasy authors such as Martin continue to make use of patriarchal pseudo-medieval systems amid other radical changes to the genre. Jane Tolmie (2006) argues that fantasy fiction continually reproduces oppressive and patriarchal neomedieval worlds for heroines to overcome, but in so doing these texts affirm individual exceptionalism rather than addressing structural inequalities. Building on Tolmie’s argument, Debra Ferreday (2015) has demonstrated how rape culture is present in *Game of Thrones*, even as fans of the series reject this patriarchal repetition in the digital sphere.

sword, betraying the moment of deformity in his sovereign violence: he is motivated by a desire to re-establish his phallic power by enacting the law.

Eddard's phallic motivation becomes more visible in the *Game of Thrones* adaptation (S1E1 "Winter is Coming"), further demonstrating that his violence is a means of demonstrating his phallic prowess via the law. The camera shows a low angle shot of Eddard and his sword, where Ice and the loose end of the sword belt are in a phallic position (fig. 18). The shot occupies a full two seconds of screen time and is repeated moments later before Eddard severs the man's head. Between these frames is a long shot of Eddard in the middle of the lower third of the screen, his silver sword again suggestive of the phallus because of its placement near his groin and the visual contrast between the light silver sword and Eddard's black cloak. When Eddard and Bran speak after the execution, the pommel of Eddard's sword becomes visible at an acute angle from his groin, reminding viewers of his phallic power (fig. 19). In *Game of Thrones* the phallus is the central element of sovereign violence, as demonstrated through the repeated visual motif of the phallic sword/sword belt. As in the novels, the phallus-sword's visual centrality reveals Eddard's act of sovereign violence as being flawed because one of his motivations is to reassert power over the criminal's body rather than protect the realm.

Figure 18: Low angled medium shot of Eddard holding his sword as he sentences Will/Gared (S1E1 "Winter is Coming")



Figure 19: Eddard explaining his actions to Bran in a medium close up, the pommel of his sword visible at the bottom of the frame (S1E1 “Winter is Coming”)



Contact with the abject is an inevitable part of sovereign violence and the structure through which it functions. Criminals are abject because they challenge the law’s stability, and this state is reflected upon their bodies through abject signifiers. Kristeva (1982, 53) contends that “the body’s inside” breaks through the skin “in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside.” Crime represents such a collapse “because it draws attention to the fragility of the law” and “premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more [abject] because they heighten the display of such fragility” (Kristeva 1982, 4). The men whose executions I examine experience bodily abjection because of the way their crimes disrupt the law. Sovereign violence is intended to resolve this fragility by restoring the monarch’s power, the force of the law, and the kingdom’s borders—restoring the boundaries of the sovereign’s body which is also the body politic—but because the execution is deficient, the criminal’s abjection is not contained but spreads. In other words, sovereign violence always produces abjection as the act of execution forces the criminal’s body to become fragmented, unstable, penetrable, and permeable. But successful performances of sovereign violence resolve the blurred boundaries of the criminal’s body instantly because they reactivate the kingdom’s borders and the sovereign’s power.

The performance of sovereign violence by Eddard seems to be successful and later there are suggestions of deformity, and they lead him to become temporarily abject because of his contact with the criminal’s body. However, in flawed repetitions of sovereign violence such as Eddard’s, the sovereign body is shown to be fragile: he comes into contact with the abject and becomes a threat to

the male symbolic order. The physical manifestation of the criminal's threat to the law upon the criminal body reinforces the urgent need for sovereign violence and in so doing makes it appear moral. In Eddard's case, this promise is realised through descriptions of Will's/Gared's physically incomplete body. Bran observes that "he had lost both ears and a finger to frostbite" (GoT 11), and Will's/Gared's corporeal vulnerability becomes the key feature of his characterisation: Bran describes him as "the ragged man" on three separate occasions (GoT 12, 13, 18). The Oxford English Dictionary defines "ragged" as "old and torn," "having an irregular or uneven surface, edge, or outline," or "lacking finish, smoothness, or uniformity" (Oxford University Press 2018). Will's/Gared's "ragged" body is abject because he lacks the closed, firm, and impermeable body that the male symbolic order demands. Bodily fragmentation is further evoked when Bran claims that "his father took off the man's head" (12) and, on the next page, when Robb says, "The Others take his eyes" (13). The sword and the supernatural Others—the army of living dead that is invading Westeros—suggest that Will's/Gared's body is unstable and open. It is "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1982, 4), which is unacceptable according to the dominant masculine discourse and must be remedied with sovereign violence.

Eddard's negotiation of the multiple forms of abjection that Will/Gared represents through his ragged body and abject criminal status reveals a flaw, in that he privileges sovereign violence to the detriment of the kingdom in his desire to reactivate his power as the sovereign's representative. If the white walkers that Will/Gared forewarns Eddard about are corpses, the pinnacle of Kristevian abjection, then living corpses push this abjection even further, blurring all of the boundaries that define and safeguard the self and culture.²² In *Game of Thrones* Will/Gared mutters: "white walkers... I saw them..." as soldiers escort him to the tree trunk, and when he explains his crime he says, "I saw the white walkers. People need to know" (S1E1 "Winter is Coming"). Will/Gared is cadaverous as he makes this warning with chapped lips, frostbitten white skin, and dark eyes sunken into his skull. His liminality is highlighted when the close up of his ravished face is interspersed with shots of the other characters in the scene, all of whom look healthy and alert.

Eddard's enactment of sovereign violence can be seen to fail because he refuses to listen to Will/Gared—to embrace the Other—because he cannot face the idea that the white walkers have already invaded the kingdom. That Eddard—who is characterised as reasonable and sensible—will

²² Several scholars have used Kristeva's work on the abject to analyse the cinematic zombie, including Jamie Russell (2005), Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry (2008, 102), and Angela Tenga and Elizabeth Zimmerman (2013).

not listen to these warnings suggests that he cannot face the societal threat represented by the white walkers' penetration of the kingdom's boundaries. The realisation that the self is abject, when the subject "finds the impossible within [...] finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject" (Kristeva 1982, 5), is an unsettling experience, and Eddard empowers himself by ignoring the threat. He focuses on repudiating the micro-abjection before him: Will/Gared and the idea of the living dead. This decision is framed as the fulfilment of classical fantasy promises: executing Will/Gared is lawful and Eddard trusts the law completely, so he executes Will without pause. Sovereign violence is used to expel Will/Gared and symbolically reject the presence of the white walkers, as Will's/Gared's experience and decaying body herald their attack. Yet as Eddard speaks, non-diegetic sounds hint at his folly as eerie music plays in the background, hinting toward a looming threat. Eddard's refusal to listen is one of the reasons his sovereign violence is faulty.

Signifying this fault, Eddard's body takes on the fluidity of the criminal he executes, as when Bran observes that "his father peeled off his gloves" (GoT 12). The word "peel" conventionally describes the act of removing the skin or outer covering from a fruit, and so speaks to the performativity of the scene, wherein Eddard's act of sovereign violence is produced by many layered acts. But it is also a potential moment of abjection: for Eddard to "peel" off his gloves suggests that he is removing his outer skin to expose the porous (and potentially edible) membrane beneath. The skin is "the essential if not initial boundary of biological and psychic individuation," "a fragile container" (Kristeva 1982, 101) that promises to maintain one's subjectivating borders. Whether Eddard's act of peeling off his gloves is read as the removal of his skin or the signal of the performative through repeated costumes, he now diverges from the stable, natural, and closed male body demanded by the symbolic order and so has the potential to become abject.

In Eddard's mandate, the sovereign should use a "single sure stroke" (GoT 12) to end the criminal's life. The clean death reflects sovereign violence's major promises: that the execution will restore justice to the kingdom by removing the threat of abjection that takes place when the criminal demonstrates the law's fragility. Conversely, the audience is thereby encouraged to associate blood and abjection with an improper performance of sovereign violence because a "single sure stroke" produces the least amount of blood and is less likely to spray the sovereign with gore. Eddard manages the "single stroke," but the resulting blood and abjection are emphasised. In "Winter is Coming" Will's/Gared's blood is audible for a full five seconds of screen time as it spouts from his

neck and onto the grass. The other characters respond to the sound with the visceral disgust that the abject evokes: Bran, Robb, and the master-at-arms visibly clench their jaws in distaste over the five seconds where the blood is audible. Similarly in *A Game of Thrones*, “blood sprayed out across the snow, as red as summerwine. [...] Bran could not take his eyes off the blood. The snows around the stump drank it eagerly, reddening as he watched” (GoT 12), with this personification of the snow furthering the sense of boundary transgression. Alongside blood, the corpse becomes linked with sovereign violence. The cadaver is abject because it violates multiple boundaries and reminds the subject of what they must forget at all costs: their own death.²³ Yet death is brought to the fore when Eddard decapitates Will/Gared and “the head bounced off a thick root and rolled. It came up near Greyjoy’s feet. [...] He laughed, put his boot on the head, and kicked it away” (GoT 12-13). Even though Theon is rejecting the abject, his jovial dismissal is unsettling. Combined with the visible distaste that the characters display in *Game of Thrones*, Theon’s casual interaction with the corpse links Eddard’s sovereign violence to the feeling of repulsion. In this way the Martinverse critiques sovereign violence after disclosing it as a performative act that is unable to support a coherent masculine identity or functioning society.

Eddard’s lawfulness is critiqued because it is used against him and brings about his death: his sovereign violence is “repeated in directions that reverse and displace [its] originating aims,” as Butler (1993, 83) says of gender subversion. Eddard adheres strictly to the Law and uses it to justify sovereign violence, believing in the patriarchal system that sovereign violence supports. He gains political power in the short term through lawful sovereign violence when he is named Hand of the King. However, he is later executed for treason by Joffrey Baratheon, whose violence I examined in chapter two, and a headsman uses Eddard’s own greatsword, Ice, to carry out the deed. Right before Eddard is executed Joffrey tells onlookers, “So long as I am your king, treason shall never go unpunished” (GoT 702). Joffrey’s statement and actions are coded as dishonourable because he promised to spare Eddard but (it is implied) kills him because he dislikes the Starks and fears that Eddard will reveal that he has no legitimate claim to the throne. Nonetheless, Joffrey’s phrasing and his decision to have Eddard executed with Ice cite Eddard’s own unflinching application of the Law and inflexible moralism.

²³ In *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, Kristeva (2012) writes extensively about images of decapitated heads in relation to fear, desire, and the sacred. However, her discussion of the corpse in *Powers of Horror* is more pertinent to the present chapter because she situates the corpse (which I take to include the severed head) in relation to abjection and boundaries, which are two key methods through which the Martinverse critiques sovereign violence.

Joffrey's enactment of sovereign violence is one of the "repetitions of hegemonic forms of power which fail to repeat loyally and, in that failure, open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims" (Butler 1993, 84). When Eddard's past act of sovereign violence returns to the narrative present during his own execution, Eddard's and Joffrey's aggression are placed in dialogue and both are shown to be flawed. Sovereign violence is uncovered as "a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one can embody" (Butler 1990, 138-139). The circularity between Eddard's deployment of sovereign violence and Joffrey's creates a queer rupture in the narrative: equating Joffrey's unnecessary and egotistical brutality with Eddard's strict lawfulness demonstrates that patriarchal violence in any form is destructive. Strict adherence to sovereign violence leads to an inflexible worldview that cannot survive the coming winter—a form of abjection for the kingdom in the return of the dead. Where Eddard began the narrative using sovereign violence to demonstrate his phallic power by destroying Will's/Gared's abject criminal body, his last appearance in the Martinverse is reduced to pure abjection as a severed head on display in King's Landing (GoT 723; S1E10 "Fire and Blood"), an exercise in the sovereign violence he once (mis)performed.

Sovereign Repetition

A sequence of repetitions, the most faithful being Robb's, evokes the features of the father's performance, including its phallic dimensions and repetitions, while also failing to fulfil the promises of sovereign violence. When Robb cites Eddard as he decides to execute one of his own men after he becomes King in the North, sovereign violence is revealed as a "politically tenuous construction," and hence open to subversion (Butler 1990, 192). Robb is faced with a difficult moral decision after one of his bannermen, Rickard Karstark, murders two political hostages in revenge for his own sons' deaths. In a consultation with his advisors Robb ponders how best to punish the man and says, "I told myself . . . *swore* to myself . . . that I would be a good king, as honorable as Father, strong, just, loyal to my friends and brave when I faced my enemies" (SoS1 280, original emphasis). Robb's criteria for being "a good king" is to repeat his father's actions because he believed him to be the epitome of morality and masculinity.

The performativity of the decision is indicated through classical fantasy genre conventions, specifically the crown and the act of placing it upon one's head. Right after Robb cites his father, his

mother Catelyn observes that “Robb reached down with both hands, lifted the heavy bronze-and-iron crown, and set it atop his head, and suddenly he was a king again. ‘Lord Rickard dies’” (SoS1 280). As Robb makes the decision his sovereignty is reinforced. He is constrained by norms of masculine sovereign violence (“I told myself . . . *swore* to myself . . .”) because he must adhere to them if he intends to be intelligible as a “good king.” By placing his crown on his head when he makes the execution order, and by citing his father, the way in which Robb’s decision-making process is narrated illustrates how sovereign violence in fantasy fiction is comprised of repeated acts.

The abjection of the criminal body is also repeated during Robb’s act of sovereign violence as a means of justifying the execution. By purposefully breaking the law Karstark has revealed its fragility and thereby threatened the kingdom, and his criminal abjection is realised upon his body, specifically through the bloody mouth. In chapter two I discuss the bloody mouth at length as an image that is used to evoke horror because of its liminality and its connections to the *vagina dentata*. The same is true when Karstark is brought before Robb and his mouth becomes the focal point of his abjection: he “spit out a broken tooth” and “smiled a wet red smile” (SoS1 276). In “Kissed by Fire” (S3E5) Karstark’s mouth is rendered abject as he talks with a bloody mouth and blood trails into his white beard. The mouth is both inside and outside the body because of the movement of the tongue and lips and is capable of both incorporating and rejecting materials outside of the body—as evidenced by Karstark spitting out his own tooth and having blood in his beard. Karstark’s premediated murder exposes the law’s fragility and his body becomes abject. Sovereign violence becomes the logical means of controlling that abjection.

Robb’s explicit citation of his father, specifically the notion of the “good king,” creates generic tension within the scene. The desire to be “strong, just, loyal to my friends and brave when I faced my enemies” (SoS1 280) is a classical model that contradicts the moral ambiguity associated with postmodern fantasy. The Martinverse contains many kings but none of them are “good.” Robb’s reluctance to embrace this generic reality reveals the pseudo-medieval society’s systems of organisation to be copies, and inevitably failed ones. Moreover, he privileges his own desire to be a “good king” over his kingdom’s need for a large army with which to defeat the Lannister forces, and this attempt to empower the self at the expense of others makes his sovereign violence patriarchal. The fantasy genre and its depiction of masculinity are both denaturalised through this moment of overburdening, as in Eddard’s case. And like his father, Robb’s violence is the first in a series of honour-bound decisions that lead him to lose the war and his life. After Robb gives the execution

order his mother observes, “outside the thunder crashed and boomed, so loud that it sounded as if the castle were coming down about their ears. *Is this the sound of a kingdom falling?*” (SoS1 277, original emphasis). Two kingdoms fail because of Robb’s repetition of sovereign violence: his own kingdom in the North, and the imaginary kingdom of classical fantasy and its binary moralism, which cannot support a sovereign who must operate in a world of uncertainty and ambiguity.

The act of sovereign violence that Robb performs, like his father’s, is shown to be more invested in power than justice through phallic symbolism when he decides to execute Karstark in the *Game of Thrones* episode “Kissed by Fire” (S3E5). The props and blocking allude to the execution scene in “Winter is Coming” (S1E1) and demonstrate how Robb repeats his father’s imperfect act of sovereign violence through the phallic fantasy sword. When Robb discusses Karstark, the sword is framed in a way that suggests that it originates from Robb’s groin as he sits at his desk in medium and medium long shots (fig. 20 and 21). The weapon’s provocative angle and its placement at the edge of the frame cite the shot in “Winter is Coming” when Eddard speaks with Bran and the pommel of his sword is visible near his crotch (fig. 19). Eddard’s pose and the placement of his weapon are mirrored when Robb stands before Karstark during the execution, sword facing downward and held with two hands in the middle of his body (fig. 22). Through the sword, phallic imagery specific to the fantasy genre, Robb’s performance of sovereign violence is made visible as an attempt to gain phallic power through an inflexible adherence to the law that serves his own desire to be a “good king” while harming his kingdom. By focusing on the phallus as the object around which repetitions are orchestrated and legitimated, sovereign violence becomes more deeply imbued with, and capable of imbuing, masculinity.

Figure 20: Robb considering Karstark’s fate in a medium shot, the pommel of his sword jutting out from under the table (S3E5 “Kissed by Fire”)



Figure 21: Robb discusses Karstark in a medium close up, his sword at an angle from his crotch that evokes the erect penis (S3E5 “Kissed by Fire”)



Figure 22: Robb readies his sword and stands in the rain in a long shot before executing Karstark (S3E5 “Kissed by Fire”)



Robb’s inability to perform sovereign violence in the correct emotional register leads his normative masculinity to become incoherent. While convening with his council, Robb is described as speaking “angrily” (SoS1 275) and having “cursed, in a fury of despair” (SoS1 280). After he severs Karstark’s head, Robb “flung the poleaxe down in disgust” and his mother observes that he “stood shaking with his hands half-clenched and the rain running down his cheeks” (SoS1 282), descriptions more suggestive of a toddler having a tantrum than a powerful sovereign. In “Kissed by Fire” Robb snarls as he brings his sword down, and as he strides away he throws the sword to the

ground, clenches his gloved hands, and snarls. Robb's sentencing and execution of Karstark are emotional, although his specific feelings are ambiguous. His mother's perspective frames the scene in the novel, which may be inflected with her own maternal feelings about his violence, but also positions Robb as a child once again. In the television series the scene takes place quickly and in low lighting, making it difficult to discern Robb's interior state. The only emotion that is undoubtedly present is anger, and even though it is one of the few emotions masculine subjects are permitted to display, as established in Eddard's original performance, sovereign violence in the Martinverse promises a detached actor. Robb's intense affective experience during and after the execution deviate from the version of sovereign violence that he has been taught to repeat, and this fault becomes one of the reasons why he cannot contain the threat of abjection against his kingdom or even his own masculine body.

The deformed version of sovereign violence that Robb produces damages his sovereign masculinity and his kingdom, arousing abjection and disgust as he fails to enact the execution quickly and cleanly. The bloody scene is similar to gender subversion in that it shows that sovereign violence is "structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal [...] but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground'" (Butler 1990, 192, original emphasis). Robb's botched attempt to execute Karstark is one such "*discontinuity*." When Robb carries out the execution in *A Storm of Swords* he struggles to do so without gore: Karstark is killed "in a single blow, but it took three to sever the man's head from his body, and by the time it was done both living and dead were drenched in blood" (SoS1 282). The word "drenched" speaks to the thorough and intimate contact Robb has with Karstark's blood: the abject fluid seeps through his clothing, to his skin. Robb causes the bloody scene through his refusal to compromise his strict morals, and cracks appear in his kingdom as the Karstark soldiers withdraw from his army. The abject surges forth because Robb is unable to make the "single sure stroke" (GoT 12) that is expected during acts of sovereign violence.

Robb's masculine body becomes temporarily abject in response to his de-formed repetition of sovereign violence, although in his case it is visibly self-inflicted. Bodily surfaces, Butler (1990, 200) argues, "can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself." Robb's reaction to the execution is narrated in such a way as to suggest that he makes his own body a dissonant version of sovereign masculinity after he beheads Karstark. Continuing his inappropriate emotional response to violence, Robb insists upon

wearing the clothing he wore during the execution despite it being “drenched in blood” (SoS1 282). Robb forces abjection onto the surface of his body: he creates a spectre of the dead man through which the reader views glimpses of “the place where meaning collapses,” the abject (Kristeva 1982, 2). Robb’s refusal to change his bloody clothes points toward his horrified reaction to his violence, as well as its implications for his character: “to have blood on your hands is to be implicated in the blurring of essential boundaries of identity” (Halberstam 1995, 77). Robb dresses himself in remnants of Karstark, disturbing the fundamental border between life and death that is required for his own subjectivity. Through Karstark’s lingering blood and viscera, Robb’s body comes into close contact with the abject and once again sovereign violence is shown to be unable to support a coherent masculine identity.

Just as Robb’s body falls prey to abjection because of his imperfect repetition of sovereign violence, so too does his kingdom. By killing the Karstark patriarch, Robb knowingly forfeits the Karstark family’s political allegiance and the soldiers needed to secure the North, which leads him to release his hold on his own land. In so doing, his kingdom’s fragility is exposed. Robb repeats his father’s inflexible adherence to the law and focuses upon Karstark as an individual rather than compromising his morals and addressing the larger and more urgent threat that the Lannister army poses, much like his father Eddard did by executing Will/Gared rather than dealing with the threat of the white walkers. Both characters are presented as having relied upon a binary moral universe linked to classical fantasy promises and using sovereign violence to serve their own individualistic ends, and both lead their kingdoms and their own bodies to abjection.

Robb’s violence is critiqued in a circular fashion like his father’s, showing the law turned against itself with subversive effects. Robb is murdered at the “Red Wedding,” an infamous scene in which many of the major Stark characters are killed on Walder Frey’s orders when they are attending the wedding of Frey’s daughter Roslin and Robb’s uncle Edmure.²⁴ After Robb is killed his head is severed and replaced with that of his direwolf, Grey Wind, who has a crown nailed to his head. Kristeva posits that the cadaver and the animal corpse must be rejected to maintain one’s subjectivating borders, but the opposite occurs in Robb’s case. The desecration is emphasised because of the ways that the scene is recounted within the Martinverse: it is purposefully theatrical,

²⁴ This revenge happens because Robb has sex with a woman out of wedlock and chooses to prioritise her honour over his own by marrying her, a trope oriented more towards the classical end of the high fantasy spectrum. However, in so doing he breaks a marriage promise that he made when negotiating with the Freys in the postmodern genre world.

which gives away its performative dimensions. Robb Stanton (2015, 58) argues that “the music, the crossbows, the (doubly) empty insults, the locked doors, the gaudy display of Robb’s corpse with his direwolf Grey Wind’s crowned head stitched in place of his own” are “destined to forge a memorable narrative unity – fit, vivid subject matter for a chilling tale or song.” And the Red Wedding does become a story within the story, repeatedly retold as a rumour²⁵ in *A Storm of Swords*: “They swear Lord Frey had the boy’s head hacked off, sewed the head of his direwolf in its place, and nailed a crown about his ears” (SoS2 151). The phrase “hacked off” belies the scene’s violence, although the careful act of sewing head to neck reveals that it is not a random act of violence but “a piece of thymotic theatre” (Stanton 2015, 56), a carefully staged performance of Frey’s (grotesque) sovereign power. Maureen Attali (2017, 189) contends that “the narrative importance of this performance is emphasized by the fact that the scene is recounted twice,” disclosing its citationality.

The scene evokes abjection to an almost hyperbolic degree, but it is an abjection that is specifically linked back to Robb’s flawed enactment of sovereign violence. The “crown [nailed] about his ears” echoes the real crown that Robb wore, covered in tiny phallic swords. The action of nailing the crown in place critiques Robb’s sovereign violence, specifically its rigidity and anger. Robb’s crown was repeatedly referred to as a symbol of his sovereignty when he chose to use sovereign violence against Karstark, as I have noted, and his mother described the “circle of iron swords” that decorate it (SoS1 278). The swords speak to Robb’s unwavering repetition of phallic violence as a centre point of his sovereignty. He was too rigid and insistent upon following the law and a binary moral code informed by classical promises because this rigidity enabled him to empower himself and feel like a “good king,” and it destroyed his kingdom. Robb’s positioning as a classical fantasy character, and consequent failure to survive the game of thrones (like his father), indicates that patriarchal sovereign violence is incapable of supporting his masculine identity or kingdom.

Robb’s abject body and kingdom are tied to his sovereign violence through audio and visuals in the *Game of Thrones* episode “Mhysa” (S3E10). In contrast to the novels, viewers directly witness Robb’s dehumanisation: the wolf head is attached to Robb’s body with a large spear, and the corpse is tied to a horse and paraded through the Frey campsite as the soldiers chant, “King in the North!”

²⁵ In some ways, the fact that readers must imagine this scene and only hear about it through rumours and gossip elevates its abjection, as Robb becomes a spectral ghost who blurs the lines between present/past, real/imagined, and present/absent. See Attali (2017) for further discussion of the importance of the event’s repetition.

(fig. 23). The mantra parodies Robb's sovereignty and his kingdom, locating them within a repeated system of violence that is exposed as abject as the corpse appears to move through the yard of its own volition. As the wolf-king-corpse wanders through the camp, the boundaries between North/South, human/animal, alive/dead, and animate/inanimate are disrupted. The spear that joins Grey Wind's head to Robb's body critiques violence as the phallic thread running through his sovereignty: it is the tool through which Robb's corpse achieves animalised abjection.

Figure 23: Robb's mutilated corpse in a profile angle as it is paraded around the Frey camp (S3E10 "Mhysa")



The horror is not linked to Robb and the North alone: it is placed within a larger critique of the societal reproduction of violent patriarchal sovereignty through intertextual reference to the Stark family via the direwolf, to Robb's (and later his half-brother Jon's) coronation via the crown, and to the body politic/social sphere via the scene's (re)citation as gossip, which I have noted above. The animalism, phallic weapons, dialogue, and mise-en-scène that make Robb's corpse a figure of horror are also positioned as mocking repetitions of the Starks and their (re)production of violent sovereignty. When Robb becomes sovereign in the season one episode "Fire and Blood" (S1E10) he wears a thick brown fur stole that is emphasised against his pale face in medium close ups, reminding viewers of his Stark heritage, his bond with Grey Wind, and the costumes worn by the Starks in the first episode (S1E1 "Winter is Coming"; fig. 17). The room is filled with candles and Robb's men present their phallic swords to him while chanting "The King in the North." The Frey's mocking use of this phrase intertextually references Robb's coronation scene, reinforcing the point that violence begets violence.

The grotesque merging of human and wolf speaks to this larger criticism of the Starks, whose sigil is the fierce direwolf, and their role in reproducing sovereign violence as a means of maintaining order in the North. The Stark-direwolf corpse collapses the boundaries between human/animal and life/death, but also those between self/Other, animate/inanimate, and inside/outside the body. The parodic amalgamation of the deceased Stark sovereign with a slaughtered direwolf presents Robb's problematic citation of sovereign violence, and its grotesque inversion after his death, as reflective of the larger system of cultural reproduction in which masculine subjects are constituted through violent technologies of power. Accordingly, the exact same imagery is repeated in season six when Jon takes up this mantle, named the "White Wolf" in another candle-lit room, to cheers of "King in the North!" ("The Winds of Winter S6E10).

Sovereign Failure

The repetition of sovereign violence becomes even more fraught in relation to Theon Greyjoy, Eddard's ward. As I have demonstrated through Robb's and Eddard's executions, crime is abject because it disrupts the law, and in the Martinverse this abjection is reflected on the criminal's flesh. In *Game of Thrones* Theon executes one of Winterfell's inhabitants—the master at arms Ser Rodrick in the television series and the kennelmaster Farlen in the books—who enters the yard with blood streaming down his face from two gashes to his head, and soon thereafter spits on Theon in defiance. The fluids disturb the boundary between inside and outside the body, and the spit in particular reflects a dangerous transgression as it is an act through which Ser Rodrick challenges Theon's fragile sovereignty in the television series. The repetition of criminal abjection provides a loose justification for Theon's act of sovereign violence, although it is worth noting that no such abjection takes place in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, further highlighting Farlen's innocence and, more importantly, Theon's violence as flawed.

Theon's repetition of sovereign violence is represented in such a way as to emphasise the citation of Eddard. Theon becomes sovereign of Winterfell for a brief period in *A Clash of Kings*/season two after he betrays the Starks and seizes the castle for himself and his family, as noted in chapter two. He faces dissent from the castle's inhabitants and is manipulated into killing Farlen/Ser Rodrick in punishment for alleged murder/disrespect. Initially it appears that Theon will allow his Ironborn soldiers to perform the execution on his behalf, breaking one of the core

promises that constitute sovereign violence—that is until his victim cites Eddard as a means of critiquing Theon’s decision. Farlen tells Theon that “M’lord Eddard always did his own killings” (CoK 725), directly and unfavourably comparing Theon to Eddard. A similar tactic is used by Ser Rodrick, who snarls “he who passes the sentence should swing the sword, coward” (S2E6), literally repeating Eddard’s own words back as a means of “forcibly shaping” (Butler 1990, 155) Theon’s actions so that he repeats sovereign violence in the way Eddard condoned. Repetition remains central to this form of violence, although it is shown to fail in its proliferation and become open to subversion.

Theon’s act of sovereign violence is also flawed in the sense that it is used to reinforce his individual power rather than to protect the realm. The lack of justice is highlighted in *A Clash of Kings* when Theon explains his reason for executing Farlen: “he could not let the killings go unpunished. Farlen was as likely a suspect as any, so Theon sat in judgment, called him guilty, and condemned him to death” (CoK 725). Theon knows that the murders were committed by one of his cronies as a means of stopping them from betraying him by revealing that he killed two farm boys rather than Starks, but he blames Farlen instead. The injustice is highlighted through the specific phrasing in this sentence, specifically the words “called” rather than found, and “condemned” rather than sentenced. The fact that Farlen’s crime was being “as likely a suspect as any” reveals a conscious role-assignment within the apparently natural judiciary process. Yet Theon’s actions, unlike Robb’s or Eddard’s, are presented as departing from classical fantasy promises because of their moral ambiguity rather than the failure of their enactment. By unjustly murdering Farlen, Theon fails to live up to the promise that classical fantasy makes to its readers about sovereign violence—that it will bring justice—but temporarily secures Winterfell: “the killings stopped after Farlen’s death.” However, ambivalence remains as the Ironborn soldiers “continued sullen and anxious” (CoK 726). Even though Theon’s repetition of sovereign violence restores peace to Winterfell, his decision to use violence for his own gain and as an attempt to secure his patriarchal authority means that the society over which he rules does not prosper.

In “The Old Gods and The New” Theon’s decision to use sovereign violence is framed in such a way that it directs the viewer’s attention to his lust for patriarchal power, disclosing his sovereign violence as unnatural. Theon intends to imprison Ser Rodrick rather than use violence against him, but he is manipulated into doing otherwise. His first-mate, Dagmer, tells him: “My prince, you cannot let that stand. He must pay. [...] He has to pay the iron price. They’ll never

respect you while he lives” (S2E6 “The Old Gods and the New”). The “my prince” address and the reference to paying the “iron price” appeal to Theon’s assumption that, as heir to the Iron Islands, he is owed honour and sovereign power—a promise that is presented as being informed by classical fantasy through the “my prince” title (also see CoK 156, 157, DwD 572-573). Theon acquiesces, and in so doing he demonstrates that his sovereign violence is motivated by a desire for “respect”—which is shown as the deep urge to see these classical fantasy promises met and his personal phallic power maintained—rather than any thought for Winterfell’s laws and justice.

Theon’s act of sovereign violence is also marked as deformed because it is imbued with emotion. As I have noted, sovereign violence promises objectivity in relation to both sentencing and execution. Yet in the novel Theon’s “hands were sweating” after Farlen critiques his actions, suggesting that the violence and its failure makes Theon anxious. In *Game of Thrones* the weather and music represent Theon’s emotional turmoil. Rain is audible throughout the scene, but it only falls down in visible torrents after Ser Rodrick places his head on the block, after which the audience sees a medium close up of Theon’s face and shoulders with rain pouring down behind him. The weather heightens the scene’s somber mood, and Theon’s emotional turmoil, as he is about to murder Ser Rodrick. The music also adds to this effect: the song “Pay the Iron Price” plays quietly after Dagmer’s dialogue and soon thereafter thunder rumbles in the background. The music swells, expressing Theon’s mixed emotions as he decides to heed Dagmer’s words and murder Ser Rodrick. Through the music and weather in the television series, and Theon’s interior monologue in the novel, his sovereign violence is revealed as flawed because it is fuelled by selfish desires rather than the good of the kingdom.

Theon’s repetition of sovereign violence is further emphasised as imperfect because he, like Eddard, is motivated by a desire for phallic power. Brooke Askey (2018) argues that Theon has internalised his phallic culture, and I would add that this desire for phallic power was learned from Eddard and from the social structures that inform his identity, and manifests when he decides to use sovereign violence. During the scene in which he executes Ser Rodrick, almost every shot of Theon features an Ironborn soldier in the background holding a Greyjoy banner or spear, linking Theon’s enactment of sovereign violence to phallic imagery (fig. 24). A similar connection is made in *A Clash of Kings* through the narration: the story of Farlen’s death is told as Theon is walking to meet his sister Asha. He feels threatened by his sibling and attempts to display his phallic power through his clothing. As he dresses, the narrator observes, “Around his waist he buckled sword and dagger,

remembering the night [Asha] had humiliated him at his own father's table. [...] *Well, I have a knife too, and know how to use it*" (CoK 725, original emphasis). Theon's excessive use of phallic weapons, the "sword and dagger," disclose his desire to dominate his sister specifically through a display of his own phallic power, which she diminished when last they met. As the scene of Theon's flawed sovereign violence is recounted alongside his phallic struggle with his sister, the audience is encouraged to view the violence as a repetition of Eddard's, wherein executions can be used to re-activate phallic power.

Figure 24: Theon speaking with Ser Rodrick, an Ironborn soldier in the background holding a pike (S2E6 "The Old Gods and the New")



Theon's act of sovereign violence fails to live up to classical fantasy conventions because it is unjust, emotional, and is informed by a desire to wield phallic power to empower himself, and for this reason the execution produces abjection and the audience is encouraged to link the patriarchal violence to disgust. As I have noted, successful enactments of sovereign violence see the criminal experience a swift and clean death, which will in turn secure the kingdom against the threat of the abject. Theon's violence further splinters, rather than resolves, the fragile law within his kingdom, and he becomes grotesque. In *A Clash of Kings* Theon's "hands were sweating, so the shaft twisted in his grip as he swung and the first blow landed between Farlen's shoulders. It took three more cuts to hack through all that bone and muscle and sever the head from the body" (CoK 725). Likewise in "The Old Gods and the New," Theon takes four attempts to sever Ser Rodrick's head, all of which result in blood spraying across the yard. Despite all the gore, Theon's sword proves insufficient; in a degraded echo of the kick he gave to the head of Will/Gared after he was executed by Eddard (GoT

12-13), he kicks the head from the body to detach it completely, and it then rolls across the muddy ground. Both versions of Theon's execution of Farlen/Ser Rodrick end with hyperbolic abjection, which the audience is encouraged to experience as intense disgust that, by association, attaches to patriarchal sovereign violence.

As in Robb's enactment, Theon's repetition of sovereign violence is further critiqued because of his own bodily responses to the practice. In the television series the scene ends with a close up of Theon panting, his face speckled with blood, and looking around the yard as if he is frightened. In the novel Theon vomits and says that "he only wished he had killed him cleaner. Ned Stark had never needed more than a single blow to take a man's head" (CoK 725-726). As well as in his explicit memory of Eddard's actions, Theon's messy sovereign violence is placed in dialogue with Eddard's through the repetition of the phrase "single blow" (GoT 12), highlighting its imperfection by comparison with Eddard's performance.

Because Theon's act of sovereign violence fails in fulfilling so many promises, he does not contain the threat that the criminal poses to the kingdom and instead becomes abject himself, opening his own masculine body "to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism" (Butler 1990, 200). One such "splitting" is Theon's own physical rejection of the execution: "afterwards he was sick, remembering all the times they'd sat over a cup of mead talking of hounds and hunting. *I had no choice*, he wanted to scream at the corpse" (CoK 725, original emphasis). Theon attempts to dispel the threat of abjection by vomiting, but he continues to engage with it as he "scream[s]" internally "at the corpse" (CoK 725), the pinnacle of abjection. In "The Old Gods and the New" Theon has an even closer encounter with the corpse as he kicks head from body to complete the execution, and by the end of the scene his face is splattered with Ser Rodrick's blood, as in the scene with Robb and Karstark. Theon's aggression is conflated with the feelings of revulsion that are aroused by the abject. His misuse of sovereign violence reveals that the act blurs, rather than bolsters, his masculine identity as his body begins to unravel. Other characters' horrified emotional responses to Theon's botched execution are also used to critique his repetition of patriarchal sovereign violence. In the *Game of Thrones* adaptation of this scene the execution is intercut with the sound of Bran screaming and the onlookers' faces, which show terror at the excessively bloody sequence (S2E6). Even Dagmer, who incites the violence, has a disgusted expression in a medium close up. Rather than being cowed or impressed by his sovereign violence, Theon's subjects are terrified at the abject scene he has unleashed, and in this way this patriarchal violence is presented as repulsive.

Theon's performance of patriarchal sovereign power is critiqued when his sovereign status and phallic power are turned against him after he is captured, tortured, and castrated by Ramsay Snow (later Bolton), who is obsessed with sovereignty, and whose violence I examine at length in chapter two. Ramsay acts in the name of sovereignty, and in so doing he turns Theon's violence against itself. Ramsay's obsession with sovereignty becomes apparent early in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*. Soon after Theon is captured he observes: "His lordship was not a bastard anymore. *Bolton, not Snow*. The boy king on the Iron Throne had made Lord Ramsay legitimate, giving him the right to use his lord father's name. Calling him *Snow* reminded him of his bastardy and sent him into a black rage" (DwD 190, original emphasis).

Ramsay, like Theon, is attached to his sovereignty, and when he feels that it has been threatened, he is consumed by an implicitly violent "black rage." In the television series Ramsay's relation to sovereignty is more exaggerated. In "And Now His Watch is Ended" (S3E4) Ramsay pretends to free Theon and masquerades as a man who "grew up on Salt Cliff" in the Iron Islands and mourned the loss of "Balon Greyjoy's last living son" when Theon left for Winterfell. Ramsay manipulates Theon's expectation that his sovereign status is sacred to the Ironborn and uses it to gain Theon's trust and return him to the dungeon. Ramsay's obsession with his own sovereignty soon becomes apparent: in "The Climb" he pretends that if Theon can guess "who I am and why I'm torturing you," he will "win" (S3E6), which Theon does not. Ramsay's neurotic attachment to his sovereignty, and his frequent use of violence to reactivate it, parody Theon's own deformed act of violence against Ser Rodrick/Farlen.

Ramsay's torture regime also repeats Theon's phallic sovereign violence "in directions that reverse and displace [its] originating aims," as Butler (1993, 83) says of gender subversion, through castration that limits, rather than aids, Theon's phallic power, as I have noted in chapter two. The violence takes place explicitly in the television series and implicitly in the novels after Theon is taken prisoner. "Reek," the personae Ramsay gives Theon, describes himself as "docile as a dog" and thinks, "*If I had a tail, the Bastard would have cut it off*" (DwD 190, original emphasis). Theon's reference to the removal of a phallic appendage points toward his castration, and other references are made later in the novel. Theon says that Ramsay, "*has taken only fingers and toes and that other thing, when he might have had my tongue, or peeled the skin off my legs from heel to thigh*" (DwD 303, original emphasis). As Theon reflects on Ramsay's violent torture methods, it is implied that the unnameable "*other thing*" that was "*taken*" was his penis. Further confirmation of Theon's castration is given near the end of

A Dance with Dragons when Ramsay orders Theon to sexually stimulate his new bride: “For a moment he did not understand. ‘I . . . do you mean . . . m’lord, I have no . . . I . . .’” (DwD 583). Theon’s confusion and reference to his lack—“I have no . . .”—suggests that his sexual organs have been removed, signalled by their disappearance from language. From the linguistic lack surrounding Theon’s genitals, it is implied that “the castrated being has been mutilated into something “lacking” or less than a man” (Askey, 2; see also Wassersug and Lieberman 2010). Theon’s masculinity, symbolised by his penis and achieved through his phallic sovereign violence, is taken from him in a moment of narrative circularity in which this form of patriarchal violence is again unable to support (and in fact, leads to the loss of) a coherent masculine identity.

In *Game of Thrones* Theon’s castration is explicit from the moment it takes place in “The Bear and the Maiden Fair” (S3E7), and is linked to his sovereign violence through references to the loss of his sovereign manhood and ability to produce heirs. In the season three finale “Mhysa” (S3E10), Ramsay sends Reek/Theon’s flayed penis to the King of the Iron Islands and Theon’s estranged father, Balon Greyjoy, calling it “a special gift: Theon’s favourite toy. He cried when I took it away from him.” Balon comments that Reek/Theon is no longer worth rescuing as “he cannot further the Greyjoy line” and is “not a man anymore” (S3E10). While for some viewers this scene may suggest that masculinity is contingent upon fatherhood, the exchange is linked with class, sexual, and racial power. The Great Houses in Westeros are consumed with a narcissistic desire to self-reproduce and keep the family “pure”—often through killing those who fail to reflect their father’s image (DeCoste 2015). Since Reek/Theon can no longer access heterosexual reproductive sex and produce a Greyjoy heir, his sovereignty is forfeit and Balon must remove him from the family so that his own masculinity is not questioned. Not only has Reek/Theon lost the symbolic power of the phallus and his cherished claim to sovereignty, but he cannot be a father and is “not a man anymore”—unintelligible and lacking the power that he once used sovereign violence to maintain. By situating the castration as an act that removes Theon’s phallic power and sovereign potential, it becomes clear that neither a prosperous society nor individual masculinity can be supported or maintained through patriarchal violence, regardless of its legitimacy.

Sovereign Resistance

Although multiple acts of sovereign violence are exposed as failed copies that abject and destroy the subjects who enact them, in relation to one character—Eddard’s bastard son, Jon—there are occasions in which the proliferation of sovereign violence is re-worked and disrupted. As such, they query the relationship between masculinity, power, and violence in the way that the question of repetition, in Butler’s theory, has the capacity to “*displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself” (Butler 1990, 203, original emphasis). In adopting then rejecting sovereign violence, Jon “*displace[s]*” this form of masculine power from violence to pacifism, showing that masculine subjects can be intelligible if they refuse patriarchal violence and instead attempt to work with others to make the world a more livable place.

Jon gains sovereign status as the democratically elected Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, a position earned through merit rather than blood. Although Jon is likewise motivated to perform sovereign violence by the emotional desire for revenge, and thus also fails to enact sovereign violence successfully, in some ways he comes closest, (temporarily) restoring peace to the Night’s Watch by executing the disobedient Lord Janos Slynt. Jon’s actions demonstrate that there can be an enactment of sovereign violence that is distanced from patriarchal violence and is used to empower others. I attribute this partial success to the way that Jon is “not quite so bound by codes of honor as the hegemonic archetype of the hero might typically connote, particularly as embodied in Robb or Ned” (Ward 2018, 117). This separation from “the hegemonic archetype,” and Jon’s subsequent adaptability, is demonstrated by his willingness to embrace the Other, particularly the “wildling” people who live south of the Wall as well as the other misfits he encounters. These connections prove valuable as they literally save his life, even though his sovereign violence remains ambiguous.

Jon’s performance of sovereign violence is located as a repetition through citations of Eddard, as with Robb and Theon, although in this case vengeance for Eddard’s death is the true reason for the execution. Janos was Commander of the City Watch in *A Game of Thrones*/season one when Eddard attempted to contest Joffrey’s claim to the throne, believing he had the military support of the Watch when the Lannisters had bought the army. Jon repeatedly alludes to this betrayal: when he first gives an order to Janos, Jon admits in interior monologue that he mistrusts the man because he “*helped slay my father and did his best to have me killed as well*” (DwD 124, original emphasis). When Janos makes no move to follow his orders Jon says, “I am giving you a chance, my

lord. It is more than you ever gave my father” (DwD 125). Jon’s decision to repeat sovereign violence is framed in such a way as to highlight the citations of Eddard, disclosing the act as performative rather than natural and highlighting its emotional motivation rather than objectivity.

Jon’s act of sovereign violence also repeats Eddard’s, Robb’s, and Theon’s because the criminal he executes is described as having an abject body that represents his threat to the law and kingdom. Jon describes Janos as “dribbling porridge down his chest,” sees his “jowls quivering,” and watches as “his face went white as milk” after the execution order (DwD 126). When Janos resists, Jon sees “flecks of porridge spraying from his lips” and later observes that his smile “had all the sweetness of rancid butter” (DwD 127). The “dribbling,” “quivering,” and “spraying” that Jon narrates mark Janos’s body as malleable and unable to maintain boundaries between the inside and outside of the body. Janos’s skin, the border that maintains his subjectivity, turns “white as milk” then to “rancid butter”: bodily instability becomes bodily decay. Janos’s subjectivating borders break down and he becomes, as Halberstam (1995, 1) says of the intensely visibility of the monster, “all body and no soul.” His excessive and rotting flesh mark him as neither human nor masculine.

Yet Jon’s repetition of sovereign violence is narrated in ways that highlight his divergence from classical fantasy, his father’s binary moralism, and patriarchal individualism, specifically through his interior monologue. In the instant before Jon sentences Janos to death, he considers and rejects several other options:

[...] Please take Lord Janos to the Wall—’

—*and confine him to an ice cell*, he might have said. [...] *And the moment he is out, he and Thorne will begin to plot again.*

—*and tie him to his horse*, he might have said. [...] *It will only be a matter of time before he deserts, then. And how many others will he take with him?* (DwD 126, original emphasis).

Jon recognises that Janos is a versipellous coward and that the only way to contain the threat he poses—his likelihood of plotting and desertion—is to execute him for the minor crime of disobedience and disrespect. The repeated sentence structure and the phrase “he might have said” is a performance within a performance. Jon’s explanations and dismissals show that he is aware of his world and the fact that noble decisions are rarely rewarded. Sovereign violence becomes the best choice for empowering the Night’s Watch because it ensures the outcome Jon needs in order to

maintain peace, and in so doing to ensure the kingdom is protected. At this point the violence is not patriarchal, though it later becomes more ambivalent. Jon's own liminal status as a bastard and the youngest Lord Commander in recorded history has forced him to face the harsh realities of a world of moral ambiguity (what I call the Martinverse's postmodernism) and approach his sovereignty through this lens. Unlike his predecessors, he is the only sovereign whose decision to use violence is presented as brushing up against, but never privileging, classical fantasy morals.

Even though Jon's decision to enact sovereign violence is contextualised by his awareness, as an outsider, of the ambiguity of "justice," the act is imperfect because it is not performed objectively but is revealed to be informed by Jon's personal feelings about Janos. In the novel this flaw is exhibited prior to the execution order, as Jon repeatedly cites his father's death when he deals with Janos—revealing the act's performativity and its emotional motivation. The television series reverses this dynamic: Jon repeats sovereign violence flawlessly until Janos begs for mercy for "all I've said and done" (S5E3 "High Sparrow"). Janos does not explicitly mention Eddard, but the reference to "all" of his crimes makes this clear. Jon responds to Janos's pleas with rage, even though Janos's emotional display marks personal growth and is an appropriate response to the violence he has enacted, symbolically against the kingdom and literally against Eddard. It could be argued that feeling wrong does not excuse Janos's actions, but for the fantasy genre this rejection of one's own violence is critical: Janos's emotions suggest that he repents his crimes and should be spared from execution. Jon chooses to use sovereign violence anyway, and it is here that Jon's violence is shown to be patriarchal because it is motivated by anger, rather than a desire to protect the kingdom. In a close up of Jon's face right before he executes Janos, Jon's veins stand up on his forehead, he makes a tense frown, and breathes rapidly before snarling as he swings his sword down (fig. 25). Jon, like Robb and Theon, is unable to perform sovereign violence successfully, according to the classical fantasy model that his father encouraged, because his actions are informed by a desire to safeguard the kingdom as well as his own desire to express his anger.

Figure 25: Close up shot of Jon's furious face moments before he executes Janos Slynt (S5E3 "High Sparrow")



While Jon's repetition of sovereign violence is not entirely successful because it is emotionally motivated, it does prevent the Night's Watch from political upheaval and for that reason the execution itself is quick and clean, minimising his contact with the abject. In the novel, the execution is given less than half a page: "Longclaw descended" and, as "Janos Slynt's head went rolling across the muddy ground," a man asks to keep his expensive boots (DwD 128). The rolling head is abject, but its motion means that it is immediately expelled from view. So swift is the head's rejection that the focus shifts to mundane matters: the (re)possession of Janos's belongings and King Stannis's approval. The television series also features a brief moment of abjection: viewers see Jon's sword slice through Janos's neck, followed by three seconds of the bleeding stump as the camera pans up to Jon's face and then to an approving nod from King Stannis (S5E3 "High Sparrow"). Jon retains his coherent masculine identity and receives approval from another sovereign for protecting the Night's Watch from dissent. His sovereign violence is not entirely in keeping with the idealised model because of its affective flaw, but nor is it exposed as failed.

The circularity between Jon's life and death is as ambiguous as his sovereign violence. His attempted murder is fuelled by vengeance (like his execution of Janos) but he is brought back to life and is thereby rescued from abjection. In the novels and television series Jon is killed the evening after he announces his plan to defeat Ramsay Bolton and re-take Winterfell with the wildlings, an act he acknowledges as "*oathbreaking*" (DwD 1062, original emphasis). As Lord Commander Jon's desertion places the Night's Watch at risk. It also gives his subordinates justification to kill him after

long and public unease over Jon's decision to allow wildlings to pass beneath the Wall. Jon accepts these others but the men fear their entry into the kingdom, so by murdering Jon they attempt to expel him and reinforce the solidity of the sovereign body.

The coup initially confuses Jon and his attackers tell him that they are acting "For the Watch" (DwD 1064). The phrase is repeated when "Bowen Marsh stood there before him, tears running down his cheeks. 'For the Watch'" (DwD 1064). The brothers are destroying Jon's "two bodies": they stab his sovereign body and de-activate his power because they believe he has broken the law and injured the kingdom by choosing to leave the Night's Watch to defend Winterfell. However, just as Jon executed Janos because of his feelings toward him, the mutineers execute Jon because they are angry about his decision to work with the wildings. The "tears running down" Bowen's cheeks gesture toward the emotive dimensions of the decision and subsequent actions. Bowen regrets having to kill Jon because they were once friends, but he is overwhelmed with feelings of betrayal and fear of the Other. The Night's Watch and its honour are only a secondary reason for his violence. It becomes difficult to see the abstract kingdom, "the watch," as a valid reason to execute Jon, or anyone else. Sovereign violence, and specifically Jon's flawed citation of it and the need to preserve the impermeability of the sovereign body, bring about his death. Patriarchal violence can only produce more violence.

The inappropriate emotion that informed Jon's act of sovereign violence is emphasised even more strongly in the *Game of Thrones* episode "Mother's Mercy" (S5E10). From the beginning of the scene emotion plays a far greater role than in the novel: Jon is lured from the office by the (false) news that one of the wildings has seen his uncle, the First Ranger Benjin Stark, who was presumed dead. Jon's cautious optimism vanishes when he walks through the cluster of men and sees two crossed pieces of wood with the word "TRAITOR" written across the horizontal. The word indicates that Jon has betrayed the Night's Watch's mandate by allowing the wildlings to pass, and the cross's religious symbolism suggests that they have betrayed Jon. In Biblical stories Jesus is betrayed by his disciple Judas for money, and he is crucified only to rise again days later. As the scene unfolds in *Game of Thrones* the cross and its cultural meanings indicate that the brothers, like Judas, are betraying their leader for an ignoble reason. Indeed, the emotionality behind the decision is demonstrated by the first and last characters who stab Jon, his nemesis Alliser Thorne and his steward Olly. Thorne has a longstanding hatred for Jon, and when he stabs Jon and says "For the

Watch,” his face is expressionless and his voice is contemptuous. “The Watch” is a thinly veiled excuse to release his loathing with violence.

In contrast to Thorne, the last character to stab Jon, Olly, airs the group’s anger and fear about Jon’s decision to aid the wildlings. Olly has a longstanding hatred for the free folk because they attacked his village and sent him to Castle Black to relay the atrocities.²⁶ He joins the Night’s Watch and initially respects Jon, but becomes resentful after the Lord Commander allows the wildlings to pass beneath the Wall (“Kill the Boy” S5E5). Olly’s character represents the majority of brothers in the Night’s Watch: he loathes the wildlings and experiences anger, fear, and a sense of betrayal when Jon decides to forgive their past misdeeds and combine forces. As Olly walks through the other men the song “Goodbye Brother” begins to play, a mournful string piece that heightens the emotion in the scene. Olly’s facial expressions betray his mixed feelings: rage and grief, as well as sadness and regret. Olly stands directly in front of Jon, who implores, “Olly...” (S5E10). The boy frowns and stabs Jon in the chest before saying, “for the Watch.” This last moment bears a striking resemblance to Jon’s imperfect performance of sovereign violence. Janos, like Jon, begged for mercy but Jon, like Olly, was acting because of his own emotional motives and chose to kill in vengeful anger. The entire society enacts patriarchal violence, attempting to banish the other in order to reify the existing patriarchal structure, because they have seen from Jon’s exercise of sovereign power as Lord Commander that this is acceptable. Jon’s death, just like that of Theon, Robb, and Eddard, is circular: his own deformed performance of sovereign violence in life is repeated to cause his death.

Yet Jon’s —blatantly foreshadowed—resurrection in *Game of Thrones* suggests a potential break in the cycle of patriarchal sovereign violence. As the scene unfolds the cross and its symbolism indicates that Jon, like Jesus, is not truly dead. Jon’s resurrection is also hinted at because the blood stain his corpse left behind on the snow resembles a dragon (citing Daenerys Targaryen, the dispossessed ruler of Westeros, and her rebirth in the flames in season one) or a phoenix, a mystical bird reborn from flames. The most significant confirmation that Jon will live comes from the red priestess Melisandre, who is visibly confused when she sees Jon’s corpse because she “saw him in the flames, fighting at Winterfell” (“The Red Woman” S6E1). Indeed, she begins working on his

²⁶ In the season four episode “Breaker of Chains” (S4E3) Olly’s village is attacked by wildlings, including Jon’s former lover Ygritte and his close friend Tormund Giantsbane. After watching his parents die brutal deaths, Olly is grabbed and told, “Those are your parents. [...] I’m going to eat them. Do you hear me? I’m going to eat your dead Mama. And I’m going to eat your dead Papa” (S4E3). The boy is sent to Castle Black to warn the Night’s Watch about the horror he has witnessed.

corpse—cleaning his wounds and cutting his hair for her spellcasting—almost as soon as she learns of his death, a magical ritual that forces Jon’s body into motion. He is no longer a corpse, but an active agent awaiting rebirth. The magic and symbolism reduce the abjection that Jon’s corpse inspires: he is not “death infecting life” (Kristeva 1982, 4) because he has not truly ceased living.

Jon was murdered because of his radical embrace of the Other, but it is also these connections that allow him to come back to life, proving that the cycle whereby sovereign violence is enacted on the body of the sovereign can be broken because the act is both a protection of the body of the sovereign and of the borders of the kingdom: it is both a protection of the individual and the community. Commenting on Jon’s relationship to Daenerys in season seven of *Game of Thrones*, Ward (2018, 119) argues that “Snow’s trajectory after resurrection suggests a more flexible embodiment of masculinity, one in which deference does not equate to weakness or subordination, and heroism is malleable rather than unyielding.” I agree that Jon’s masculine performance is less rigid than his father’s and brothers’, and I would add that it is his connection to others that allows him to be brought back to life and take on a more flexible approach to violence. As I have noted, Jon is brought back by Melisandre, but the priestess learns of Jon’s death because of his connections to others: Jon’s direwolf Ghost howls to alert Jon’s friends, and they work together with the wildlings to send word to Melisandre. Jon is saved through a web of connections, and he continues to privilege these after he returns to life.

At first Jon appears to continue the pattern of sovereign violence when he executes four of his killers, including Thorne and Olly, in “Oathbreaker” (S6E3). The men are hanged—with Jon cutting the rope that releases the floor beneath them—and after they die, seven seconds of screen time is spent on a medium close up of Olly’s corpse swinging in the wind (fig. 26). The shot creates intimacy between the viewer and the corpse, and the terrifying confrontation is exacerbated by its duration, which is far longer than most others in the scene. While Olly’s hanged corpse is less monstrous than Robb’s desecrated body or Eddard’s severed head because it is whole, it creates similar levels of abjection because it is forced into an inescapable intimacy with the viewer (much like Joffrey’s, which I discuss in chapter two). Olly becomes the site where Jon’s flawed sovereign violence is critiqued; he stands in for the patriarchal aspect of sovereign violence that Jon continued when he executed Janos and continues again when he executes his killers.

Figure 26: Olly's face in close up after Jon hangs him (S6E3 "Oathbreaker")



Yet after the execution and abjection Jon ceases using sovereign violence because it is followed by a breaking rather than an aligning of the body of the sovereign and the nation. Jon hands his cloak to his friend Dolores Edd as a symbol of his sovereignty, telling him, "Wear it. Burn it. Whatever you want. You have Castle Black. My watch is ended" ("Oathbreaker" S6E3). While *Game of Thrones* is yet to air its eighth and final season at the time of writing, Jon does display a reluctance to use sovereign or any other form of patriarchal violence following his execution of Thorne and his co-conspirators. There are only three exceptions (which is a relatively small number in a series so full of violence). The first and most graphic is when he defeats Ramsay in one-on-one combat after the Battle of the Bastards, a scene I analyse in chapter two, but stops when he sees his sister Sansa watching ("Battle of the Bastards" S9E9). Jon also makes two violent threats: one when he strangles Littlefinger after he confesses his love for Sansa ("Stormborn" S7E2), and another when he grabs Theon by the lapels and claims that he would kill him for betraying his family if not for the fact that he helped Sansa escape Ramsay ("The Spoils of War" S7E4). In each case Jon constrains his violence because of kinship with others: his love for his sister stops him from falling back into a form of violence that aims only for individual power and patriarchal reproduction.

Conclusion

In the fantasy genre sovereign violence is comprised of a wide array of often contradictory promises, even as it is also a practice through which masculinity materialises. By tracing the overburdened

genre conventions and denaturalised gender performances that arise when Eddard, Robb, Theon, and Jon enact sovereign violence, the act becomes visible as a repetition of phallic, affective, and bodily gestures. Sovereign violence is often presented in such a way as to evoke the classical fantasy attachment to a just and moral world, yet the ways in which such violence is enacted, and its effects, highlight the moral ambiguity of postmodern fantasy.

The gender and genre overburdening reveals that sovereign violence is comprised of so many contradictory or grandiose promises that failure is more likely than success. This is especially true for Eddard and Robb, who refuse to compromise their personal ideals for the good of the kingdom. An inflexible attachment to moral absolutism leads each sovereign to fail to restore order. Through these flaws, the act is revealed, as Butler says of gender as a whole, “to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that nobody *can* embody” (Butler 1990, 189). This failure of embodiment is then demonstrated in the inability of these sovereigns to contain the literal and figurative threats of abjection presented by the criminals. Instead, the sovereign becomes subject to that same instability. After making contact with blood and the corpse, an unavoidable facet of execution, the sovereign’s own personal boundaries become blurred and unstable, and patriarchal sovereign violence is revealed as unable to support a coherent masculine identity.

Alongside abjection, sovereign violence is problematised through circularity: the way men use sovereign violence in life is reversed, parodied, or de-formed so that they are killed by exactly the same version of sovereign violence that they enacted. After these circuitous demises, the association of sovereign identity and abjection is foregrounded as the men are reduced to horrifying corpses: mutilated and put on display as tools of horror. The sovereign body is punished with abjection beyond death, placed within a cycle of patriarchal violence that can produce nothing but destruction. Through these textual resonances, each man is shown to be complicit in a dangerous cycle of subject constitution and patriarchal reproduction in which violence that is enacted for individualistic ends can only produce more violence for the self and society. Yet Jon’s rejection of sovereign violence shows that this cycle can be subverted. As of the season seven finale Jon has been exposed as the legitimate son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark, making him the true heir to the Iron Throne, a position that would logically encourage his return to sovereign violence. Yet considering his apparent rejection of this form of power, the Martinverse may provide a means of breaking from the destructive cycle of patriarchal violence.

Chapter Four: The Bear and the Maiden Fair

In this chapter I continue to investigate the relation between violence and masculinity in the Martinverse as it is negotiated through fantasy genre conventions, embodiment, and abjection, but now turn to alternative forms of masculine embodiment, in relation to which both positive and negative interpretations of violence can be found. As noted in the previous chapters, violence is viewed as a gendered act (or series of acts) through which masculinity can be enacted because of cultural associations between men and violence, not because of any biologically essential link between male bodies and violence. The masculine male characters I have analysed, such as Theon Greyjoy and Robb Stark, are presented in terms of this performative dynamic through their citation of other patriarchs, and are shown to make use of violence to bolster their own power in ways that consequently make them monstrous. Female masculinities are a non-normative subject position from which violence is also enacted. For these characters, as with the male-embodied ones, patriarchal violence leads to a loss of subjectivating borders and their violence turned against them in death. However, from this non-normative subject position, other uses of violence and their consequences are also demonstrated. Specifically, forms of violence that make the world a more liveable place allow characters to maintain their constitutive borders and share their knowledge through queer kinship. In examining both of these outcomes, I argue that masculine women in the Martinverse make violence a visibly masculine act that can be coded as heroic or monstrous, depending on whether it reproduces patriarchal structures or pushes them in more enabling directions. The Queen (and later Queen Regent) Cersei Lannister and the female knight Brienne of Tarth represent the two most extreme examples of this dynamic.

I understand Cersei and Brienne as masculine, or embodying female masculinity, a gender configuration aligned with “women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine” (xi) or are “mistaken consistently for a man” (Halberstam 1998, 57). These two criteria reflect different ways in which female masculinity can be embodied: as a personal identification that may have no outer expression (as in Cersei’s case at the beginning of the series), or as a cultural interpretation of embodied gender presentation (as in Brienne’s case). Masculine women often appear in fantasy fiction; as Anne Balay (2010, 7) argues, the genre “isn’t limited by genders as we know them, or even as we believe they might be possible” and therefore “offers a fruitful sight [*sic*] for investigation of female masculinities.”

Female masculinities stage a complex (re)negotiation of the relationship between masculinity and violence in the Martinverse. Cersei's violence is narrated in ways that cite other patriarchs: her father Lord Tywin, but also her deceased husband King Robert Baratheon. Cersei follows the same gendered patterns that these men enacted, using violence to dominate others and empower herself. As a consequence, Cersei's embodied masculine performance becomes horrifying: through figures of queer feminine monstrosity and through bodily abjection during her walk of penance in the novel, and through her relationship with Gregor Clegane in the television series. As Cersei's narrative has continued in *Game of Thrones*, her violence is trapped within a destructive loop: she repeats the violence that was used against her, but fails to break free from the patriarchal models that inform it.

Cersei's female body does not make her masculine performances problematic; rather, it is the patriarchal violence that divides people, endangers society, and maintains a masculine hierarchy. It could be argued that the critique arises because Cersei transgresses the boundaries of what women can say, rather than from her violent acts. Caroline Spector (2012, 182-183) takes this view, arguing that "Cersei wields power by adopting the strategies and behaviors of the patriarchy more often than the ones routinely available to women. It's telling that she's judged negatively while the men who use similar tactics are celebrated as legends." However, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, male-bodied masculine characters are also made monstrous when they reproduce patriarchal violence. As I will show, the way Cersei uses violence is what makes her monstrous and abject, rather than her female-bodied performance of masculinity. While Cersei is empowered and operates within masculine domains, her power is gained through acceptance of masculine power structures. She makes individualistic efforts to succeed rather than advocate for social change.²⁷ Cersei dons a masculine role but does not attempt to rewrite the Westerosi gender order.

In contrast, Brienne's non-normative gender identification and her use of a sword make her character overburdened with meaning in terms of both gender and genre, and I suggest that this allows a way of bridging the critical divide between Judith Butler's performativity theory and the trans* scholarship that disputes it. Brienne is able to enter categories of her choosing—to be as she identifies—while simultaneously collapsing those categories, especially as they attach to patriarchal violence. Brienne has no stable model of masculine reference and so cites the figure of the knight, which for her encompasses honour, chivalry, and oath keeping and so allows her to forge an

²⁷ For further discussion of this trend in fantasy, see Linda Badley's essay on *X-Files* (2000).

alternative form of pseudo-medieval masculinity. The knightly discourse enables Brienne to use violence to protect others and co-operate for mutual gain, acts which challenge patriarchal structures that venerate domination and individualism. Because Brienne uses violence to empower others, she is able to maintain her personal borders when she comes into contact with the abject during her quest. Despite being covered in animal blood, having her face eaten, and killing several men, Brienne's subjectivating boundaries are never overwhelmed for long, a resistance that is explicitly tied to her connection to others and her honour, constructed with reference to the masculine figure of the knight. Brienne's violence demonstrates that it is possible to break free from destructive patriarchal structures and forge a new and less harmful masculinity, which she does through queer kinship. Rather than passing her knightly violence down to biological children, Brienne's violence proliferates queerly, through her bonds with Jaime Lannister, Arya Stark, and Podrick Payne.

This chapter brings these concepts of queer kinship and female masculinity together with the theoretical framework already used to investigate monstrous and sovereign male violence—that is, Butler's theory of gender subversion, Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, and Barbara Creed's work on the monstrous feminine—to argue that in the Martinverse, masculine women who reproduce patriarchal violence are critiqued, whereas masculine women who use violence to empower other characters are presented as heroes. In so doing, I progress Jack Halberstam's (1998, 9) conclusion on female masculinity—that it is never ideologically resolved but may function in service of numerous political projects: "sometimes female masculinity coincides with the excess of male supremacy" and sometimes it represents "the healthful alternative to what are considered the histrionics of conventional femininities." By returning to Creed's theory of monstrous femininity, now with a focus on masculine female characters, I reveal a new framework for understanding the queer monstrous feminine, which combines the female body, masculinity, and femininity to problematise patriarchal violence. As in previous chapters, these forms of monstrosity do not feminise the masculine women, but rather draw attention to the horror that their patriarchal violence evokes in such a way as to critique its continued repetition.

"I Choose Violence"

A Feast for Crows offers the first of Cersei Lannister's perspective chapters, in which she "dreamt she sat the Iron Throne, high above them all" (FfC 51). At first Cersei enjoys this masculine authority—

smiling down upon the “bold young knights” and “great lords and proud ladies”—until they begin to laugh and she realises that she is “naked” (FfC 51). As she attempts to cover herself, “the blades of the Iron Throne bit into her flesh”: a grotesque scene unfolds in which “blood ran down her legs, as steel teeth gnawed at her buttocks” and “the more she struggled the more the throne engulfed her, tearing chunks of flesh from her breasts and belly, slicing at her arms and legs until they were slick and red, glistening” (51). Cersei reproduces existing patriarchal structures by dominating from the Iron Throne (the ultimate phallic symbol in the Martinverse), leading to horror as her supposed lack is revealed and she becomes an abject mess of broken flesh. Violence and abjection are paramount to Cersei’s dream, and foreshadow her masculine practices and, as I will argue, their critique.

Cersei is one of the most widely discussed characters in academic criticism of the Martinverse. She is a major character and frequent antagonist who plays a crucial role throughout the series as a wife, mother, lover, and ruler. Cersei is not a typical queen, good or evil: she manipulates several men, including her brother and cousin, through sexual favours; gets drunk on wine; and arranges dozens of murders of men, women, and Robert’s bastard children. Scholars have analysed her walk of shame and ensuing abjection (Patel 2014), her relation to femininity (Frankel 2014, 72-75) and feminism (Spector 2012, 181-183), her moral judgements (Anglberger and Hieke 2012), her connections to other women in history (Mares 2017, 148-150), and her Machiavellian practices (Beaton 2016, 199-203). At first glance, her traditionally feminised beauty and her lack of masculine accoutrements appear to make her an unlikely choice for this discussion of female masculinity. Charul Patel (2014) suggests that Cersei enacts a monstrous femininity, yet while the character is monstrous, she expresses an explicit desire to be a man on multiple occasions; for instance in the television show her costumes increasingly incorporate armour (to which I shall return) and in the novels she says “I should have been born a man” (CoK 291) and thinks, “*I am the only true son [Tywin] ever had*” (FfC 54, original emphasis). In the terms of Halberstam’s notion of female masculinity (1998), the fact that Cersei feels “more masculine than feminine” means that she may be described as a masculine woman.

Cersei often cites her father, Lord Tywin Lannister, and her husband, King Robert Baratheon, in forming her own identity; and these citations contribute to the series’ depiction of “*the imitative nature of gender itself*” (Butler 1990, 187, original emphasis). Cersei identifies strongly with her father and in *A Song of Ice and Fire* she regularly thinks of him as a source of model masculine

conduct. When Cersei sees her advisor Qyburn torturing a man, she “felt ill. Part of her wanted to close her eyes, to turn away, to make it stop. But she was the queen and this was treason. *Lord Tywin would not have turned away*” (FFC 657, original emphasis). Similarly, before Cersei’s walk of shame she thinks, “*I am Cersei of House Lannister, a lion of the Rock, the rightful queen of these Seven Kingdoms, trueborn daughter of Tywin Lannister. And hair grows back*” (DwD 989, original emphasis). Cersei’s interior monologue reveals that her masculine performativity is in imitation of idealised memories of her father and his patriarchal lineage.

In *Game of Thrones*, Cersei cites Tywin mostly through clothing as she appropriates his black leather or chainmail tunics; but she also repeats his words. When Cersei and Tyrion are discussing the Battle of the Blackwater in season two, Cersei mentions “rain[ing] fire down on them from above,” and Tyrion repeats her words back to her, adding, “You’re quoting Father, aren’t you?” (S2E7 “A Man Without Honour”). Cersei notes that Tywin has an excellent mind for strategy—one, it is implied, that she is choosing to repeat in her own masculine performance. Far more frequent than Cersei’s dialogue is her costumes, which attempt to reproduce Tywin’s attire (see fig. 27). Beginning with a thin metal belt around her waist in season one, Cersei’s dresses increasingly incorporate masculine armour, from a full breastplate at the end of season two to an armoured under bust corset in season three, and so on. The masculinity that the costume evokes is compounded in seasons six and seven after Cersei’s long blonde hair is removed for her walk of penance at the end of season five, and she chooses to maintain her short hair as Queen. The references to Tywin are made explicit by costume designer Michele Clapton. In an interview about Cersei’s coronation gown, Clapton says, “I wanted the cut leather that would mirror Tywin’s — it was everything she always told her father she could do, and she can now do it” (Flaherty 2016, para. 24). Cersei’s clothing cites her father as her interior monologue does in the novel. Cersei imitates her father’s enactment of patriarchal violence, much like the sovereigns I discussed in chapter three.

Figure 27: Cersei sitting on the Iron Throne alongside Tywin, both wearing high-necked black leather costumes [from Julie Miller (2016)].



While Cersei models her idealised version of masculinity on her father, her patriarchal violence is often narrated alongside references to her husband, Robert. Robert was once a formidable warrior, but after he became king, his body and morality fell into disrepair: when readers first encounter him, he is a fat, drunken womaniser who skirts his responsibilities and wastes the kingdom’s coin. Cersei arranges Robert’s death in *A Game of Thrones*/season one, but his masculine practices continue to inform her own gendered conduct. One of the clearest examples is Robert’s marital rapes, “assaults” in which “he would drink too much and want to claim his rights” (FfC 544), after which “those nights never happened. Come morning he remembered nothing” (FfC 543). Marital rape empowers the self by banishing the Other and their agency: it is an act through masculinity can be performed, and it is one that Cersei repeats as Queen. Cersei has sex with her “olive skinned” friend Taena Merryweather, the wife of a courtier, in *A Feast for Crows*. When Cersei begins to sexually stimulate Taena she says, “I am the queen. I mean to claim my rights” (FfC 548). Cersei repeats the exact same phrasing that she used to describe Robert’s marital rapes, and thinks about how he would have acted with Taena: “*Robert would have loved you, for an hour. [...] but once he spent himself inside you, he would have been hard pressed to remember your name*” (FfC 548). Cersei repeats this dismissal after she brings Taena to climax: “it would be morning soon, and all of this would be

forgotten. It had never happened” (FfC 549). By citing Robert in this way, it is clear that Cersei views her sexual experience with Taena as an act of patriarchal violence rather than pleasure.²⁸

Cersei’s reproduction of self-serving violence is made grotesque and terrifying through imagery that evokes the *vagina dentata*. As I have noted in chapter two, Creed (1993, 105) understands the *vagina dentata* as reflecting a “fear of the female genitals,” which may manifest as a toothed mouth, a beautiful woman with a fanged animal companion, a barred entrance, or a mother consuming her young. When the *vagina dentata* is linked with male bodied characters and their patriarchal violence, both become monstrous and the latter is rejected. A similar process takes place in relation to Cersei’s sexual violence: the *vagina dentata* is aligned with her, and this link makes both Cersei and her violence terrifying. The toothed vagina may be linked with either “symbolic castration” or “literal castration” (Creed 1993, 107), and Cersei imagines performing a mixture of the two on Taena. While the women are having sex, the queen “let herself imagine that her fingers were a bore’s [*sic*] tusks, ripping the Myrish woman apart from groin to throat” (FfC 549). Cersei wants to destroy Taena’s genitals and her entire body, castrating her literally by “ripping” open her vagina and then symbolically by dismembering her. The boar as *vagina dentata* is significant because Robert was killed by a boar in a drunken hunting accident *A Game of Thrones*/season one, and it was Cersei who arranged his death. The boar becomes Cersei’s “animal companion with open jaws and snapping teeth” (Creed 1993, 108), but it is very clearly linked to her enactment of patriarchal violence rather than to her female body. The horror that the boar evokes because of its link to the *vagina dentata* and because of the abjection of the human/animal (Cersei/boar) crossing, is linked to Cersei’s patriarchal violence, which also becomes monstrous.

Patriarchal sexual violence is further critiqued through Cersei’s interior monologue during the same scene, in which she reveals that she rebelled against Robert’s marital rapes by eating his semen—an act that cites the evil queen and the monstrous feminine. While Cersei penetrates Taena, she thinks about Robert: “*ten thousand of your children perished on my palm, Your Grace [...] I would lick your sons off my face and fingers, all those pale sticky princes. You claimed your rights, my lord, but in the darkness I*

²⁸ In some ways, she is correct: the race and class difference between the Caucasian Queen and the dark-skinned noblewoman may mean that Taena felt pressured to acquiesce. Yet Taena appears to enjoy the experience, and tells Cersei, “Please [...] go on, my queen. Do as you will with me. I’m yours,” and on the next page, she “shuddered again and arched her back and screamed” (FfC 549). Taena’s enjoyment can be read as submission to Cersei’s power and an attempt to provide a highly performative orgasm that may stop the assault. However, if Taena’s comments are taken to express a genuine desire and pleasure, then Cersei’s insistence that she is raping Taena is an attempt to take the other woman’s voice and colonise her experience.

would eat your heirs” (FfC 549, original emphasis). Cersei presents Robert’s sperm not as a bodily fluid but as “children” and “pale sticky princes,” anthropomorphism that elevates her (stereotypically feminine) consumption of his sperm to violence against his royal offspring. Yet Cersei is Robert’s queen, which would make any of his “pale sticky princes” her own children: she gives symbolic birth to them by humanising them and imagining them as grown children—as queen she must be the mother of any royal offspring. Cersei becomes a figure of queer feminine monstrosity: a “cannibalistic mother” (Creed 1993, 109) who births and then consumes her own children.

The specific way in which Cersei describes the violence, “in the darkness I would eat your heirs,” adds to her monstrosity by evoking the *vagina dentata*. While Cersei explicitly states that she does not allow Robert to ejaculate inside her vagina, “the darkness” and oral sadism she alludes to conjure images associated with the monstrous female genitals, such as “sharp teeth and bloodied lips” and “a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow [men] up and cut them to pieces” (Creed 1993, 106-107). Cersei’s vaginal violence is also a symbolic castration in the sense that she removes Robert’s phallic power by stopping him from producing legitimate heirs. “Cersei usurps the line of succession,” argues Spector (2012, 182), by “substituting another man’s child for Robert’s own, an act that is both treason and the ultimate emasculation.” Because that other man is Cersei’s own brother, it could be argued that the horror comes from incest. However, because Jaime is Cersei’s twin brother, the incest is also parthenogenetic: as Patel (2014, 142) argues, “not only has she substituted her own children into the line of succession so that a matriarchal rule will follow, but the children are a product of a relationship with her twin and thus Cersei enacts a form of self-replication or auto-impregnation.” By eating Robert’s “heirs” as a *vagina dentata*, Cersei swallows his futurity: she becomes a “black hole which threatens to swallow [men] up and cut them to pieces” (Creed 1993, 106-107). Cersei appears to disrupt patriarchal reproductive systems when she is disempowered through Robert’s patriarchal violence and eats his sperm, but when the feudal patriarchy gives her power as Queen she maintains its logics by explicitly reproducing Robert’s patriarchal violence in order to further empower herself and banish the feminine Other. The horror that the *vagina dentata* and castrating mother evoke is projected onto Cersei’s patriarchal violence in the narrative present wherein she rapes Taena.

In *Game of Thrones* Cersei’s repetitions of this form of violence are also critiqued through the queer monstrous feminine, although in the filmic medium both her violence and monstrosity are made more spectacular. In the season six finale, “The Winds of Winter,” Cersei murders the

majority of Westerosi nobility in a magical explosion. When Cersei does not appear at the sept where she is to be tried for crimes (including regicide, adultery, and deicide), her cousin Lancel, a member of the Faith Militant, is sent to find her and instead discovers barrels of magical “wildfire” that are about to ignite. Wildfire has been established as a masculine and specifically a sovereign weapon: in “The Ghost of Harrenhal” (S2E5) Tyrion visits the Alchemist’s Guild and learns that “wildfire was the key to the Targaryen power,” especially for King Aerys Targaryen, who arranged for it to be stored under the city. While audiences may now associate the Targaryens with a woman, Daenerys, in Cersei’s world of King’s Landing, the Targaryens and wildfire remain culturally linked to Aerys, under whose rule no one “would dare insult” the pyromancers (S2E5). Cersei makes use of wildfire as a means of re-establishing her power and banishing the others who challenge her. She intervenes in the reproduction of the paternal law by destroying a patriarchal institution, the sept, but she does so in order to reproduce the symbolic law in a way of her choosing: through her son Tommen, and after his death, through declaring herself as Queen. The violence is made terrifying through the tunnel in which the substance is stored, which evokes the *vagina dentata* through its shape and the explosives it harbours, like the “tunnels and caves” hiding “spiders, snakes or bats which attack the unwary” in horror films (Creed 1993, 108).

The image of the *vagina dentata* works alongside the archaic mother, which is cited in a way that is very similar to how this latter figure appears in the film *Alien* (1979), as Creed analyses it. In *Alien*, the crew of a commercial spaceship investigates the distress signals of another vessel, wherein they find the ship abandoned but filled with rows of eggs. The “womb-like imagery, [and] the long winding tunnels leading to inner chambers” are for Creed (1993, 19) images whose horror comes from a fear of the archaic mother. In the Martinverse, the barrels of wildfire can be read as “rows of hatching eggs” (Creed 1993, 19), embryos of destruction that Cersei has planted beneath the city and which will give way to a monstrous birth. Like a woman in labour, the city’s “surface is no longer closed, smooth and intact – rather the body looks as if it may tear apart, open out, reveal its innermost depths” (Creed 1993, 58). As green fire engulfs the city, King’s Landing is torn apart literally as its infrastructure crumbles, and symbolically as the religious headquarters and the nobility are destroyed. Cersei’s terrorism is not merely an explosion but one rendered abject through association with the female reproductive body. Yet even here, Cersei’s masculinity is emphasised. After the explosion the audience sees Cersei in her chambers watching the mayhem, but her breasts, a sign of femaleness, are excluded from the frame for almost the entire scene, and her masculine

garb is foregrounded because it takes up a quarter of the frame (fig. 28). The horror that Cersei's wildfire explosion inspires is linked to the female reproductive body as well as her patriarchal violence, and consequently the latter is positioned as monstrous.

Figure 28: A close up of Cersei wearing a high-necked military style dress while she watches King's Landing burn from the palace (S6E10 "The Winds of Winter")



Cersei also uses patriarchal violence to disempower those who have wronged her, acts which are similarly made terrifying through the monstrous feminine. In "The Winds of Winter" (S6E10) and "The Queen's Justice" (S7E3), Cersei tortures and murders Septa Unella, who oversaw her imprisonment by the Faith Militant, and Ellaria Sand, who murdered her daughter Myrcella Baratheon. When speaking with Unella, Cersei makes her enjoyment of violence clear: "I killed your high sparrow, and all his little sparrows, all his septons and all his septas, all his filthy soldiers, because it felt good to watch them burn. It felt good to imagine their shock and their pain. No thought has ever given me greater joy" (S6E10). Cersei enjoys taking her revenge, an act that she views as masculine because her father Tywin was notoriously vengeful.²⁹ Cersei takes great pleasure in patriarchal violence in this scene and (it is implied) in the one in "The Queen's Justice." Her affective response marks her violence as patriarchal and makes it unacceptable for either the classical or postmodern ends of the high fantasy spectrum, where violence should be committed unwillingly and be met with emotional turmoil, as I have noted.

²⁹ One of the most popular songs in Westeros, "The Rains of Castamere," is about the conflict between Tywin and House Reyne of Castamere, wherein the latter house attempted to challenge the former and was entirely obliterated.

Because Cersei's violence is patriarchal and self-serving, it is critiqued through the queer monstrous feminine. Both torture scenes take place inside cavernous dungeon rooms that resemble wombs: the brown mottled walls give the space an organic quality, especially when they seem damp as the light shines on them. The dungeon evokes the horror of the abject womb: where Kristeva views the corpse as the epitome of abjection, Creed (1993, 49) contends that it is actually "the womb [...] for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination – blood, afterbirth, faeces." Adding to the scene's abjection is Cersei's costume. In both scenes she wears jewel incusted shoulder pads that twinkle because of the light from the torches, giving her regal costume a reptilian look that disrupts the binary between human and animal. The abject and the monstrous feminine work in concert to make Cersei's positive affective response to her patriarchal violence disgusting and terrifying: an unacceptable means of performing masculinity. The violence does not become unacceptable because it is used by a woman; it is unacceptable because Cersei uses violence to empower herself and disempower the Other.

Cersei's violence reinforces patriarchal structures, and for this reason she becomes trapped within the same cycle of bodily abjection as her male counterparts. Patel (2014, 144) argues that Cersei becomes abject during her walk of penance, as she has abject objects thrown at her: "they call her dirty names [...] and begin to throw rotten food and even a dead cat that explodes maggots and entrails all over her. The rotten food and dead cat are significant, as Kristeva identifies the corpse as a symbol of abjection." I agree that the walk of penance is where Cersei first becomes abject, but would add that her interior monologue can illuminate the ways in which she has internalised this abjection.

Cersei maintains the emotional repression she learned from Tywin until she imagines seeing an alleged witch from her childhood, Maggy the Frog, in the crowd. The narrator says, "Suddenly the hag was there, standing in the crowd with her pendulous teats and her warty greenish skin, leering with the rest, with malice shining from her crusty yellow eyes" (DwD 999). With her exposed breasts, sickly pallor, and infected eyes, the witch's body is overburdened: it spills forth across the boundaries of public/private and sickness/health, as well as the spectrum between classical and postmodern fantasy because the wicked witch is a more classical convention. Maggy the Frog gave Cersei a prophecy before the Queen came to court as a young woman, and she recalls the witch's words on this walk: "*Queen you shall be,*" she hissed, "*until there comes another, younger and more beautiful, to cast you down and take all you hold dear*" (DwD 999, original emphasis). It is here that Cersei loses her

self-control and “there was no stopping the tears” that “burned down the queen’s cheeks like acid” (DwD 999). Inner monologue is used to show that Cersei’s abjection is not only external but internal, representing the “peak” of abjection: in Kristeva’s words, the “subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject” (Kristeva 1982, 5). Maggy the Frog’s imagined re-emergence forces Cersei to recognise her own abjection, as demonstrated in the scene’s narration. Tears, as a liquid that moves from inside to outside the body, are abject, and here they are made horrifying as their border crossing is made explicit as they feel like “acid” corroding Cersei’s flesh. Placing one hand across her breasts and the other “down to hide her slit,” Cersei “scrambled crab-legged” to the castle (DwD 1000). The word “slit” to describe Cersei’s genitals builds on the acidic tears that run down her face, inviting the audience to recognise how Cersei’s body has begun to disassemble in her own mind. “Slit” suggests an openness, a vulnerability, in the stable and closed body that the symbolic order venerates. Such is Cersei’s abjection that she sees herself as becoming animalised, “crab-legged” and lacking the constitutive borders that grant her intelligible humanity.

In *Game of Thrones* Cersei’s abjection is expressed through her relationship with Gregor Clegane, a bond that I described in chapter two as a bastardised form of alternative or queer kinship. Like the alternative kinship Butler (1993, 95) discusses, Cersei “repeats in order to remake” the sexist pseudo-medieval system and its violence into a space that allows for her existence by spreading her subjectivity across two sites as Gregor’s body is integrated with her own. But as Gregor perpetrates violence on Cersei’s behalf, this kinship only reproduces patriarchal logics. Cersei fails because she empowers herself regardless of the cost to others and so does not consider pushing her repetition in productive directions—such as “creat[ing] the discursive and social space for a community.” Viewers see the monstrous kinship in action during Cersei’s torture scenes: when she confronts Septa Unella and Ellaria Sand, she makes lengthy monologues about her violence, but it is Gregor who carries out or oversees the acts in silence.

Violence is the precise point where Cersei’s identity is merged with Gregor’s: he acts out her desires. As I have argued in chapter two, Gregor’s violence becomes terrifying through its association with the queer monstrous feminine, but Cersei too becomes a figure of horror in this arrangement. She becomes abject because her second body is used to reproduce patriarchal structures through its violence. In spreading her subjectivity to increase her capability for violence,

Cersei purposefully disrupts identity as she enacts patriarchal violence. She uses Gregor to carry out these deeds, and the violence becomes the locus of terror because it is the site where their abject identities merge and are made horrifying.

Alongside abjection, Cersei's violence is critiqued because it is shown to be part of the destructive cycle of patriarchal violence that I have explored in the chapters on monstrous and sovereign violence. Cersei's female masculinity is informed by the "other imitations" of masculinity that she has witnessed in the pseudo-medieval fantasy world, and as she repeats them she ensures their continued reproduction. In the torture scenes in "The Queen's Justice" and "The Winds of Winter," discussed above, Cersei uses violence in a way that aims to approximate what she experienced. She chants "Confess" four times as she is waterboarding Septa Unella, and later chants "Shame" twice as she leaves the room, repeating the phrase that the Septa used during Cersei's walk of penance (S6E10 "The Winds of Winter"). Likewise, in "The Winds of Winter" Cersei poisons Tyene Sand with "the poison [Ellaria] used to murder Myrcella." As Butler argues in her analysis of the film *Paris is Burning*, gender parody has the potential to challenge normative systems of power but does not necessarily do so. Cersei's violence, like drag, "calls into question whether parodying the dominant norm is enough to displace them; indeed, whether the denaturalization of gender cannot be the very vehicle for a reconsolidation of hegemonic norms" (Butler 1993, 85). She turns the violence against itself, but ends up reproducing it anyway, and being trapped within its destructive cycle.

While Cersei's narrative is still being written, its circularity suggests that she will never break free from "hegemonic norms" of masculine violence. Cersei's walk of penance echoes the one that Tywin forced his step-mother to endure: "she had been sent forth naked to walk through the streets of Lannisport," making "futile efforts to cover her breasts and her sex with her hands as she hobbled bare-foot and naked through the streets to exile" (DwD 993). Cersei is forced to make a near-identical walk of penance, and while it could be argued that this punishment is chosen because of her female body, it was the kind of violence that her father and role model, Tywin, privileged, and that she reproduces as queen. The masculine practices Cersei draws upon are not simply reproductions of a male-bodied masculine original but part of a constellation of repeated acts that aim to give the illusion of a stable gender identity. Cersei's insistent repetition of the patriarchs close to her—Tywin and Robert—reveal that her masculinity is contingent and borne out of a violent patriarchal system.

Cersei's actions may be read as empowering or subversive because she challenges patriarchal institutions such as the church, marriage, and the feudal system even as she reifies them in new ways. A woman ruler is significant within the fantasy genre, even if she proves to be, as Margery Tyrell claims, "a vile, scheming, evil bitch" (FfC 738). Almost all of Cersei's decisions are hastily made and poorly considered, which may suggest to readers that female masculinities are poor imitations of male masculinities, or worse, that women should be excluded from power because they cannot rule effectively. However, it is patriarchal violence that leads the queer monstrous feminine to be projected onto Cersei's body. Rather than contesting dominant and oppressive gender regimes, she retraces the steps of the patriarchy and achieves the same monstrous ends.

The Magic Sword

Brienne of Tarth, the tall and muscular female warrior who is originally encountered serving King Renly Baratheon as kingsguard during the War of the Five Kings, enacts masculinity through knighthood, especially protecting others through chivalric violence. After leaving the island of Tarth, Brienne serves multiple characters: Renly Baratheon, Catelyn Stark and Sansa Stark (and in the television series, also Arya Stark). While these quests dominate her narrative arc, her characterisation revolves around her relation to her magic sword, which is both a fantasy convention and a symbol of her masculinity. Brienne identifies as a man,³⁰ and when she receives her sword Oathkeeper—a symbol of honour, phallic masculinity, and knighthood—this identity is positively confirmed. The sword makes Brienne's violence intelligible as violence, and it provides an embodied way to enter knightly subjectivity. At the same time, the sword destabilises all of these categories because it is so saturated with meaning, denaturalising the patriarchal violence with which the sword is commonly associated and allowing it to be re-made by Brienne. She cites knightly masculinity as her model for gendered conduct, including as she reforges the relationship between masculinity and violence. Rather than reinforcing patriarchal structures, Brienne uses violence to protect various others, including lower-class women and children. Because of the demands of her quests Brienne comes into contact with the abject, but she is not contaminated by it: she maintains her constitutive borders and her violence is reproduced through alternative kinship. Brienne's knightly violence offers a

³⁰ I continue to use she/her pronouns when discussing Brienne because she uses them to talk about herself, as does the narrator.

means of (re)working masculinity as it is figured through violence, so that it runs along healthier lines.

There is a difference between Butlerian gender performativity and trans* theory when it comes to female-embodied men—being versus performing—that is relevant to understanding Brienne’s character in the Martinverse. The amalgamation of performativity and physicality makes Brienne a useful character through which to bridge the gap between trans* theories, which are often concerned with re-centralising the gendered body, and with challenging Butler’s argument that the body comes into being through the repetition of stylised acts. Many trans* scholars remain sceptical about the value of performativity because they associate it with theatricality and playfulness and view it as antithetical to “transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be non-performative, to be constative, quite simply to be” (Prosser 1998, 32; also see Namaste 1996; Rubin 2003).³¹ Brienne’s relationship to her sword reveals that performativity is intimately bound with the desire “to be” (Prosser 1998, 32): the sword, as overburdened genre convention and performative prosthesis, allows her to better embody masculinity.

In this sense, the sword for Brienne is a phallic prosthesis that allows her to enter the embodied history of knighthood, itself a classical fantasy convention that creates added tension around her character. Brienne does not appropriate discourses and the types of violence they encourage by ownership of the sword, but creates an embodied queer phallic power that troubles the lingering connection between masculinity and violence by showing that masculinity is not contingent upon a male body but can be gifted, bought, and forged. Jeanne Hamming (2001, 331) makes a similar argument about dildos, showing how the phallus can be bought in “basically any size, shape, texture and color they desire. [...] A dildo never suffers from impotence or premature ejaculation and most perform feats men only fantasize about.” An “aggressive reterritorialization” (Butler 1993, 53)—such as that which occurs when women buy penises, or when they are given swords—reveals that these objects are culturally linked to male embodied masculinity, but that this link can be contested as different subjects engage in such embodiments. The sword symbolises the masculine (and masculinised) history Brienne is entering: a history of bodies and acts that can be made visible through the warrior woman.

³¹ This is not to say that trans* theories reject poststructuralism; the field has been heavily influenced by poststructuralist thought, and scholars including Susan Stryker (1994, 2004, 2008) utilise this critical lens in their scholarship.

It is important to establish the relationship between trans* and Brienne³² because the way she re-makes patriarchal violence through her sword is relevant to my core argument about subversion arising from genre tension. The sword carries a substantial number of meanings. From a gender perspective it can be read as a phallus, a normative masculine weapon, and a detachable phallus for subjects who lack a penis; and from a genre perspective an individual sword is part of a history of swords used for great deeds, signals heroism, and carries the symbolic weight of its name. Adding to these genre meanings is the sword's ties to the classical end of the high fantasy spectrum, as demonstrated through Brienne's understanding of the sword as magic. While resting for the night during her quest, Brienne takes her sword out and admires it: "Gold glimmered yellow in the candlelight and rubies smouldered red. When she slid Oathkeeper from the ornate scabbard, Brienne's breath caught in her throat. Black and red the ripples ran, deep within the steel. *Valyrian steel, spell-forged*. It was a sword fit for a hero" (FfC 78, original emphasis). Phrases such as "gold glimmered" and "rubies smouldered" give the scene a lyrical tone that evokes storytelling, denaturalising the narrative. Brienne's description of Oathkeeper as "*spell-forged*" leaves no doubt that this is a magical weapon, and she repeatedly refers to Oathkeeper as a "magic sword" (FfC 327; 716). The intense polyvalence that surrounds the weapon is useful from a Butlerian perspective because it reveals the unnaturalness and contingency of the patriarchy and the fantasy genre. When a sword is owned by a character such as Brienne who disrupts gender categories even without this accoutrement, its subversive potential is amplified. For this reason, Brienne and her sword have significant potential for rearticulating citational acts in ways that disrupt both the fantasy genre and patriarchal structures. I argue that this potential is oriented around Brienne's chivalric violence and the proliferation of her knowledges and practices through her entry into queer kinship systems. The sword's function as a performative act allows Brienne's violence to be intelligible as violence, and it allows her "to be," to appropriate Prosser (1998, 32), in the sense that it gives her an embodied way to enter the category that she desires, a knight. At the same time, the sword destabilises all of these

³² The Martinverse may have a pseudo-medieval setting, yet it is informed by and speaks to our present historical moment: the early twenty-first century. Terms such as trans* identification are therefore used to describe some of the masculine women in the series, even if they would not use these terms themselves because of their medieval fantasy milieu. Brienne's characterisation and internal monologue privilege gender rather than sexuality, which resonates with trans* theories that "willfully [disrupt] the privileged family narratives that favor sexual identity labels (like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) over the gender categories (like man and woman) that enable desire to take shape and find its aim" (Stryker 2004, 212). Brienne's characterisation is more interested in these "gender categories": she is female and identifies as masculine, and for this reason she has considerable potential for re-imaging gendered acts/genre conventions and patriarchal structures/the fantasy genre, especially as they relate to the relationship between masculinity and violence in the Martinverse.

categories because it is so saturated with meaning, denaturalising the patriarchal violence with which the sword is commonly associated and allowing it to be re-made by Brienne.

Brienne's non-normative gender presentation is apparent even before she gains a sword, making her character highly useful for placing trans* theories in dialogue with performativity. Brienne transgresses the socially imposed boundaries of normative high-class femininity because she considers herself a man, or as Halberstam (1998, xi) might put it, "more masculine than feminine." For this reason, she can be understood as trans* as it is defined by Susan Stryker: "*the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition*" (2008, 1; original emphasis). It is worth noting that, as Halberstam (2012) has argued, the term trans* is specific to this historical period in Western culture. Gender variance proliferates across the globe, but local complexities have increasingly been marginalised by monolithic trans* discourses, even if the aim of this intervention is to raise awareness and acceptance of trans* issues. The same is true of reading identifications such as lesbian and trans* "back" in history (Halberstam 1998; Doan 2006); these identities were not available at the time, and may obscure historical complexities by imposing modern meanings on disparate historical moments.

Brienne's position as a character who collapses categories even before she gains a magic sword is demonstrated when she uses the figure of the knight to move from one form of gender performativity, high-class femininity, to another, masculinity. Brienne regularly denounces the title of "Lady" (here meaning high class woman); while she also notes that she is "no knight," I argue that she rejects this title because she has not sworn knightly oaths or been otherwise officially interpolated into knighthood, rather than because of the title's implied masculinity. Yvonne Tasker and Lindsay Steenberg (2016, 176) contend that these "ritualistic denials [...] signal her uneasy and unsettling combination of both categories," and brush off Brienne's "assumption of knightly regalia" as "a complicated kind of cross dressing; neither disguise nor burlesque, but an outward indicator of her inner commitment to chivalric ideals" (178). I agree with Tasker and Steenberg that Brienne's clothing reflects her interest in chivalry and knighthood. But this interest is shaped by her identification as masculine. When Jaime asks if Brienne has siblings, she says, "No. I was my father's only s—child." Jaime responds, "*Son*, you meant to say. Does he think of you as a son? You make a queer sort of daughter, to be sure" and he later thinks that, "she reminded him of Tyrion in some queer way, though at first blush two people could scarcely be any more dissimilar" (SoS1 155). Brienne's slip of the tongue indicates her identification as masculine rather than non-binary or

feminine, while Jaime's repeated use of the word "queer" highlights Brienne's gender nonconformity and potential homosexuality, the subversive potential of which is inadvertently highlighted through insistent heterosexual pairings. The novel and television series suggest that one of the cornerstones of Brienne's character is her love for the deceased (and implicitly gay) Renly.³³ In the television series Brienne appears to have a budding romantic relationship with Jaime Lannister (Shaham 2015) and is subject to advances from a wildling man called Tormund Giantsbane, which are earnest though played for comedic value. Later in the series when Brienne is forced to wear a dress, Jaime observes that "Brienne looked more like a man in a gown" (SoS2 49): she retains her masculinity despite societal policing. Brienne is presented as a character who collapses categories, and this queerness is amplified when she gains Oathkeeper.

Brienne's knightly masculinity is revealed as performative through her use of prostheses, specifically the sword. The sword is discursive, embodied, and performative, and for this reason it is a unique site through which to bridge the divide between performativity and trans* theory. Jes Batts (2006, para. 17) argues that, in Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* series (1983-1988), "Alanna's sword, the mythical weapon called Lightning, becomes the representation of her phallic power, the most important piece of artifice in her performance as a male knight." While Alanna quite literally performs her status as a "male knight" because she does not identify as a boy but pretends to be one for the purposes of receiving knightly training, the sword is the central prosthesis that allows her to convince others of her masculinity because its shape can carry phallic power for the owner. Attention is drawn to the phallus as "an idealization, one which no body can adequately approximate," which for Butler (1993, 53) makes the phallus transferable, and open to a "aggressive reterritorialization" that disrupt its link to normative masculinity.

Such a reterritorialisation takes place in the Martinverse when Brienne gains her sword. The sword's function as a performative act makes Brienne's violence intelligible, and it allows her "to be" (Prosser 1998, 32) in the sense that it gives her a means of entering the embodied category of knight. The sword empowers Brienne to enter her desired identity (a masculine body via a phallic prosthesis), but this entering is shown to be a process that is never complete. Moreover, the sword destabilises all of these categories because it is so saturated with meaning, denaturalising the patriarchal violence with which the sword is commonly associated and making room for it to be re-

³³ See David Nel (2015) for further discussion around Renly's sexuality.

forged. The sword is an icon of “knightly masculinity,” an identification that is “a perpetual work of progress” (Larrington 2017, 269-270)—much like Butlerian gender performativity. Knighthood is a specifically phallic form of performativity; as I have demonstrated through my discussion of sovereign violence, the sword is the object through which class, ability, and masculinity materialise, and Brienne’s relationship to Oathkeeper reveals that it also produces knighthood. When phallic swords are wielded by women who identify as masculine, the weapons can be understood as prostheses that allow characters to bridge the gap between trans* identification, performativity, and embodiment.

When Brienne meets with Jaime in his chambers after she returns him to King’s Landing on Catelyn Stark’s orders, she sees him in the white cloak of the kingsguard for the first time and tells him that “it becomes you” (SoS2 432). Brienne describes Jaime’s cloak as becoming in the sense that it suits him, but it is also possible to read the white cloak (symbolising honour, chivalry, and virtue) as a prosthesis that allows Jaime to embody his desired identity (as well as the one that Brienne seeks herself to become). The sense of becoming through prostheses is also highlighted when Jaime gives Brienne the sword Oathkeeper, a prosthesis that allows her to more fully embody chivalric knightly masculinity: it gives her access to the phallus, as well as violence, class status, and martial prowess.

In *Game of Thrones* the prosthesis plays a more central role in Brienne’s embodiment and heroism as Jaime gives her a tailored suit of armour and a squire as well as Oathkeeper (S4E4 “Oathkeeper”). The armour is tinged with blue for her native Tarth, and is cut without room for breasts. Like the sword, the armour can be viewed as a prosthesis: it is a physical object that allows Brienne to shift her embodied personhood so that it can better achieve knightly masculinity. Jaime comments, “I hope I got your measurements right” as if confirming that she does want to pursue this gender identification—which is implied by her acceptance of the armour. According to John Cameron (2014, 198), “the gift of this sword signifies just how much Jaime [...] has come to respect Brienne.” The respect is directed toward Brienne’s honour as well as her knightly masculinity.

When Jaime presents Brienne with the sword and armour in the White Tower (the historic home of the kingsguard), the *mise-en-scène* foreshadows her future heroism. Brienne walks slowly toward the armour with an open mouth and gently touches the metal, then vows, “I’ll find her. For Lady Catelyn. [Pause] And for you” (S4E4). Famous swords don the wall behind Brienne, and candles are visible behind Jaime’s head, emphasising the sacred role of weaponry among knights. Thanks to Jaime, “Brienne is marked by the iconography of knightly prowess—and the close of the

fourth Season [*siz*] sees her wearing armor, with a Valyrian steel sword (that she has named Oathkeeper), and a loyal, if perhaps unskilled, squire, Podrick” (Tasker and Steenberg 2016, 176). Thanks to the prostheses Jaime provides, Brienne is able to pursue her quest to find and protect the Stark girls.

For all that the sword draws attention to Brienne’s gendered embodiment, it also directs the audience’s attention to her violence. Brienne receives Oathkeeper from Jaime, who charges her with “find[ing] Sansa first, and get[ing] her somewhere safe. How else are the two of us going to make good our stupid vows to your precious dead Lady Catelyn?” (SoS2 344). The sword is from the outset tied to notions of “good” and chivalrous “vows,” foreshadowing the effects that her violence will have on the world and overburdening these effects through the citation of classical fantasy conventions. Brienne’s re-working of patriarchal violence is emphasised when Jaime explains the sword’s origins: “When Ned Stark died, his greatsword was given to the King’s Justice. [...] my father [...] had Ice melted down and reforged. There was enough metal for two blades. You’re holding one. So you’ll be defending Ned Stark’s daughter with Ned Stark’s own steel, if that makes any difference to you” (SoS2 434-435; S4E4 “Oathkeeper”). Ned Stark’s name is repeated three times as Jaime gives Brienne Oathkeeper, citing his flawed sovereign violence as well as his phallic power. Yet the fact that his greatsword is “reforged” speaks not only to re-making the sword, but to the potential for (re)imaging his violence, the law of the father, and its connections to the phallus.

Brienne cites chivalric masculinity: a collective set of practices associated with medieval knighthood in which courtesy, respect, prowess, and honour are expected of the subject. Through Brienne, chivalry is reinvigorated in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* as a non-binarising and mutually beneficial masculine resource. Unlike the other masculine characters I have examined, Brienne has no human reference point for her masculinity. She mentions her father Lord Selwyn Tarth, Jaime, and her master-at-arms Ser Goodwin, but she does not hold these men as models for masculine conduct. Instead, she cites the concept of the knight: as Tasker and Steenberg (2016, 175) argue, Brienne “embodies many legacies of medievalism that have shaped the fantasy genre and the nostalgic view of the past formed by codes of chivalry and ideals of courtly love and honorable war.”

Brienne’s character is certainly informed by “codes of chivalry,” but because of her category-collapsing—postmodern—gender identity, they can be removed from the nostalgic model in classical fantasy, and the patriarchal version of chivalry that is critiqued by feminists who correctly

align it with male supremacy and oppressive gender binaries (Hackney 2015). The act of protecting others forces one subject into the discursive position of victim and the other as protector, and Elyce Rae Helford (2000a) argues that, even when women are protectors, the protector/protected binary demands a victim, and that victim is almost always a woman. Yet even as Brienne repeats the protector/protected binary, her chivalric practices reflect a third wave feminist approach to gender equality, in her awareness, for example, of intersections of class and gender. Brienne uses violence to empower others: she repeats the connection between masculinity and violence as she remakes it. Brienne's chivalry in the Martinverse operates in the same way that Butler describes being at once produced by and resistant to dominant gender norms: being "occupied by such terms and yet occupying them oneself risks a complicity, a repetition, a relapse into injury, but it is also the occasion to work the mobilizing power of injury, of an interpellation one never chose" (Butler 1993, 83). Between reproducing women's victimisation and remaking chivalry, Brienne negotiates the association of masculinity and patriarchal violence established by many male-embodied characters into a productive marker of heroism that rejects its heterosexist underpinnings.

For Brienne, these chivalric codes are the model after which her own masculinity is repeated. She regularly insists that she wants "to be a knight" (FfC 238, 240), and acts accordingly. During her quest to return Jaime to King's Landing she comes across "a live oak full of dead women" and tells her companions, "I'll leave no innocents to be food for crows" (SoS1 25/ S2E10 "Valar Morghulis"). Brienne also criticises the (many) male bodied knights who fail to act chivalrously: "*Old or young, a true knight is sworn to protect those who are weaker than himself [sic], or die in the attempt*" (FfC 526, original emphasis). Brienne has experienced the harsh realities of the Martinverse: bullied, harassed, and threatened with sexual violence from a young age, she consciously chooses to stand by her idealised version of knighthood despite knowing that most of the characters around her do not. The concept of chivalric knighthood is Brienne's point of masculine reference: she does not encounter any "true" knights and it is therefore without a purported "original" that informs her gendered actions. According to Charles Hackney (2015, 139-140), "although [Brienne] is never anointed as a knight due to her sex, in every other sense she lives according to the chivalric code, and is a far better exemplar of honour than most of her male counterparts." Importantly, it is because Brienne chooses to interpret this chivalric code in ways that enable others and break free from patriarchal repetition that her violence is able to make the world more liveable.

While the sword is the central item that cements Brienne's masculinity, it is not the crux, as is demonstrated by the fact that she continues to engage in chivalric violence even when she knows that she lacks sufficient weapons. When Jaime and Brienne fight in the bear pit at Harrenhal, their conversation over the presence/absence of phallic swords highlights the fact that while neither Jaime nor Brienne are capable of performing phallic masculinity, they choose to use violence to protect one another anyway. In both the novel and television series the sword is the central point of measure for each character's capability in the fight. When Jaime jumps into the bear pit in the novel, Brienne resists his help, saying, "You get behind. I have the sword," although Jaime points out that it is "a sword with no point and no edge," which the narrator later refers to as "useless" (SoS2 47). Likewise, in *Game of Thrones*, Jaime has confidence in Brienne's ability to protect herself with a phallic weapon—until he realises that her captor "gave her a tourney sword" (47). Jaime's lack of any kind of weapon reflects the recent loss of his sword hand, the body part which allowed him to access patriarchal violence (a point I will return to in chapter five). Brienne's "tourney sword"/"sword with no point and no edge" speaks to her reliance upon prostheses to perform masculinity: like a practice sword, she appears from a distance to embody phallic masculinity, but upon closer inspection that embodiment is only partial. The same is true of Jaime, meaning that this partiality is not an issue unique to Brienne: the embodiment of the ideal is always incomplete. Brienne's lack of phallic power is presumed to make her vulnerable, an assumption that presents the phallus as the source of all masculine power.

Along with using masculine violence to aid others, Brienne actively challenges the patriarchal systems that dominate the pseudo-medieval world. In both the television series and novels Brienne pauses her quest with Jaime to bury a group of hanged prostitutes, but in the former she also comes face to face with the murderers (S2E10 "Valar Morghulis"). Sexual violence is woven throughout the scene; before they see the women Jaime implies that Brienne wishes someone were strong enough to overpower and rape her because she wants to know what it "feels like to be a woman," and right afterwards the pair pause as they see the corpses dangling from a tree. The abrupt transition highlights the sharp contrast between Brienne's ability to resist sexual violence through her class and knightly training and the prostitutes' vulnerability as working class women. Brienne registers her comparative privilege in the pseudo-medieval world and pauses to "bury" the women, but before she can untie the rope, the three men who killed them return. They laugh when they realise Brienne is a woman, and continue to insult her throughout the scene. When she attempts to leave they ask

her what she thinks of “these beauties”—the corpses—and Brienne responds, “I hope you gave them quick deaths.” Their leader says, “Two of them we did, yeah.” Brienne again attempts to leave, but the men realise that she is transporting the infamous Jaime Lannister and she has to fight them. She kills the first two men quickly, but when she approaches their leader she says “two quick deaths?” and draws her sword, which she slowly plunges through the man’s torso. Brienne’s decision to repeat the men’s violence and dialogue is subversive in the sense that it reproduces patriarchal violence “in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims” (Butler 1993, 83): to punish rather than to perpetrate sexual violence against women. While Brienne thus reinforces the link between masculinity and violence, she also contests the notion that such violence must be patriarchal: instead, she uses violence to redress the sexism and classism in her world. She protects the murdered prostitutes’ honour and humanity by treating their corpses with respect.

Because Brienne uses violence as a means of empowering others, she does not become abject even when she comes into contact with objects and acts that might otherwise undo her subjectivating borders. Her resistance to abjection begins early in her knightly training when her master-at-arms, Ser Goodwin, “had always questioned whether she was hard enough for battle” and so “toughened her” by “send[ing] her to her father’s butcher to slaughter lambs and suckling pigs” (FfC 324). Brienne’s perceived emotionality is presented as a weakness, but Ser Goodwin’s phrasing—“hard” and “soft”—also draws attention to her lack of phallic power, as a trainee knight, a young person, and a woman. The means of gaining this phallic hardness is, for Ser Goodwin, by enacting violence against young animals—an act that reinforces patriarchal structures by disempowering the animal Other to empower the self. Yet this practice is presented as abject: Brienne describes how “the piglets squealed and the lambs screamed like frightened children. By the time the butchering was done Brienne had been blind with tears, her clothes so bloody that she had given them to her maid to burn” (FfC 324).

Brienne comes into contact with abjection on multiple levels: through the blood and tears, but also through the blurring of human and animal that the anthropomorphism facilitates: the “squealing” piglets and “scream[ing]” lambs are one of “those fragile states” where “the territories of animal” become blurred with the human (Kristeva 1982, 13). Despite the domination Brienne achieves over the animals, her embrace of the Other means that she is distraught (“blind with tears”) when she is forced to kill the animals, and her negative affective response to her own violence makes the act ambiguous rather than monstrous. The dismay that Brienne experiences allows her to

remain within the realm of acceptable violence and so retain her constitutive borders: it is her “clothes,” rather than her own body, that becomes “so bloody,” and even these are immediately rejected: “given [...] to her maid to burn” (FfC 324).³⁴ Brienne is not contaminated by the object because she refuses to be affectively complicit in the patriarchal violence she is forced to reproduce. She may enact violence against frightened, anthropomorphised animals, but as I have demonstrated, she otherwise protects these subjects through her chivalrous violence.

In *Game of Thrones* Brienne’s resistance to abjection is expressed through textual gaps and silences during her violence, especially when she enacts sovereign violence against King Stannis Baratheon. After securing Stannis’s confession Brienne says, “In the name of Renly of House Baratheon, first of his name, rightful king of the Andals and the first men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms and Protector of the Realm, I Brienne of Tarth sentence you to die” (S5E10 “Mother’s Mercy”). In citing Renly and acting as his vassal, Brienne’s murder becomes sovereign violence. She carries it out almost perfectly: Stannis confesses his violation of the law, and Brienne uses Oathkeeper to restore its borders.

Yet there is some ambiguity around the act. The objectiveness that is promised by sovereign violence according to Eddard is absent. Brienne was in love with Renly, and when she swears herself to Catelyn in season two she implies that she wishes to avenge his death (S2E5 “The Ghost in Harrenhal”), making her sovereign violence an act of revenge. Brienne’s phallic desire to dominate Stannis in vengeance is hinted at through the sword’s angle to her groin (fig. 29). The music adds another level of complexity: the song “The Old Gods and the New” plays from the moment Brienne sentences Stannis, a song that draws attention to Brienne’s oath to Renly, as well as her oath to Catelyn Stark (with whom the song is usually linked), which she chooses to sideline while she executes Stannis.³⁵ Brienne’s citation of Renly raises questions as to whether a dead sovereign’s name can be used to legitimate sovereign violence. No clear answers are provided, but Stannis tells Brienne to “Do your duty,” sanctioning the execution and acknowledging his wrongdoing.

³⁴ This scene also speaks back to the onset of Sansa’s menstruation in *A Clash of Kings*, in which she attempts to burn her bloodied clothing (and her bed) so that her maids cannot report the occurrence to Cersei. In both instances, burning can be seen to represent a rejection: Brienne rejects her own violence, and Sansa rejects the notion of carrying Joffrey’s child.

³⁵ Brienne’s first oath is to Renly as kingsguard, and her subsequent oaths are to protect the Stark girls. In season five Brienne attempts to save Sansa from Ramsay Bolton, and covertly instructs her to light a candle in her window when she wishes to be rescued. Brienne is watching Winterfell when she hears that she may be able to avenge Renly, and chooses to leave her post to fulfil this quest. Moments after she turns away, the candle is lit, signalling Sansa’s plea for help.

Figure 29: Brienne draws her sword across her body and sentences Stannis to die (S5E10 “Mother’s Mercy”)



Despite this seeming acceptance, further ambiguity enters the scene as Brienne makes the killing blow. The shot is abruptly intercut with a shot of Ramsay Bolton killing a nameless Baratheon soldier, a transition that adds a layer of ambivalence. On the one hand, the quick cut away means that Brienne never comes into contact with the abject (blood, corpse, and so on) nor has her own borders blurred by them—unlike the sovereigns I have analysed in chapter three.³⁶ On the other hand, transposing Brienne’s violence onto Ramsay’s—a monstrous and dishonourable sadist—may speak to a broader critique of all forms of violence. These contradictory meanings lead to an irresolution over the meaning of the association of violence and masculinity as Brienne enacts both.

Despite this ambiguity, and given the role of abjection in critiquing particular enactments of masculinity and violence, is it notable that, even when Brienne experiences intensely abject situations, her constitutive borders are maintained. When she defends a band of orphan children from the Bloody Mummies, she defeats several men and is then overpowered by Biter, who begins to attack her face: “When [Biter’s teeth] closed on the soft meat of her cheek, she hardly felt it. [...] Biter’s mouth tore free, full of blood and flesh. He spat, grinned, and sank his pointed teeth into her flesh again” (FfC 633). The blood, spit, and animalistic “pointed teeth” disrupt the binaries between inside/outside the body and human/animal, and thereby present the moment as grotesque. The scene becomes even more horrifying when Biter begins to eat Brienne’s flesh: “This time he chewed

³⁶ A similar ambiguity is present when Brienne fights Sandor Clegane in season four: after killing the man, the body falls from a cliff face and so Brienne does not come into close contact with the abject corpse (S4E10 “The Children”).

and swallowed. *He is eating me*, she realized [...] *It will be finished soon* [...] *Then it will not matter if he eats me*” (FfC 633, original emphasis).

For Kristeva (1982, 79), cannibalism represents a lack of “respect for the body of the other, my fellow man, my brother.” It blurs the boundaries between inside/outside the body, living/dead, and human/animal. We may expect Brienne to become abject when she becomes the subject of cannibalism, but her borders are quickly restored. Her wounds are tended by her rescuers, the Brotherhood Without Banners, who choose to help her specifically because of her honourable violence: “if not for you, only corpses might have remained at the inn by the time that Lem and his men got back. *That* was why Jeyne dressed your wounds, mayhaps. Whatever else you may have done, you won those wounds honourably, in the best of causes” (FfC 769-770, original emphasis). Because Brienne used masculine violence to protect the children, she is deemed worthy of medical treatment that allows her to resist abjection. Her wounds are quickly “dressed” and linked to knightly masculinity rather than broken borders.

When Brienne later comes into contact with the living corpse of Catelyn Stark—who has renamed herself Lady Stoneheart—she does not succumb to abjection herself, and this resistance is linked to her honourable violence. After healing Brienne’s wounds, the Brotherhood Without Banners deliver her to Lady Stoneheart, who has been brought back to life by Thoros of Myr. Brienne observes that the woman’s “hair was dry and brittle, white as bone. Her brow was mottled green and grey, spotted with the brown blooms of decay. The flesh of her face clung in ragged strips from her eyes down to her jaw. Some of the rips were crusted with dried blood, but other gaped open to reveal the skull beneath” (FfC 725). Lady Stoneheart is death itself, “that which must be thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva 1982, 3). Yet Brienne’s description presents her as more than just a living corpse; phrases such as “brown blooms of decay,” “clung in ragged strips,” and “gaped open” connote an eerie mixture of living movement and deathly inertia, as well as a blurring of the inside and outside of her body. So borderless is Lady Stoneheart that she literally has to hold her neck wounds closed so that she can speak: “the thing that had been Catelyn Stark took hold of her throat again, fingers pinching the ghastly long slash in her neck, and choked out more sounds” (FfC 726).

Brienne is sworn into Catelyn’s/Lady Stoneheart’s service, but Oathkeeper is taken as a sign of her betrayal: one of the members of the Brotherhood, Lem, says, “That sword says you’re a liar. Are we supposed to believe the Lannisters are handing out gold and ruby swords to *foes*?” (FfC 724,

original emphasis). While there are other signs of Brienne's purported betrayal, including a letter with King Tommen Baratheon's seal and two companions with Lannister connections (Podrick and Ser Hyle Hunt), the sword is figured as the most critical piece of evidence. Oathkeeper incriminates Brienne, but it also stops Lady Stoneheart from demanding that Brienne adhere to her oath of fealty and becoming abject by association. Despite coming into close contact with a living corpse, Brienne retains her constitutive borders, expelled from her brief moment of abjection because of the sword she has been given to carry out chivalric violence.

Departing from the patriarchal model, Brienne's uses violence in ways that not only allow her to escape abjection but enable her acts to proliferate through queer kinship rather than becoming trapped in a destructive loop, as I have shown is the case with regards to patriarchal violence. Brienne has relationships with other knights which reflect such a "reelaboration of kinship" (Butler 1993, 95): she passes on her chivalric violence and opens up space for its proliferation via a form of queer reproduction that benefits her personally as well as those who learn from her. One such relationship is with Jaime, the reciprocity of which is demonstrated in the bear pit scene, when he chooses to come to Brienne's aid: "Brienne tried to dart around, but he kicked her legs out from under her. She fell in the sand, clutching the useless sword. Jaime straddled her, and the bear came charging." The fight does not end with Jaime or Brienne victorious, but as "Jaime straddled her" and a "feathered shaft sprouted suddenly beneath the bear's left eye" (SoS2 47). It is significant that Martin chose to end the fight precisely when Jaime "straddled" Brienne, a moment that reinforces male activity and female passivity, and (literally) allows Jaime to come out on top. However, such is the ambivalence of the scene that it can also be interpreted as a reflection of Brienne's positive chivalric influence on Jaime. John Cameron (2014, 198) suggests that "like a true knight, Jaime saves Brienne, but, in a true twist on convention, he has learned how to be a knight and a hero from Brienne herself." Brienne's knightly masculine violence is reproduced through her kinship bonds with those around her.

Brienne's chivalric violence also proliferates through her relationship with her squire, Podrick ("Pod"). Brienne trains Pod in arms and knightly behaviour after learning that his martial skills are underdeveloped. The productive nature of Brienne's violence is implied even from this early stage in Pod's training: when she "cut two wooden swords from fallen branches to get a sense of Podrick's skills" (FfC 225). The decision to use "fallen branches" as "wooden swords" can be illuminated through Butler's (1993, 94) discussion of queer kinship as "a resignification of the very

terms which effect our exclusion” that shifts “the terms of domination [...] toward a more enabling future.” The phallic sword remains central to knightly masculinity, but is re-worked as it is used by a female knight to teach a middle-class boy, and the productive potential of this resignification is implied through their training swords, which are now made of wood, an organic material which has a history of growth, rather than the inflexible steel or iron with which swords are commonly made in Westeros.

While Pod’s training is incomplete at the time of writing, he experiences bodily changes that reflect his gradual embodiment of Brienne’s chivalric knightly masculinity. Before they begin training Brienne warns the boy, “if you stay with me, you’ll go to sleep with blisters on your hands and bruises on your arms most every night, and you’ll be so stiff and sore you’ll hardly sleep” (FfC 226). Pod takes this painful growth in his stride: “Every time he raised a new blister on his sword hand, he felt the need to show it to her proudly” (FfC 226). Pod’s flesh begins to reflect an embodied knightly masculinity as he receives blisters that will (presumably) become calluses. Brienne’s chivalrous violence likewise proliferates through Pod’s flesh in *Game of Thrones*, though in this case he is taught how to use his body to ride a horse, a metaphor for his learning to embrace the Other. Brienne says, “You want to be a knight, Pod? [...] Starting tomorrow we’ll train with a sword twice a day: before we ride in the morning and before we make camp in the evening. And I’m going to show you how to ride properly” (S5E1 “The Wars to Come”). Pod’s training is again explicitly embodied: he must learn to embody knightly masculinity, which for Brienne involves embracing the Other and so she teaches Pod to work with the animal Other, his horse. Through Brienne’s kinship bond with Pod, she shapes the boy’s body and his actions, moulding him to be able to repeat forms of chivalrous violence by encouraging him to connect to others.

Brienne’s violence continues to proliferate via queer means as she begins to train Arya Stark, although in this case the boundary between teacher and student is more fraught. Arya comes across Brienne and Pod training in the yard at Winterfell in season seven. When Brienne offers to fetch the master-at-arms for her, Arya says, “He didn’t beat the Hound. You did. I want to train with you. [...] You swore to serve both my mother’s daughters, didn’t you?” (S7E4 “The Spoils of War”). Brienne acquiesces with a nod, and the two women spar. Arya wins the first two fights, but in the third they draw. The latter is emphasised because it is the only one to feature music: a variation of Arya’s theme song “Needle” plays, a fast-paced track featuring strings and drums. The music and the fight end in unison, with both women grinning as they realise that they are evenly matched despite

their different fighting styles. The music and the actors' performances position the scene as a mutually beneficial exchange that will aid their survival in the pseudo-medieval world. The winning/losing positions are blurred, which demonstrates how "the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the 'we' cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience" (Butler 1993, 84). Brienne cannot refuse the connection between masculinity and violence because it is necessary to her intelligibility and power as a knight, but she works the weakness in the norm by using violence to aid others and to repeat that violence in disobedient directions, such as when she shares it with Arya.

For Butler (1993, 84), "ambivalence" such as that which occurs when violence proliferates queerly in this scene with Brienne and Arya, "opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds—and fails to proceed." This reworking is particularly visible at the end of the scene when Brienne asks Arya "who taught you how to do that?" and Arya responds, "No one" (S7E4 "The Spoils of War"). Arya is referring to the House of Black and White in which she learnt to fight and magically transform her flesh, but "no one" also speaks to her lack of a masculine citation point. She dresses and styles her hair exactly like her father, but Eddard never inducted her into masculine violence: although he arranged for Arya to learn the sword from Syrio Forel in *A Game of Thrones*/season one, he had no direct hand in her learning, and Arya earlier told Brienne that Eddard "never wanted [teach her the sword]. Said, fighting was for boys" (S4E10 "The Children"). Arya replicates knightly masculinity in her physical appearance. But, as I explore in more depth in the conclusion, she re-works patriarchal violence because she uses it to empower others. It remains to be seen how much Brienne's chivalrous training will influence the now-vengeful Arya, and it is possible that Arya's violence and vengeance might affect Brienne. However, the lack of a patriarch as citation point for either woman suggests that their violence, like the alternative kinship they are building, may turn them "toward a more enabling future" (Butler 1993, 95).

Conclusion

Brienne and Cersei represent two ways in which female masculinity can be seen to relate to normative masculine violence, that which is individualistic, phallic, and repeats patriarchal structures. Cersei cites certain patriarchs (her father Tywin and her husband Robert), and Brienne cites the figure of the knight. These citations disclose the women's violence as masculine, although it is

practiced in different ways. Cersei uses violence to dominate others and maintain her power as Queen, but later when she comes into contact with abjection, it spreads to her body and she becomes grotesque. Further monstrosity abounds when Cersei and Gregor enter into a bastardised form of queer kinship: a pattern of reproduction that is radically removed from the heterosexual biological family. Rather than using this bond to contest the patriarchal power structures that limit her agency, Cersei reproduces patriarchal violence and for this reason her bond with Gregor is made monstrous: both characters are linked with the queer monstrous feminine and disrupt accepted ideas about identity, bodies, and subjectivity. In contrast, Brienne embraces the Other and uses violence to empower and protect them, and when she is faced with the abject, it is her connections to others that allow her to maintain her constitutive borders. From this position Brienne is able to transfer her chivalrous violence on to others through queer kinship without being trapped inside a destructive loop. Through her friendships with other knights, she passes her knowledge and identity practices—chivalrous violence—from one subject to another and makes the world a more liveable place.

Alternative masculinities—those that depart from the white, male, heterosexual, able bodied norm—are not always productive, as I have demonstrated through my discussion of Cersei. But in the Martinverse, they inevitably compel a remaking of masculinity because in that pseudo-medieval world non-normative gender presentations are unintelligible without alignment with either masculinity or femininity. In this remaking, it is possible to find “repetitions of hegemonic forms of power which fail to repeat loyally and, in that failure, open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims” (Butler 1993, 84). In this way, the repetition and (re)articulation of violence in relation to female masculinities offers a way of imagining how to work the weakness in the norm—as it does for the disabled masculinities I explore in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Knights of the Mind

As I have argued in the previous four chapters, characters in the Martinverse who use patriarchal violence enter into an endless cycle of destruction, whereas those who use violence to empower others find an alternative kinship that allows them to reproduce queerly, that is, outside of dominant structures. In the present chapter I bring these two outcomes together and argue that disabled men who use patriarchal violence become abject, but their non-normative bodies give them the opportunity to use violence in different ways, and with messy and ambiguous results. Disability, like female masculinity in the previous chapter, necessitates a revised relationship between masculinity and violence. There are many complex disability representations in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*, and this chapter will focus upon physical impairment³⁷ as it is experienced by male characters who are white, high-class, and masculine. Despite these privileged positions, the men are often denied access to normative masculinity and the power its enactment bestows at the same time as they are thereby freed from its narrow and destructive constraints. Disabled masculine characters in the series allow the audience to engage with forms of embodiment that diverge from the repetition of an allegedly original manhood, and instead to conceive of a masculinity that is separate from patriarchal society. Sometimes these alternatives are strange and frightening; other times they offer a way of making the world a more liveable place. In order to tease out these proliferations, I analyse three of the major perspective characters with a disability: the greenseer Brandon Stark, who loses the use of his legs while gaining third sight following an accident; the infamous knight and Kingslayer Jaime Lannister, whose hand is severed halfway through the series; and the witty “Imp,” Tyrion Lannister, who is short-statured. Each character undergoes a messy and partial rejection of patriarchal violence, showing new possibilities for queer kinship, but also its limits.

Just as it has been argued that the fantasy genre is a subversive space, this point has been made particularly for representations of disabled people. The emerging body of work on disability and science fiction suggests that there is much to be gained from an engagement with non-realist forms (Bérubé 2005; Cheyne 2013; Kanar 2000). Disability scholar Ria Cheyne (2012, 119) argues

³⁷ I do not examine sensory, intellectual, or “invisible” disabilities (impairments that are not immediately visible, such as mental illness, diabetes, colour blindness, and high blood pressure). This is not to suggest that some impairments are more important than others, nor that sensory or intellectual impairments have a lesser impact upon gender performance Martha Banks and Ellyn Kaschak (2003) and Carol Kaufman-Scarborough (2004). Rather, physical impairments are the most explicit within the Martinverse and hence provide an ideal starting point for my analysis, which is centred on embodiment.

that researchers have not sufficiently engaged with popular texts because of disability theory's relative newness as an analytical lens and the lingering disdain for genre fiction within many literary studies departments. She highlights the value of a genre-based approach and argues that by focusing upon genre, "analyses of disability representation can move beyond reductionist arguments around limited versus empowering representations, and [instead explore] the ways in which popular narrative might play with radical ideas within the sometimes-limited framework of generic constraints" (Cheyne 2013, 121). The dynamic between genre and radical disability representation is explored by Derek Newman-Stille (2013, 44), who finds that the fantasy author Alison Sinclair normalises blindness in her *Darkborn* trilogy, "depict[ing] *possible* worlds and opportunities for change that a society could make" (original emphasis). Likewise, Jane Stemp (2004) argues that science fiction has long featured disabled characters, though it is "beset with traps" (7) for authors such as the "chance to choose" to live a non-disabled life (14) and the "magical cure" (6) (also see Newman-Stille 2013, 46-47). While these conventions are fantasy- and science fiction-specific, others are more widely visible, such as the "supercrip" (Newman-Stille 2013, 50-51; Grue 2015; Hardin and Hardin 2004), which can be applied to Bran and the onset of his magical powers following his impairment.

There has been heated commentary among disability bloggers and academics about the representation of disability in the Martinverse. Some disabled bloggers³⁸ criticise the representation of disabled people as white, cisgender men (Hewitt 2014) and the repetition of the tragedy narrative (Roper 2014). Others have praised the series for including disabled characters with full sex lives (Sparky 2012), embracing the reality of disability, and positioning "characters with disabilities as real characters, not just Inspiring Cripples" (Moglia 2014, para. 8). While it is hard to determine whether able-bodied fans similarly glean positive disability messages from the Martinverse, its construction of disability has been considered positive by those who identify as disabled (see Ellis 2014). Disabled bloggers' opinions certainly do not speak for all disabled viewers, yet their approval indicates that the messages about disability are achieving cultural resonance.

Within the academy, scholars such as Katie Ellis (2014), Charles Lambert (2015), and Pascal Massie and Lauryn Mayer (2014) agree that *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* engage in a complex negotiation between what queer disability theorist Robert McRuer (2006) terms

³⁸ The authors of the blogs claim to be disabled, but given the internet's anonymity it is impossible to ascertain if this identification is only expressed online.

“compulsory able-bodiedness”—the means through which the able body is repeated and naturalised—and positive disability identity. According to Ellis (2014, 4), “characters with disabilities hold central narrative positions, occupy the screen in close ups and are given a significant amount of on screen time.” Alongside these visual engagements with the disabled body, the series also accommodates “critiques such as adapting the environment to suit an impaired body rather than attempting to cure or exclude that body [...] (notably through Bran and Jamie [*sic*]).” The body of scholarly work on the Martinverse is still developing, but it is clear that the series engages with disability in complex and powerful ways. Massie and Mayer (2014, 52) contend that the reader is confronted with disability from all sides, “forced to recognize herself as a potentially disabled being or lose the experience of textual immersion altogether.” From this position, readers are invited to critique “the conventional tropes surrounding disability” (Massie and Mayer 2014, 52): to recognise and contest compulsory able-bodiedness.

I argue that when disabled characters repeat patriarchal violence in the Martinverse they become abject, but when they adopt a new citational point they learn to embrace the Other and are able to proliferate their ideas and values through queer kinship. Disabled characters in the series tend to cite a specific patriarch who shaped their gender performance: Tyrion and Jaime both discuss their father Tywin, whereas Bran is attached to a phallic idealisation of the knight. These figures encourage the men to reproduce patriarchal violence and come into contact with abjection. This citational structure can be illuminated through Judith Butler’s gender theory. As in the other chapters, I understand masculinity through Butler’s notion of performativity. I am by no means the first to use Butler to explore disability; some scholars, such as Mairian Corker (2001, 1999), McRuer (2006), and Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price (1996) have embraced Butler’s ideas about performativity, power, and identity to show that the heterosexual matrix produces the able body as well as heterosexuality and gender normativity. A system of compulsory able-bodiedness has been postulated in order to link disability theory to queer theory and the intersections of multiple matrices of power (McRuer 2006). At the same time, other scholars have questioned Butler’s decision to cite disabled bodies as support for her arguments about sex and gender. For instance, Carrie Sandahl (1999, 15) argues that “Butler uses disability (or the deformed, abject body) as a metaphor for gender and sex difference, and [...] ignores the identities and concerns of actual people with disabilities.” I agree that Butler’s use of the disabled body as a placeholder for queer bodies is problematic, but her arguments about the process of subject formation through citational acts and attempts to banish the

Other are highly relevant for analysing disability alongside gender. Following Butler, I understand disability throughout the chapter as a discourse that is produced through a complex interaction between bodies, environments, attitudes, and practices (see Davis 1995; Garland-Thomson 1997; McRuer 2006; Mitchell and Snyder 2000). This is not to deny the materiality of the body nor the reality of pain or persecution for disabled individuals, but to recognise both able bodies—what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997, 8) calls the “normate”—and disabled ones as neither essential nor monolithic but variable and fluid (see Barnes, Oliver and Barton 2002; McRuer 2006).

Entry into this borderless space leads the characters to realise that they must change to survive, and they are symbolically reborn via imagery that connotes the queer monstrous feminine as they alter their masculine performance. As in my application of Kristevian abjection and Barbara Creed’s monstrosity theories to female bodies in chapter four, I do not assume that the disabled body is automatically horrifying because, by its very definition, it disrupts normative ideas about the mind and body. Rather, I take these differences as starting point, and any new instances which disrupt the borders we expect to find in the world are understood as abject. In other words, I do not view Bran, Jaime, or Tyrion as abject because of their impairments, but because they are faced with abject signifiers such as the corpse, blood, and further damage to their bodily borders.

I argue that this contact with the abject necessitates a new masculine role model: Bran learns from the Three-Eyed-Crow, Jaime realises the value of honour thanks to Brienne of Tarth, and Tyrion enters Daenerys Targaryen’s service. These other characters enable Bran, Jaime, and Tyrion to escape the destructive cycle of patriarchal violence and develop more connected forms of subjectivity through queer kinship. However, this is not a simple transformation and the rebirths are shown to be partial and complex. Characters relapse into individualistic violence even as they strive to reject it, reflecting difficulties inherent in contesting the law as a subject who is also produced through the law (Butler 1993, 169-185). Nonetheless, the lone, singular model of masculinity is revealed to be flawed, and Bran, Jaime, and Tyrion begin to embrace the Other and become radically connected to the people, animals, and environment around them.

The relationship between disability and gender is similar to what I have discussed thus far in the thesis, in the sense that disabled masculinities force the relationship between masculinity and violence to take a different shape to its normative materialisations. Female masculinities and disabled masculinities break the presence of naturalness and therefore enable new types of performance; and that is why the overburdening of certain scenes through contradictory genre conventions is

especially important for the cisgender male characters because there is not the bodily disruption to break them free of norms.

However, disabled masculinities disrupt the naturalisation of masculinity in a different way to female masculinities because the body's abilities are at the heart of this separation. According to Garland-Thomson (1997, 92), "the disabled body is a body whose variations or transformations have rendered it out of sync with its environment, both the physical and the attitudinal environment." The notion of a body "out of sync" is particularly obvious when cisgender men become disabled, for the two are seen by dominant discourses to cancel one another out (Gerschick and Miller 1995; Ostrander 2008a, 2008b; Shuttleworth 2004; Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson 2012). Writing on the relation between gender and disability, Garland-Thomson (2002, 18) argues that while disabled women are often denied femininity and sexuality, "banishment from femininity can be both a liability and a benefit." For Garland-Thomson, disability allows women to escape destructive feminine performative practices and reimagine gender in new and creative ways. Masculinity scholars such as Thomas Gerschick and Adam Miller (1995) and Margaret Torrell (2013) suggest that disabled men may similarly be able to creatively (re)inscribe Western masculinities, and Gerschick (1998), Tom Shakespeare (1999), Russell Shuttleworth (2004), and Brett Smith (2013) reveal that, while disabled men often struggle to perform normative masculinity, "not being able to use their bodies in conventional ways may have given some men impetus to go beyond hegemonic masculinity and to focus on alternatives" (Shuttleworth 2004, 172). Gerschick and Miller (1995, 202-203) claim that "the experiences of men with physical disabilities are important because they illuminate both the insidious power and the limitations of contemporary masculinity" and for this reason "the gender practices of some of these men exemplify alternative visions of masculinity that are obscured, but available to men in our culture." The ambivalent relation between the disabled body and masculinity is reflected in the *Martinverse* through characters' ambiguous relation to patriarchal violence: they reject it, but this rejection stems from an inability to perform violence, and for this reason they enter into an ambivalent space where they sometimes relapse into using these acts when they do become accessible.

For reasons of scope I do not analyse the series' depictions of disability in depth. Rather, in exploring how disability changes the dynamic between masculinity and violence, I show that because of this supposed discordance, when disabled men insist upon being intelligible as masculine, and when this insistence takes the form of patriarchal violence, the price of intelligibility is monstrosity.

Disabled men who repeat this violence come into contact with abjection, but when they change their masculine performance and learn to embrace the Other, they enter an ambivalent position between monstrosity and passing on their knowledges through queer kinship. I chart how disabled masculine bodies in the Martinverse come to experience abjection and rebirth as they oscillate between the violent domination of others, and connection to them.

“A Thousand Eyes, A Hundred Skins”

While all of the Stark children have supernatural connections to their direwolves, Bran’s is by far the most advanced following the accident that breaks his spine. Bran’s acquisition of supernatural powers can be seen as a form of the supercrip trope, which presents “a character having some compensatory, mystical superpower as a result of his [*sic*] disability” because “being disabled isn’t enough [...] the character needs to be somehow otherworldly to be interesting” (Harvey and Nelles 2014). However, Bran’s characterisation is more nuanced because at the time of writing he has yet to achieve the “superhero” spectacularity that would make his magical, disabled body problematic. Bran’s powers are made explicit through conversations with Jojen Reed, the son of one of the Stark bannermen, who can see the future in “green dreams.” In the novels Jojen explains that when Bran dreams he is his direwolf, Summer, he is magically entering the wolf’s consciousness: “When I touched Summer, I felt you in him. Just as you are in him now” (CoK 397). Likewise, in *Game of Thrones* Jojen says, “You can get inside [Summer’s] head. See through his eyes” (S3E2 “Dark Wings, Dark Words”).

Despite his potential for magical heroism, Bran bases his masculine performance on a phallic idealisation of the knight. Bran has a very simplistic view of knighthood: the narrator observes, “Bran was going to be a knight himself someday, one of the Kingsguard. Old Nan said they were the finest swords in all the realm. There were only seven of them, and they wore white armor and had no wives or children, but lived only to serve the king” (GoT 73). Bran’s attachment to knightly masculinity is also evident in *Game of Thrones*: when Robert Baratheon arrives at Winterfell before Bran’s accident, he asks the boy to “show us your muscles” and, laughing, tells him, “you’ll be a soldier” (S1E1 “Winter is Coming”).

Even after Bran becomes paraplegic, he sees knighthood as defined by “bright armor and streaming banners, lance and sword, a warhorse between his legs” (CoK 221). For Bran, the knight

is comprised of a cluster of promises: phallic power (“finest swords,” “lance and sword,” “warhorse between his legs”), prestige (“all the realm”), legal and legitimate violence (“lived to serve the king”), glory (“streaming banners”), and tacit support for the existing patriarchal system. In other words, Bran’s “knight” is far removed from the more complex version invested in chivalry, protecting others, and virtue—as I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Brienne. Even when Bran begins his training under the Three-Eyed-Crow (also known as Lord Brynden in the novels and the Three-Eyed-Raven in the television series) he maintains his attachment to knightly masculinity: “*I was going to be a knight, Bran remembered. I used to run and climb and fight*” (DwD 530, original emphasis). The version of knighthood to which Bran aspires is informed by a narrow masculine norm that demands and is defined by an able body that can reproduce heteropatriarchal attitudes and the symbolic order. Bran remains attached to this model of masculinity long after he is impaired, and for this reason he repeats patriarchal violence.

Bran’s patriarchal violence materialises and is critiqued when he learns to magically control other humans, specifically the intellectually impaired half-giant Hodor. Hodor is a complex figure within the Martinverse, and several critics have questioned how his intellectual disability is utilised. He functions as a “narrative prosthesis,” which David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2000) define as a disabled character who exists to achieve an effect within the story and is removed once it is complete. Hodor can be seen as a narrative prosthesis in Bran’s quest because he is the foil against which the boy’s lack of physical strength is emphasised and he unwillingly provides his own body as a surrogate for Bran’s. According to Dan Harvey and Drew Nelles (2014, para. 10), “Hodor’s intellectual disability is played for laughs; most often, he serves as comic relief, and his habit of uttering his own name has even spawned a rather mean-spirited meme.” But Hodor’s character is also used to more problematic ends when Bran enters and controls his mind using magic, a more aggressive version of the connection he has with his direwolf.

Bran’s bond with Hodor is driven by a desire to inhabit heteropatriarchal knightly masculinity: while seizing the other man’s mind, Bran says, “*I just want to be strong again*” (DwD 528, original emphasis). Bran’s desire for strength is at once literal and symbolic. He wants to be physically capable, but he also wants to return to the high-class, able, youthful masculinity he embodied at the beginning of the series. From Hodor’s eyes, Bran “could see himself on the cold stone floor, a little broken thing, but he wasn’t broken now. He grabbed Hodor’s longsword” (SoS2 196). Bran understands himself as “a little broken thing,” and the ungendered word “thing” reflects

the chasm between masculinity and disability in Bran's mind. However, he immediately gains access to phallic masculinity and violence when he takes control over Hodor's body, demonstrated by Bran's acquisition of the "longsword," an object which, as explored in chapter two and four, is loaded with phallic meaning.

Bran's relationship with Hodor has been discussed by Massie and Mayer (2014), who examine the subversive and problematic aspects in relation to disability. They claim that "Hodor has simply become a resource" (54) for Bran, who builds a potentially radical subjectivity but also "displays no compunction whatsoever about using these unwilling prosthetics" (53). Massie and Mayer conclude that Bran has "the same moral ambiguity as most other characters in the epic – his youth does not constitute an exception" (2014, 54). In terms of what this moral ambiguity might signify, I agree that Hodor becomes less than human in Bran's eyes and that this is a problematic depiction of intellectual disability. However, I would add that part of the ambivalent depiction of Bran and Hodor's relationship comes from its productive queer potential (to which I shall return). But considering Bran's disability alongside his masculinity also enables a view of what Massie and Mayer call his abuse of Hodor as an instance of patriarchal violence.

Bran's psychological violence is founded on his ableist assumption that Hodor is less than human. Phrases such as "gentle giant" (DwD 69) and "child-man" (DwD 528) infantilise Hodor in an attempt to make his resistance seem overdramatic, like a child's tantrum. Bran further dehumanises Hodor by describing him in ways that connote animals. Hodor is likened to a "dog that has had all the fight whipped out of him" (DwD 528) and is seen to "whimper," "thrash his shaggy head" (DwD 69), and "curl up and hide" (DwD 528) whenever Bran enters his mind. Bran even goes so far as to describe his experience with Hodor by using a boot as a simile for the man, emphasising his assumption that Hodor lacks human sentience: "this was harder [than his direwolf], like trying to pull a left boot on your right foot. It fit all wrong, and the boot was *scared* too, the boot didn't know what was happening, the boot was pushing the foot away" (SoS2 196, original emphasis). However, Hodor's vehement bodily rejection of these possessions—shaking his head and retreating to a place "deep inside, a pit where even Bran could not touch him" (DwD 528)—reveals that he is sentient, and it is Bran who projects childishness and animality onto him.

While Bran's violence is magical and psychological, it is narrated with an emphasis upon embodiment that betrays its likeness to sexual violence and presents Bran's mind as a phallic tool. When Bran seizes Hodor's body, he describes the man "whimper[ing] when he felt him" and being

able to “taste the fear at the back of his mouth” (DwD 69-70). The encounters are a psychological violation by Bran, yet they are deeply corporeal for Hodor. The embodied terror is hinted at through Bran’s narration: he describes being “inside Hodor’s skin” (DwD 69-70) and refers to the man “whose flesh he’d taken” (DwD 528). “The choice of the word ‘flesh,’” argue Massie and Mayer (2014, 54), “stresses internality and materiality,” and I would add that the material embodiment that is thus focalised connects Bran’s psychological assault with sexual violence. Bran enters Hodor’s body forcefully and without his consent, using his mind powers as a phallus, an act that can be understood as psychological or metaphorical rape. Phrases such as “whimper when he felt him” (DwD 69) and “curl up and hide” (DwD 528) signal the conflation of mind and body. Hodor feels Bran’s mental invasions intellectually, but he processes them physically. In this way Bran’s mental abuse is linked with patriarchal violence.

Each time Bran dominates Hodor’s mind in *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a means of gaining temporary access to knightly masculine embodiment, he comes into contact with abjection soon afterwards and the scene is coded as disgusting through its visceral imagery. The first time Bran possesses Hodor it is an accident, and “he tasted vomit in the back of *Hodor’s* throat, and that was almost enough to make him flee” (SoS2 196, original emphasis). As I have noted in previous chapters, Julia Kristeva (1982, 2) views vomit as abject. As Bran instinctively takes Hodor’s mind, he becomes a representation of the abject within, and can be seen as a literal interpretation of Kristeva’s claim that “during that course in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (1982, 3). Hodor attempts to “give birth” to himself by vomiting Bran out mentally and physically, but the boy resists and takes control. For this reason Bran is confronted with the grotesque experience of “tast[ing] vomit” in “*Hodor’s* throat.” Bran senses vomit both as himself and as Hodor, making the abject substance both part of himself and part of Hodor at the same time. The reader is also brought into this experience between Bran and Hodor/’s vomit, for they are encouraged to identify with Bran because of his status as a perspective character, and to feel what he feels, sense what he senses. The horror of this confused moment is related through the emphasis upon Hodor’s name—“*Hodor’s* throat”—revealing Bran’s disgust and surprise at finding himself someone else. Kristeva (1982, 2-3, 45) claims that vomit is abject because it disturbs the boundary between inside/outside the body. When that border crossing also brings about confusion over whether the vomit/body is mine/not mine, identity and corporeality are disrupted and a feeling of abjection takes hold (Kristeva 1982, 4). Bran is almost forced to “flee” to maintain his own borders,

yet he chooses to embrace the Other without their consent, and the abjection that comes along with it, as the price of knightly embodiment and gaining Hodor's body as a detachable phallus, much like the relationship between Cersei and Gregor. Because the abjection is so closely tied to Bran's (and by extension the reader's) senses, Bran's patriarchal violence is presented as revolting.

Subsequent scenes in which Bran possesses Hodor echo this first encounter with abjection in that the psychological violence is linked to other corporeally abject narrative events. At the beginning of *A Dance with Dragons* Bran explains that when he tires of being a wolf, he "slipped into Hodor's skin instead" (DwD 69). The confession is followed by Bran's noting his physical reaction to Summer's mind: "the direwolf could sense the warm blood coursing beneath the elk's shaggy hide. Just the smell was enough to make the slaver run from between his jaws, and when it did Bran's mouth would water at the thought of rich, dark meat" (DwD 70). Although Bran enters Summer it is different to his relationship with Hodor because it is an equal sharing: the boy and the wolf share a body (another point to which I shall return), whereas Bran takes total control over Hodor's, making the man his detachable phallus. The physical and psychological connection between boy and wolf is expressed through an abject fluid, saliva, making the relationship abject immediately after Bran discloses his ongoing domination of Hodor. Again, it is a corporeal abjection that is highlighted: smell and taste are cited, and because they are linked between the direwolf, Bran, and the reader, they are unsettling, and this uncanny feeling is projected onto Bran's phallic magical powers—and thereby problematises his possession of Hodor.

Bran's relationship with Hodor can be illuminated through Butler's work on alternative kinship, but as in the case of Cersei and Gregor, it is not necessarily an improvement on "the terms of domination" (Butler 1993, 95). Bran challenges normative ideas about masculine subjectivity because he embraces the Other while repeating the pattern of domination over the less powerful. The decision to maintain attachment to patriarchal norms is not uncommon among disabled men, as demonstrated in sociological studies by Thomas Gerschick and Adam Miller (1995), Shuttleworth (2004), and Kurt Lindemann and James Cherney (2008). Lenore Manderson and Susan Peake (2005, 241) find that disabled men who play sports use this arena to "claim symbolic power" and reposition themselves in alignment with normative masculinities, a strategy that shares many parallels with Bran's patriarchal violence against Hodor. Massie and Mayer (2014, 54) contend that Bran maintains the system of compulsory able-bodiedness: "far from turning him into a vindicated victim, the new powers he acquires are not a compensation for his lost innocence" but allow Bran to become "the

abuser of the more disabled” characters in the narrative. Bran reinforces ableist masculine discourses by dominating Hodor so that he may momentarily achieve knightly embodiment and gain a detachable phallus.

Bran disrupts dominant ideas about identity and the integrity of the body every time he “wargs”—magically enters—into Hodor in *Game of Thrones*. The first instance, in the episode “The Rains of Castamere” (S3E9), takes place while Bran and his companions are sheltering in an abandoned castle during a thunderstorm. Wildlings, the marginalised humans who live south of the Wall, arrive in a nearby village, and Bran fears that if he and his friends are discovered, they will be killed. The thunder frightens Hodor, who begins to yell, drawing the wildlings’ attention to their location. Bran tries to silence Hodor but ends up warging into him for the first time and rendering him unconscious. Impressed, Jojen tells Bran that he must now warg into the wolves and attack the wildlings in order to prevent discovery. Bran slips into a trance, and the camera shifts back to the wildlings. The viewer sees a medium shot of Summer ripping open a man’s throat as he thrashes on the ground. The red blood is emphasised because of its contrast with the dim lighting and the dark grey of the wolf, the man’s clothing, and the ground. The grotesque scene is made more disturbing because it is Bran and Summer together who are murdering the man and consuming his flesh; Bran is partially performing cannibalism. The blood, multiple subjectivities in one body, and cannibalism work together to make this moment unsettling, confounding any sense of borders or positions.

Two further instances in which Bran seizes Hodor’s body in *Game of Thrones* are likewise made unsettling by reference to the abject. Bran uses Hodor to murder a minor villain called Locke in “First of His Name” (S4E5), and when Bran leaves Hodor’s mind, the man looks down at the corpse and his blood-stained hands in terrified confusion: a corporeal moment of abjection. In “The Children” (S4E10) Bran wargs into Hodor’s body as they fight white walkers, magically reanimated skeletons that threaten the borders between life and death, animate and inanimate. Each time Bran dominates Hodor’s mind against his will, he also comes into close contact with abject forces that target the physical body and in this way his patriarchal violence is positioned as frightening and disgusting.

Bran’s monstrous kinship with Hodor is less present, but arguably more strongly critiqued, in *Game of Thrones*. Bran possesses Hodor only three times: in the season three episode “The Rains of Castamere,” the season four episode “First of His Name,” and finally, in the season six episode “The Door.” Unlike the novels, where Bran takes Hodor’s mind whenever he feels the desire, the

Bran of *Game of Thrones* only controls Hodor's mind when he and his companions' lives are threatened. Jojen privileges this skill, commenting that "no one" "anywhere" can control human minds as he does (S3E9 "The Rains of Castamere"). However, the series suggests that Bran's actions—domination or no—are monstrous when it is implied that Hodor's intellectual disabilities were directly caused by Bran in a moment of time-travel in the episode "The Door" (S6E5). Bran and friends have to evacuate the Three-Eyed-Crow's/Raven's magically protected cave after the Night King (the leader of the white walkers) gains entry to it, but first the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven takes Bran into a vision of past Winterfell. While these two characters are in the dream of the past, the cave is attacked in the present and Meera Reed, Hodor, and the Children of the Forest prepare to flee and fight. Back in the dream of the past, the young and able Hodor sees Bran and becomes connected to present Hodor, who is being killed by the white walkers. Past Hodor has a seizure while present Hodor dies protecting Bran and Meera. The sombre music that plays throughout and the revelation that Hodor's impairment/identity are a direct result of Bran's psychological rapes are intended to provoke feelings of sadness and loss. These affects can be seen to problematise Bran's possession-domination—his patriarchal violence—as the cause of Hodor's disability and death.

Bran's psychological rapes of Hodor bring about only horror, which reaches its climax when he enters the Three-Eyed-Crow's cave, which I read as a symbolic womb and site of change. In the novel, Bran observes that "the way was cramped and twisty," with "dripping water somewhere to his right" (DwD 204) and "a thick white root growing from the tunnel wall, with tendrils hanging from it and spiderwebs between its fingers" (DwD 204). As noted in chapter two, this type of setting is reminiscent of the "intra-uterine" landscapes that Creed (1993) discusses in relation to the horror film *Alien*: "the interior is dark and slimy" (51), consisting of "dark, narrow, winding passages leading to a central room" (53). Similarly, when Bran and his companions enter the cave in "The Children" (S4E10), they follow a Child of the Forest called Leaf through a series of dark, narrow, twisting tunnels brimming with organic matter, and which lead to a central chamber wherein the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven is ensconced.

The unsettling tone that the symbolic womb evokes is emphasised by a reference to abjection when Bran is set down before the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven. Viewers see a brief close-up of a human skull in the foreground as Bran pulls himself across the ground, and in the novel he realises that "the floor of the passage was littered with the bones of birds and beasts" (DwD 205). The Three-Eyed-Crow's/Raven's cavernous home is presented as an abject womb, and it is indeed a

place where Bran is going to be reborn. As of the end of *A Dance with Dragons* Bran is still learning and forming new connections within the cave/womb. *Game of Thrones* takes Bran's narrative (and his symbolic rebirth) further. During Bran's mind-meld with the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven and the white walkers' attack, Leaf detonates a bomb and the entire cave is destroyed in a graphic explosion (S6E5 "The Door"). For Creed (1993, 51) explosions can be read as births, "a bursting forth from the inside to the outside." In Bran's case, it is a reversal of the usual relations to the symbolic, wherein "representations of the birth scenario [...] point to the split between the natural world of the mother and the paternal symbolic which is regulated by a completely different set of rules, rules that reinforce proper civilized codes of behavior and the clean and proper body" (Creed 1993, 49). Bran's re-birth does cite a "split," but it is a split from the paternal symbolic. As Bran is reborn as the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven, the cave/womb in which he undertook his training explodes in a fiery inferno that symbolises the violence of Bran's rebirth apart from patriarchal violence.

When normative masculine discourses bring Bran nothing but short bursts of power entangled with monstrosity—and with few other options for intelligibility because of his disabled body—he begins to accept that he must re-work his gender along new lines. Disability often demands that gender be enacted in new ways, with both enabling and limiting outcomes, as I have noted. In the Martinverse, Bran is one such example of a masculine character who adopts an alternative vision of his gender performance because he shifts his point of reference from the "knight" discourse to the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven.

Bran's repetition of his mentor's masculinity is encouraged by the Children of the Forest, who "made Bran a throne of his own, like the one Lord Brynden sat" (DwD 523), Lord Brynden being the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven. Slowly, Bran adopts the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven as citation point of his own choosing: his mentor tells him that greenseers have "a thousand eyes, a hundred skins, wisdom deep as the roots of ancient trees" (DwD 525-526), and later in the novel Bran repeats the words. He asks himself, "what was he now?": "*A thousand eyes, a hundred skins, wisdom deep as the roots of ancient trees.* That was as good as being a knight. *Almost as good, anyway*" (DwD 530, original emphasis). Pages later when he returns to his bed, he thinks, "*A thousand eyes, a hundred skins, wisdom deep as the roots of ancient trees?*" (DwD 534, original emphasis), but this time there is no caveat. Bran's repetition of the greenseer's words can be understood through Butler's (1990, 191) argument that gendered "repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established." Bran is becoming attached to the idea of performing greenseer masculinity, so

he begins repeating the “set of meanings” that his mentor has established—in this case, his words. The strategy is not new to Bran: as I have noted in chapter three, he repeats his brother’s instructions verbatim while witnessing a scene of sovereign violence. While Bran is still oscillating between the knight and the greenseer masculinity at this point in the narrative, he is learning the value of a form of identity/subjectivity that is not about violently expelling the Other.

In *Game of Thrones* Bran also comes to shift his citation point from the figure of the knight to the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven, although in this case the transition is far more violent. The end of “The Door” (S6E5) sees Bran become the new Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven, a process wherein he receives the entire history of Westeros and everyone in it at the expense of his own identity, subjectivity, and affective capacity. As the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven tells him: “it is time for you to become me.” Bran becomes abject in the sense that he loses the borders that secure his identity and subjectivity, yet it is a rewarding abjection because he no longer needs these boundaries for he gains a new strength from connection to others. The complex state of Bran’s abjection is demonstrated when his long-time travelling companion, Meera, becomes upset in “The Spoils of War” (S7E4) when he has no emotional reaction to her decision to leave him and return home. She cites the sacrifices she has made for him and the characters who died to help him, ending with a simple plea: “Bran...” The boy responds, “I’m not, really. Not anymore. I remember what it felt like to be Brandon Stark. But I remember so much else now.” As the new Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven, Bran cites this model of masculinity almost perfectly; Meera aptly comments that the boy “died in that cave.” As in the novel Bran gains a very different view of masculinity because of the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven, but in *Game of Thrones* it is possible to see gendering as “the reality-effect of a violent process” (Butler 1990, 155): Bran’s disability leaves him little choice but to become the new Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven.

In both *Game of Thrones* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Bran’s character and his merging with the world illuminate one way in which masculinity might be embodied as a site of connection rather than isolation. Discussing psychic powers in fantasy fiction generally, Lenise Prater (2016, 23) argues that they “help to reimagine the boundaries between the self and the other, and this destabilization of the unified masculine subject provides space for an alternative understanding of identity.” Bran’s potential is also noted by Massie and Mayer (2014, 53), who argue that “Bran’s paralysis allows him, paradoxically, to move more freely: to cross two borders, the first one, of a shamanistic nature, between humans and animals, the second of a metaphysical nature between mind and body.” I have

argued that this movement is not necessarily of the liberating kind usually associated with the crossing of boundaries. Nevertheless, Bran's altered subjectivity has significant implications for his relationship to patriarchal kinship and gender norms; his disruption of normative ideas about Cartesian dualism, identity, and subjectivity is demonstrated through his psychic bonds with the natural world, specifically animals and trees.

Bran's magical powers allow him to foster kinship with animals, wherein he shares his consciousness with his direwolf. Early on their adventures, Jojen tells Bran that "part of you is Summer, and part of Summer is you" (CoK 398), and he later explains that "as you drift off [to sleep, your third eye] flutters open and your soul seeks out its other half" (CoK 472). Bran's relationship with Summer is defined by equal connection: phrases such as "part of you" and "other half" speak to the experience as one of mind-sharing rather than mind control. In these relationships, working together makes patriarchal violence unnecessary: there is no need for force or domination when each party recognises the value of intellectual and affective connections. Indeed, it is the connections that are prized here, and give way to the potential for a more non-binary conceptualisation of gender.

Summer does not have warging powers and so does not enter Bran, but it is implied that the wolf has agency in their relationship. Bran is repeatedly warned that he cannot stay too long in Summer's skin because he will become more wolf than boy: "Remember *yourself*, or the wolf will consume you" (SoS1 127, original emphasis). The idea that the animal influences the human as the human influences the animal is backed up in *A Dance with Dragons* by another warg, Varamyr, who is taught that certain animals are to be avoided because of the way they shape human subjectivity: "I know skinchangers who've tried hawks, owls, ravens. Even in their own skins, they sit moony, staring up at the bloody blue" (DwD 9). Moreover, Varamyr suggests that animals can shape the human body: "Borroq looked so much like his boar that all he lacked was tusks" (DwD 10). The human is changed by the animal as the animal is changed by the human, both psychologically and physically. When the bonds are not consensual the animals are capable of fighting back physically (see DwD 9), so the fact that Summer shows no signs of distress indicates that his relationship with Bran, at least, is consensual.

The capacity for proliferating the self through queer reproduction is emphasised through Bran's relationships with ravens. The first bird that Bran's mind magically enters consents to the experience: after a brief stint of mental co-habitation ends, "it flew to him and landed on his arm,

and Bran stroked its feathers and slipped inside of it again” (DwD 524). The affectionate exchange between Bran and the bird indicates that the mind-meld is consensual for both subjects, and the boy finds that the relationship has more to offer than he expected. Soon after Bran re-enters the animal’s mind, he “realized he was not alone” and the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven tells him that it is “a woman of those who sing the songs of earth [...] long dead, yet part of her remains, just as a part of you would remain in Summer if your boy’s flesh were to die upon the morrow. A shadow on the soul” (DwD 524). It is by embracing the Other—the human embracing the animal, and the animal embracing the human—that the self is allowed to live on, to proliferate by entering a larger system of connection, to reproduce queerly. The dynamic differs from the Kristevian model of abjection, wherein the subject pushes away the other (both actual others and parts of the self that one does not want to acknowledge) in order to produce the self. In the Martinverse, Bran offers a means of breaking free from this cycle of rejection by fully embracing the Other. He shares his subjectivity to varying degrees with animals, trees, and other humans, and it is this web of connections that allows him to enter the system of queer reproduction.

In *Game of Thrones* Bran’s alternative kinship and queer reproduction are expressed through his temporality and its effects on the narrative. At the start of season six Bran and the previous Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven begin to share visions of the past, many of which concern Bran’s father Eddard. Bran’s insistent return to his father reflects his lingering investment in the patriarchal system of reproduction. He looks to his father for support and affection, as demonstrated by the fact that Bran tries to speak to Eddard, but he is unsuccessful. Some scenes indicate that Eddard hears Bran, but the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven insists that “the past is already written. The ink is dry” (S6E3 “Oathbreaker”). There is no growth to be found in biological and patriarchal family structures: it is to queer kinship that Bran must turn. It is only when Bran embraces the fact that he “can see everything. Everything that’s ever happened to everyone. Everything that’s happening right now” (S7E3 “The Queen’s Justice”) that his character begins to influence narrative events outside of his small group of companions. And these are profound effects: Bran (along with Sam Tarly and a wildling woman called Gilly) is responsible for unearthing the truth of Jon’s parentage and his status as legitimate heir to the Iron Throne (S7E7 “The Dragon and the Wolf”), and it is Bran who witnesses the white walkers’ successful attack on the Wall, one which undoes ancient magic and allows them to enter Westeros proper for the first time (S7E7 “The Dragon and the Wolf”). Bran’s

queer kinship with the ravens allows him to relay these important plot points to his family, allowing him to proliferate his knowledge queerly.

The practice of reproducing queerly by spreading one's consciousness has valuable implications for how audiences are led to understand masculinity. T.A. Leederman (2015, 193) contends that, "*A Song of Ice and Fire* suggests that hegemonic knowledge alone cannot solve our problems; we must look back, to earlier eras now wreathed in legend, and sideways, to other species, for new conceptual tools and ways of being in the world." Key among these diverse ways of being is a sense of connection: "Bran is learning to see the world as a plane of immanence, of all people, times and happenings occurring in a web of connections, actions and reactions" (Leederman 2015, 200). The "web of connections" facilitates a conception of subjectivity that breaks away from the patriarchal model, wherein the male body is singular, closed, and stable, and acts only in the interests of the self and for the purpose of perfectly reproducing the culture that sustains it. In the Martinverse, Bran's narrative reveals that patriarchal violence—such as that which underpins the version of knighthood to which he aspires—can only bring about domination and abjection, whereas models that thrive on connection and mutual co-operation can provide a means of repeating that is not dependent upon others' destruction.

"The Things I Do For Love"

This phrase—uttered as Jaime Lannister unflinchingly attempts to murder Bran to prevent the boy revealing his incestuous relationship with his twin sister Cersei (GoT 81; S1E1 "Winter is Coming")—combines patriarchal violence with supposed romantic devotion and thus captures some of that character's complex relationship to masculinity, disability, violence, and heteronormative kinship. From the first book of *A Song of Fire and Ice* and the first season of *Game of Thrones*, Jaime is constructed so that his appearance and masculine performance align with "the knights in the stories," with his bright blond hair, white armour, and renowned skill with a blade (GoT 73; S1E1 "Winter is Coming"). Yet this knight in white shining armour is in a relationship with his sister and secretly fathers her three children. As I have already alluded to in my discussion of Cersei, but as I will develop and demonstrate more fully here, this incestuous state at once bolsters and challenges the patriarchal system of reproduction, and becomes a microcosm of Jaime's relation to his body that is highlighted because his character is overburdened with classical and postmodern fantasy

genre conventions. Jaime begins the series as an able-bodied character in a warped relationship that supports and contests heteropatriarchal systems of reproduction, and after his hand is severed his relation to Cersei drastically changes in the sense that he enters into new queer kinships that allow him to share his attitudes and skills in more enabling ways.

Jaime cites his father, the patriarch Tywin Lannister, as informing his masculine performance before and after he is disabled. The most explicit example occurs after Tywin is murdered. As Jaime watches over his father's corpse he says: "Father [...] it was you who told me that tears were a mark of weakness in a man, so you cannot expect that I should cry for you" (FfC 133). Jaime explicitly locates his father as the person who taught him how "a man" should behave: without "tears" or emotion. In this moment, where Jaime reflects on his father's teaching of masculinity, emotional repression is presented as "the result of social practices which require and produce such desires in order to effect their reproductive ends" (Butler 1990, 123). Tywin did not want Jaime to be marked as weak, for this might impede his public reproductive potential and, by extension, his capacity to carry on the Lannister legacy. Yet by pointing out that by Tywin's own standards he "cannot expect that [his son] should cry" for his death, Jaime engages in one of the "parodic proliferation[s]" that Butler (1990, 188) notes in relation to gender subversion, wherein one "deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities." A man crying over the death of his father in private is an affect that would appear natural and would therefore bolster the idea of patriarchal society (and normative masculinity) as such. Jaime reinforces the idea that men must be unemotional while revealing that idea as one that is learned rather than natural. Yet ten pages later he instills this same masculine practice in his son, King Tommen: "a man can bear almost anything, if he must [...] you can fight them, or laugh at them, or look without seeing . . . go away inside" (FfC 143). In passing the act of emotional repression onto Tommen, Jaime imbues it with the power to connote masculinity while simultaneously disclosing gender as a learned practice.

Jaime's reliance on Tywin as a masculine role model is made more significant when he speaks of his father in ways that can be seen to cite religion, reflecting his constraining and enabling relation to patriarchal masculinity. Jaime says that "the warrior had been [his] god since he was old enough to hold a sword. Other men might be fathers, sons, husbands, but never Jaime Lannister, whose sword was as golden as his hair. He was a warrior, and that was all he would ever be" (FfC 138). Jaime is the father of Cersei's children, but he repeatedly indicates that he does not think of them as his own because his paternity is kept secret and he has no hand in raising them. He thinks,

“*Joff was no more to me than a squirt of seed in Cersei’s cunt*” (SoS2 435, original emphasis). Instead, he places his masculine intelligibility in the hands of the Warrior, one of seven gods in the Martinverse, who represents masculine battle prowess and courage (Wittingslow 2015). Jaime’s description gives away the Warrior’s phallic dimensions: he became attached to the Warrior when he could “hold a sword”—when he became capable of using phallic power—and the phallic power he gains from this citation point become as central to his identity as his Lannister lineage (“sword was as golden as his hair”). For Jaime, the Warrior is conflated with his father, Tywin. Readers see here the power of citation to guide identity, but also to constrict it: to his mind, Jaime would only “ever be” a knight. The conflation of Warrior/Tywin in Jaime’s mind is reflected after his father’s death, when he thinks: “Unbidden, his thoughts went to Brienne of Tarth. [...] *Father, give her strength*. Almost a prayer . . . but was it the god he was invoking, the Father Above whose towering gilded likeness glimmered in the candlelight across the sept? Or was he praying to the corpse that lay before him?” (FfC 138, original emphasis). The play on the double meaning of the word “father” reveals Jaime’s previously religious attachment to Tywin’s model of masculinity. Jaime prayed to the Warrior/Father/father, and cited them as the “original” on which his own gender performance was based.

In *Game of Thrones* Jaime’s citation of Tywin is expressed through his clothing. In season six and seven Jaime’s costumes are near identical to ones his father wore, reflecting his redoubled commitment to his family after being removed from the Kingsguard. In “No One” (S6E8), “The Dragon and the Wolf” (S7E7), and several other episodes, Jaime wears nearly the exact same clothing that Tywin wore in season one, including armour with a thick golden breastplate that features a gold lion in the centre (fig. 30 and 31) and a black leather surcoat with gold clasps. The clothing reflects the masculine ideals that Tywin tried to instil in Jaime: heteronormative reproduction (“family”), hardness, practicality, prestige, and power. The uncanny likeness between Tywin’s and Jaime’s costumes, especially in season seven, reflects Jaime’s attachment to his father as his model of masculinity.

Figure 30 (left): Tywin sitting at a table as the commander of the Lannister army (S1E7 “You Win or You Die”) compared with Figure 31 (right): Jaime talking to Cersei about how they will move the Lannister troops north (S7E7 “The Dragon and the Wolf”)



Jaime’s attachment to patriarchal systems and their violence is demonstrated through his complex relationship to (incestuous) reproduction. In psychoanalytic terms, breaking the incest taboo refers to the prohibited love between the infant and their parent (Butler 1990, 38). However, in Jaime’s case he breaks this taboo by having sex with his twin sister and secretly fathering her three children. Jaime and Cersei’s incestuous reproduction can be seen as an idyllic repetition of heteronormative kinship, which “implicitly figures culture as a whole, a unity, one that has a stake in reproducing itself and its singular wholeness through the reproduction of the child” (Butler 2002, 31). Because Jaime and Cersei are twins, they can reproduce the desired “singular wholeness” to a greater extent than most heterosexual reproductive couples. Yet their twin status also makes their union illegitimate and unacceptable; incest is prohibited by the symbolic law, and it is one of many non-normative sexual practices that is not acknowledged by the state (Butler 2002). Moreover, Cersei’s insistence upon only bearing her brother’s children can be seen as parthenogenetic, as I noted in chapter four. The parthenogenetic model is especially visible when Cersei’s public persona is taken into consideration: Jaime is not in the (sexual) picture, and the children, purportedly fathered by King Robert Baratheon, only bear a likeness to their mother. In short, Jaime’s character is presented as at once deeply invested in, and resistant to, reproducing heteronormative kinship.

When bargaining with his father to spare Tyrion’s life after he is accused of Joffrey’s murder, Jaime proposes to cement his allegiance to this model by offering to re-enter this system of heteronormative patriarchal reproduction. Jaime says, “[The Lannister name] survives. Through me. I’ll leave the Kingsguard. I’ll take my place as your son and heir. If you let Tyrion live” (S4E6 “The Laws of Gods and Men”). Tywin accepts, saying, “you will marry a suitable woman and father

children named Lannister. And you'll never turn your back on your family again." Tywin's insistence upon Jaime's fathering a Lannister child reflects the child's place in culture, as an "eroticized site in the reproduction of culture, one that implicitly raises the question of whether there will be a sure transmission of culture through heterosexual procreation" (Butler 2002, 35). Jaime's dialogue, its repetitive structure (I'll leave/I'll take), and the individualistic focus on himself as "I," reflect the repetitive heteronormative family system that he offers to enter, as one patriarch transmitting the Lannister legacy to the next.

Jaime's renewed attachment to patriarchal violence and reproduction is emphasised when he cites Tywin when he learns that Cersei is pregnant in season seven of *Game of Thrones* and she implies that she will publically name Jaime as the father. Cersei's revelation is made between two references to Tywin: she says, "if we want to beat [Daenerys] we have to be clever. We have to fight her like father would have" (S7E5 "Eastwatch"). Moments later Cersei confirms that Jaime is the father, and when he questions how the public will respond to their incestuous relationship she says, "do you remember what our father used to say about people?" to which Jaime answers, "the lion does not concern itself with the opinions of sheep," the exact same words that Tywin told Jaime in his first appearance in the series (S1E7 "You Win or You Die"). It is implied that Jaime and Cersei will publically acknowledge their relationship, and while it is unclear whether they will be married, Cersei's sovereign status and her previous citations of the widespread incest in the Targaryen dynasty—"Targaryens wed brother and sisters for three hundred years to keep bloodlines pure" (S1E7 "You Win or You Die")—would suggest that their union will be legitimised in some way. Jaime's flawless citation of his father's words in the moment when he gains access to heteropatriarchal reproduction therefore speaks to his newfound faith in the cycle of repetition wherein patriarchal violence is fostered.

Jaime's acceptance of this system is unsurprising given that he receives social and literal rewards for his patriarchal violence as a knight of the Kingsguard, but halfway through the series the limits of the dominant masculine discourse are made apparent by his contact with abjection when he becomes disabled. While Jaime is travelling to King's Landing as Brienne's prisoner, he escapes his bonds and attacks her in an effort to escape (SoS1 289; S3E2 "Dark Wings, Dark Words"). During the fight, Jaime makes a number of misogynistic and patronising comments about Brienne: in the television series he calls her "a great beast of a woman," and in the novels he calls her "wench" (SoS1 289, 290) and mocks her by saying, "come on, come on, my sweetling, the music's still

playing. Might I have this dance, my lady?” (SoS1 290). Each comment cites one way in which Brienne fails to live up to Westeros’s patriarchal expectations of women: she is physically large, not traditionally attractive, and lacks the feminine grace required by traditional courtship practices. Jaime’s patriarchal dismissal of Brienne proves to be a mistake as the fight is long and loud, drawing the attention of a group of violent bandits called the Bloody Mummies/Brave Companions. Their leader³⁹ severs Jaime’s hand, and he is forced to wear it around his neck. While Jaime is tied to Brienne to keep him secure on his horse, “His hand was always between them. Urswyck had hung it about his neck on a cord, so it dangled down against his chest, slapping Brienne’s breasts as Jaime slipped in and out of consciousness” (SoS1 415).

The severed limb—as partial corpse—represents the same threat of extreme abjection that I have associated with the corpse in previous chapters and it is especially horrifying in Jaime’s case because he is not allowed to reject it after separation: he is forced to keep it “about his neck,” a sign of his grotesque incompleteness. The hand’s placement also gives it an eerie motion: it dangles and slaps, somewhere between life and death. The binary blurring is brought up repeatedly through the scene: Jaime comments that “blood and pus seeped from his stump, and the missing hand throbbed every time the horse took a step” (SoS1 415). Alongside “blood and pus,” Jaime experiences phantom limb syndrome, feeling like his “missing hand [is] throbbing,” at once present and absent in a way that disrupts the supposed binary between life and death. Likewise in *Game of Thrones*, the hand takes up uncanny positions within the frame. In “And Now His Watch is Ended” (S3E4), Jaime tries to fight Locke and fails, after which he lies on the ground and there is a five second long close up of his head and his hand. As figure 32 shows, the two objects take up almost the same amount of screen space, speaking to the hand’s presence as a character in its own right. Indeed, the mud obscures the limb to such an extent that it could well be alive. Jaime is correspondingly diminished as a character, from a whole and complex person to a severed hand. In both the television series and novels, the hand around Jaime’s neck signals his descent into abjection, a collapse of his personal boundaries that results directly from his violent battle with Brienne.

³⁹ In *A Song of Ice and Fire* the leader of the group is Vargo Hoat, and in *Game of Thrones* this character is merged from several in the novel into one: Locke.

Figure 32: A close of up of Jaime and his severed hand lying in the mud, where both take up equal space in the frame (S3E4 “And Now His Watch is Ended”)



In *Game of Thrones* Jaime's abjection is coupled with references to his permeable sexual body. The first scene to feature Jaime after his hand is severed, “And Now His Watch Is Ended” (S3E4), begins with a six-second close-up of the dead hand, which pans to Jaime's face. In the same shot, the audience hears a man ask, “How many of those fingers do you reckon we could shove up his arse?”⁴⁰ Locke responds, “Depends if he's had any practice. Is that the sort of thing you and your sister go in for, Kingslayer? She loosen you up for us?” Once Jaime's hand is taken, his body's fragility is exposed, and his private sexual exploits are revealed to have been public all along. States of vulnerability such as this are unacceptable for men because, as I have noted in my discussion of sovereign and monstrous violence, the male body is expected to be closed and firm so that it can support the symbolic order. While no man is actually able to embody these ideals, Jaime's amputation stands as an ongoing public reminder that his flesh is fragile and vulnerable, and for this reason he becomes an open target for mockery as well as sexual assault. His body is no longer closed and contained but “loose” and vulnerable.

As the fragility of Jaime's male body is exposed, so too his masculine identity is shaken. After his wound is cleaned and he has time to reflect on the experience, it becomes clear that his hand and the acts it allowed him to perform were fundamental to his understanding of his own masculinity. Writing on Jaime's impairment, Massie and Mayer (2014, 52-53) argue that “his eventual

⁴⁰ Theon Greyjoy is similarly threatened with anal rape after he is first imprisoned. Ramsay pretends to be a Greyjoy supporter and helps him escape, and after Theon leaves he is captured by men who threaten to “fuck you into the dirt” (S3E3 “Walk of Punishment”). Ramsay “saves” Theon from rape, only to bring him back to the Dreadfort.

mutilation, the loss of his sword hand, reduces him to the most abject form of dependency, for he had no abilities other than his fighting skills.” The authors go on to claim that “disability, for Jaime, is punishment; it is a castration, the loss of his masculinity” (Massie and Mayer 2014, 53) although they draw some of this argument from the idea that Jaime becomes Hand of the King, which is factually incorrect. I agree that Jaime’s masculinity is irrevocably altered, but his amputation is one part of a series of moments in which he is associated with the abject. He says, “They had taken his hand, they had taken his *sword hand*, and without it he was nothing. [...] It was his right hand that made him a knight; it was his right arm that made him a man” (SoS1 417, original emphasis). Jaime’s thoughts contain two sets of repeated phrases: “they had taken his hand” and “it was his right hand that made him.” The repetition reflects the performativity of gender: Jaime repeatedly enacted masculinity by using his sword hand to perpetrate patriarchal violence, but once he loses the hand these repetitions become unintelligible.

Jaime’s borders have been fundamentally disrupted and his sudden openness is interpreted as emasculation, reflected in *Game of Thrones* through other characters’ comments. In *Game of Thrones*, Jaime laments that he has lost “my sword hand. I was that hand,” and Brienne tells him that he “sound[s] like a bloody woman” (S3E4 “And Now His Watch Is Ended”). When Jaime refuses to speak as he leaves Harrenhal for the first time, Locke says, “I don’t remember chopping your balls off” (S3E7 “The Bear and the Maiden Fair”), the reference to severed balls speaking to a loss of masculinity. Once Jaime cannot repeat the form of phallic violence that granted him access to patriarchal power, it becomes clear that patriarchal violence has limited generative options. As in the case of the sovereign violence I have analysed in chapter three, violence is one of the stylised acts that produces Jaime as a knightly subject, but it also brings him into contact with the abject.

Jaime undergoes a symbolic re-birth after his hand is severed, which reflects his changed relationship to patriarchal violence. The re-birth occurs in the baths of Harrenhal, two in-ground tubs of steaming hot water within a dark, cavernous chamber lit by candles (S3E5 “Kissed by Fire”), which is described in the novels as a “dim, steamy, low-ceilinged room filled with great stone tubs” (SoS1 503). Amid the womb-like imagery, Jaime recounts to Brienne for the first time why he murdered King Aerys II, relaying the sovereign’s horrifying plan to set King’s Landing ablaze with wildfire. When Jaime faints and Brienne calls out for help for “the Kingslayer,” Jaime corrects her, saying “Jaime... my name is Jaime” (S3E5/SoS1 508). Jaime’s invocation of his birth name as opposed to the nickname Kingslayer can be understood as an interpellation: just as Butler (1993,

177) argues that when a doctor says “it’s a girl” they begin a process of girling, so too does Jaime thrust himself out of the Kingslayer identity. The dark, cavernous space, the water, and the naming all connote birth, but as in the case of Bran, it is a reversal of the normative birth paradigm wherein the subject moves from the maternal to the paternal law, rejecting their kinship with the mother. Instead, Jaime is reborn as he rejects the law of the father and begins to untangle his repetition of patriarchal violence.

In both the novels and television series, Jaime rejects his father in favour of his queer kinship among the Kingsguard. Prior to his impairment Jaime had little interest in this role: he joined so that he could be near Cersei (SoS1 156), and he infamously murdered the king he swore to protect. Yet after his maiming, Jaime realises that the Kingsguard may offer him an authentic set of connections and type of power that are more rewarding than patriarchal violence. After Jaime’s adventure with Brienne but prior to Tywin’s death, Tywin attempts to force Jaime out of the Kingsguard so that he can be heir to Casterly Rock, as I have noted. In the novels Jaime vehemently rejects this idea, saying, “*I don’t want her, and I don’t want your Rock!* [...] “I am a knight of the Kingsguard. The *Lord Commander* of the Kingsguard! And that is *all* I mean to be!” (SoS2 281-283). In response, Tywin disowns Jaime: ““You are not my son.’ Lord Tywin turned his face away. ‘You say you are the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, and only that. Very well, ser. Go do your duty’” (SoS2 281-283).

Jaime also severs ties with his sister Cersei, a decision that reflects his rejection of the normative kinship bonds that privilege repetition. The breakdown of their relationship comes to a climax in the novels when Jaime ignores Cersei’s letter begging for help while she is imprisoned by the Church: “A snowflake landed on the letter. As it melted, the ink began to blur. Jaime rolled the parchment up again, as tight as one hand would allow, and handed it to Peck. ‘No,’ he said. ‘Put this in the fire’” (FfC 761). Jaime chooses to ignore Cersei’s “fevered and fervent” words: “*Come at once*, she said. *Help me. Save me. I need you now as I have never needed you before. I love you. I love you. I love you. Come at once*” (FfC 761, original emphasis). Cersei’s letter is rife with repetition, a reflection of her fear and urgency but also a symbol of her reliance upon the patriarchal system of reproduction. Jaime chooses to break free from these repetitions when he puts her letter “in the fire,” burning his last stake in patriarchal violence and its reproductive logics.

In *Game of Thrones* Jaime maintains his relationship with Cersei for far longer—seven seasons as opposed to four books—but he decides to leave her after learning that she has no intention to

fight the white walkers, as she pledged to do. When Cersei reveals her true intentions to Jaime he says, “I pledged to ride north. I intend to honour that pledge” (S7E7 “The Dragon and the Wolf”). Cersei tells him that he is committing treason and she stands, on the verge of violence. It is here that Jaime brings up their complex investment in traditional heterosexual kinship: he tells Cersei, “I’m the only one you have left. Our children are gone. Our father is gone. It’s just me and you now.” Yet Cersei still has faith in their House, telling Jaime, “there’s one more left to come” and placing her hand on her stomach. Gregor pulls out his sword, and Jaime walks away. Jaime’s last appearance to date in the series sees him riding North as it begins to snow; winter has come and he is alone, but he is now fully aware of the threat to the kingdom and ready to embrace the others—including Daenerys, Tyrion, and Jon—who share his desire to reject patriarchal violence and instead make the world a more liveable place through the battle against the white walkers.

Jaime’s rejection of patriarchal kinship is tied to his decision to adopt Brienne’s chivalric violence—which I defined in the previous chapter as violence intended to protect and empower those weaker than the knight—when he gives her the sword Oathkeeper. In the novels Jaime says, “There was a time that I would have given my right hand to wield a sword like that. Now it appears I have, so the blade is wasted on me. Take it. [...] It would please me if you would call this one Oathkeeper” (SoS2 434). The way Jaime expresses the gift of the sword signals its relationship to his rejection of his Lannister ties and his desire to change his approach to violence. I have noted previously that swords carry considerable phallic meaning in the fantasy genre, and Jaime’s decision to name the sword Oathkeeper and to bequeath it to Brienne and her/their quest to save Sansa reflects his blooming investment in chivalric, as opposed to patriarchal, violence. Audrey Moyce (2018, 66) argues that Oathkeeper is “an outward symbol of their living life on terms that do not fit with the harshly enforced norms around them [...] his gift of Oathkeeper to her is evidence of his remaking of his self and sense of honour.” I agree that Oathkeeper is highly symbolic, and part of Jaime and Brienne’s divergence from the “norms around them” comes from their approach to violence.

Jaime’s disability and the transference of the sword to Brienne also provide a moment for the creation of queer kinship structures and a rejection of the heteropatriarchal project. Jaime and Brienne create what Moyce (2018, 67) calls a “queer lineage” which is signalled through the sword. Tywin fetishised the Valyrian steel sword as a family heirloom that would reflect the Lannisters’ phallic power and be passed on from father to son, an exact copy reflecting the masculinity he also

hoped to reproduce. However, in giving the sword to Brienne, Jaime wilfully abandons this heteropatriarchal project and instead privileges queer kinship. Jaime's gift can be seen to reflect the non-normative kinship that Butler (2002, 34) describes: "a kind of doing, one that does not reflect a prior structure but which can only be understood as an enacted practice." In the television series the shift is made more explicit because there is an additional scene where Tywin gives the sword to Jaime (S4E1 "Two Swords"), making the connection between the phallic sword, Tywin's masculine performance, and patriarchal violence apparent, and thereby making Jaime's transferral of Oathkeeper to Brienne an even clearer symbolic rejection of patriarchal violence.

The text illuminates the intersection of queer and disability studies ideas through Jaime's interior monologue as he becomes Lord Commander, embracing a masculine performance, a title, and a body that denaturalise heteropatriarchal structures. Where once Jaime felt that he could only "ever" be a patriarchal warrior, "*all*" he now "mean[s] to be" is Lord Commander of the Kingsguard (SoS2 281-282, original emphasis)—a position that he means to use to enact chivalric violence in service of making the realm a better place. When Jaime first meets with his underlings as Lord Commander he thinks, "It seemed queer to him to sit in the Lord Commander's seat where Barristan the Bold had sat for so many years. *And even queerer to sit here crippled.* Nonetheless, it was his seat, and this was his Kingsguard now" (SoS2 343, original emphasis). The repetition of the word "queer" highlights Jaime's experience of strangeness, as well as the non-normative system of reproduction into which he is entering. In the next book Jaime thinks, "*No man can choose his brothers. [...] Give me leave to pick my own men, and the Kingsguard will be great again*" (FfC 255, original emphasis). By "great," Jaime means an order that practices chivalric violence to empower others, which he learned from Brienne. Jaime's queer kinship and reproduction within the Kingsguard is one instance of the "radical social transformation" that is, according to Butler (2002, 40), "at stake when we refuse, for instance, to allow kinship to become reducible to 'family,' or when we refuse to allow the field of sexuality to become gauged against the marriage form."

As Lord Commander of the Kingsguard it is Jaime's sacred duty to record the order's history in the Book of White—the record of the Kingsguard's noble exploits—and when he reflects upon his own narrative, his rejection of patriarchal violence is foregrounded. Jaime observes that "more than three quarters of his page still remained to be filled between the gold lion on the crimson shield on top and the blank white shield at the bottom. [...] the rest Jaime Lannister would need to write for himself. He could write whatever he chose, henceforth. Whatever he chose . . ." (SoS2 436).

Jaime realises that since he has abandoned patriarchal kinship ties in joining the Kingsguard and breaking from Cersei, he is now free to practice whatever type of heroism he chooses. As his narrative in the Book of White literally moves away from the Lannister shield to Kingsguard white, so too does Jaime plan to diverge from the heteropatriarchal violence that his father taught him. The repetition in the passage (write/write, chose/chose) reflects his entry into a new order of reproduction, but the openness of this queer kinship is disclosed through the exact words that are repeated: “write” and “chose” evoke a sense of agency that is denied by patriarchal systems. Jaime’s family—the Kingsguard—is now chosen and passed on through writing rather than paternity. The scene also offers a meta-textual commentary on the power of writing to re-create narratives about the real world. As the ellipses ends the chapter an open moment of possibility, so too do fantasy fictions more broadly leave space for unexpected masculine discourses that are separate from patriarchal violence.

After these introspective scenes Jaime transforms his approach to his own violence: like Brienne he uses violence to empower others. Long after Jaime leaves Brienne’s company he talks to a man who mocks her appearance, and he responds with violence that defends her honour in her absence: “Jaime’s golden hand cracked him across the mouth so hard the other knight went stumbling down the steps. [...] ‘You are speaking of a highborn lady, ser. Call her by her name. Call her Brienne’” (FfC 459-460). Jaime uses violence to punish the other man for his disrespect and to make himself seem powerful as he interpolates Brienne into personhood: “Call her Brienne.” The repetition in these sentences reflects the way in which Jaime’s chivalric violence has become part of his performative repertoire, the means through which he enacts masculinity. However, calling Brienne a “highborn lady” also foregrounds the social class hierarchies that chivalry is associated with, suggesting that her intelligibility as human is dependent upon her (high) class status. Where once Jaime would have joined in the sexist banter, he now defends Brienne even against his own men, but ambivalence remains as he can be seen to replace patriarchal attitudes with classist ones, and in this way his chivalric violence becomes ambivalent.

Jaime’s chivalric violence even extends to conflict negotiations, such as when he breaks the siege at Riverrun in *A Feast for Crows*. Jaime negotiates courteously with the heir, Edmure Tully, but the latter resists yielding the castle. Only then does Jaime turn to violence to resolve the matter, and says, “you’ll want your child, I expect. I’ll send him to you when he’s born. With a trebuchet” (FfC 648). Because of Jaime’s threat Edmure acquiesces and the Lannisters seize the castle without using

force. Jaime realises that he feels “curiously content” because “he had done his own part here at Riverrun without actually ever taking up arms against the Starks or Tullys” (FfC 756). Jaime is referring to a long-distant oath to Catelyn Stark, wherein he vowed not to harm her kin if she freed him. He now uses violence to fulfil his oaths and act honourably, using threats instead of direct violence, and only when necessary for peace. Yet Jaime’s expression of chivalric violence is again tied to class hierarchies: having an oath to protect one royal lineage means going against another. Jaime’s newly honed chivalric violence is useful for political negotiation, but it also reifies class binaries, as in the scene with Brienne. Chivalric violence is not better for everyone.

“I Drink and I Know Things”

Patriarchal violence is remade in different ways through Jaime’s brother Tyrion, whose disability is congenital; he has achondroplasia and scoliosis, leading him to be referred to as a “dwarf” or “imp.” Laura Backstrom (2012) argues that Tyrion’s character as informed by the history of dwarfism in the West rather than by discourses of disability, and like dwarves in freak shows, one of Tyrion’s main functions within the narrative is to entertain readers with humour. While this historical background may reinforce the idea that small-statured people are servants whose function is to entertain their masters, Tyrion implicitly critiques ableist discourses on numerous occasions. Having been born with his disabilities, Tyrion has a different relationship to masculinity than the other two men I have analysed: Jaime pushes Bran from a window and the boy becomes paraplegic; and Jaime’s hand is severed and he becomes disabled. In contrast, Tyrion’s impairment is always part of his life, and he is hyper aware of the ways in which he must negotiate his masculinity—through intellect and sexuality—so that he remains intelligible.

Tyrion, like his older brother Jaime, cites his father Tywin. Tyrion says that “all his authority derived from his father” (GoT 61), a statement that speaks to Tyrion’s literal, gendered, and symbolic reliance upon the Lord of Casterly Rock. Even Tyrion’s name is embedded in a patriarchal system of reproduction; the “Ty” prefix is passed on from Tywin, who was named by his father Tytos.⁴¹ The Lannister name—“my name,” as Tywin says (SoS1 65)—and Tyrion’s male body spares him from being killed as an infant as most short-statured people in Westeros are, and gives him

⁴¹ While the “Ty” prefix is a recent addition to the Lannister family history, it has been taken up persistently by Tywin, as well as his brother Tygett, who names his son Tyrek.

power and wealth. Tyrion's masculinity is also "derived from his father": he expects to be like Tywin and this expectation is what leads him to repeat his father's masculinity. On a deeper level, all of Tyrion's authority is derived from the Law of the Father, the symbolic order that ensures the repetition of patriarchal violence. Tyrion relies upon Tywin as a representation of the paternal law through which he is produced as an intelligible subject.

Tyrion's multiple dependencies on his father are revealed when he talks about adopting Tywin's masculine performance to bolster his political power. While negotiating with Cersei, Tyrion thinks, "he loved his brother's reckless wrath, but it was their lord father he must try and emulate. *Stone, I must be stone, I must be Casterly Rock, hard and unmovable*" (CoK 703, original emphasis). The word "emulate" explicitly discloses Tyrion's repetition of his father's masculinity, which he associates with "stone," being "hard" and "unmovable." Moreover, the repetitiveness of Tyrion's phrasing—"I must be stone, I must be Casterly Rock"—reflects the repetitive nature of gender performance, while the words themselves suggest phallic power, emotional repression, and physical strength, thus highlighting the patriarchal assumptions that inform Tywin's masculinity. In *Game of Thrones* these repetitions are expressed through Tyrion's dialogue and costumes. Tyrion regularly uses his father's wrath as an indirect threat or promise of reward: he tells Cersei that "father would be furious" (S2E1 "The North Remembers"), and he uses his family name and informal motto—"a Lannister always pays his debts"—to create the illusion of power.

Tyrion's costumes reflect his citation of his father when he is acting as Hand of the King in season two. Tyrion wears a black leather surcoat with gold clasps, exactly what Tywin wears in the same season (S2E8 "The Prince of Winterfell"). Tyrion's gender proves to be, as Butler (1990, 34) argues, a compulsory performance that grants gendered coherence and intelligibility. The narrator claims that Tyrion has successfully repeated his father's masculine performance during his conversation with Cersei: "he'd reached for his father's voice, and found it" (CoK 704). In this instance, the "father's voice" is one that speaks in patriarchal violence; Tyrion pretends that he would be repeating individualistic violence to empower himself and disempower the Other. Tyrion says, "Whatever happens to [Tyrion's friend Alayaya] happens to Tommen as well, and that includes the beatings and rapes" (CoK 704). Tywin's/Tyrion's "voice" emotionlessly threatens to perpetrate violence against his young nephew to gain power over Cersei, even though he has no intention of actually doing so. While Tyrion's compassion stops him from repeating Tywin's masculinity more

faithfully, he claims that he is Tywin “writ small” (SoS2 498-499), signaling the central role that his father plays in shaping his masculinity.

This all changes when Tyrion is unjustly accused of murder and he undergoes a symbolic re-birth as he violently abandons Tywin’s masculine ethos. As Tyrion escapes his jail cell, the spymaster Varys leads him through a series of dark, damp tunnels that evoke a womb. Tyrion describes “the dark of a twisting turnpike stair,” a “place of cold stone and echoing darkness” (SoS2 492), “traps for the unwary,” “a damp bone-chilling cold” (SoS2 493) within “the blackness of the tunnel,” and describes himself as “*scuttling through the dark, holding hands with a spider*” (SoS2 494, original emphasis). In *Game of Thrones*, the viewer sees a sequence of shots totalling fifteen seconds in which Jaime and Tyrion run through a series of tunnels. The scene is made frightening in two ways: Jaime holds a flickering torch that gives the tunnels an eerie atmosphere, and the music is fast paced and punctuated with low drum beats that imply looming danger. In the same way that tunnels function in horror films, this journey can be illuminated by Creed’s (1993, 53) argument that dark tunnels and enclosed spaces reflect patriarchal society’s fear of the female reproductive system. Tyrion’s journey through the black cells is a kind of transformation, marking the gestation period in which he moves from patriarchal violence to a new citation point. When Tyrion emerges from the tunnels, he is faced with abjection.

In *Game of Thrones* Tyrion discovers and kills his former lover/prostitute Shae in his father’s bed and a considerable amount of screen time is spent on her corpse, emphasising Tyrion’s abjection in the moment of his re-birth (S4E10 “The Children”). Tyrion’s discovery of Shae is horrifying because Tyrion thought that she had fully accepted his masculine performance and reciprocated with heterosexual love, despite her testifying against Tyrion when he is on trial for Joffrey’s murder. The seeming betrayal is coded as one born out of heartbreak because the song “I Am Hers, She Is Mine” plays when Tyrion breaks up with Shae (S4E2 “The Lion and the Rose) and when she enters the court room to testify (S4E6 “The Laws of Gods and Men”). Shae’s presence in Tywin’s bed reveals that she takes the opportunity to gain favour from a more powerful patriarch. Right after Tyrion strangles Shae to death, there is a 44-second close-up of his face, which tracks right to include Shae’s, as shown in figure 33. The extreme length of the shot forces the audience to witness Tyrion come undone in two ways: through his contact with the corpse and his emotions. Tyrion does not “thrust [the corpse] aside in order to live,” as Kristeva (1982, 3) posits, but sits with the corpse and his realisation that he failed in his masculine performance all along because Shae

never loved him. Her open eyes and mouth add an additional layer of horror as the line between life and death is blurred. The framing suggests an unsettling duality between them: Tyrion and Shae both take up a third of the frame on either side of the screen, with another third between them (fig. 33). It is fitting that Tyrion's unemotional masculinity also falters here even as the emotion makes Tyrion's violence more acceptable for a fantasy genre where violence is expected to be met with negative feelings: during the close up his emotions are on display because his facial expressions are highlighted: fear, anger, sadness, and regret. Tears glisten on the skin around his eyes and he continues to hold the chain he used to strangle Shae while he cries. His hands shake, and he says "I'm sorry" twice. After the first time, the camera shifts to a long shot of the silent bedroom (fig. 34) where Tyrion appears small and alone. Tyrion repeats his apology, and the audience sees that this is where the repetition of patriarchal masculine violence has brought him: nothing but death, abjection, and isolation.

Figure 33: A close up of Tyrion sitting with Shae's corpse after strangling her (S4E10 "The Children")



Figure 34: A long shot of Tyrion's bedroom as he sits with Shae's corpse (S4E10 "The Children")



In the novels Tyrion is faced with the abject not when he kills Shae, but when he murders his father and the man defecates, taking the re-birth metaphor through additional moments of abjection. As he shoots his father, Tyrion observes, “the bolt slammed into [Tywin] above the groin and he sat back down with a grunt [...] blood seeped out around the shaft, dripping down into his pubic hair and over his bare thighs.” As Tywin dies, Tyrion smells “the sudden stench, as his bowels loosened in the moment of death. [...] Lord Tywin Lannister did not, in the end, shit gold” (SoS2 498-499). The conflation of corpse, blood, and faeces works alongside the tunnels Tyrion travelled through: as Creed (1993, 49) argues in relation to the horror film, “blood, afterbirth, faeces” are the signs of the womb’s inherent “contamination” because they it “represents the utmost in abjection [...] it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside.”

On a symbolic level, Tyrion rejects phallic patriarchal violence through echoes of his actual birth and references to his father’s penis. The idea that Tyrion kills his father as he is (re)born shares a parallel with his literal birth, after which his mother died. Tywin claims that Tyrion “killed your mother to come into the world” (SoS1 65), an assertion that reflects his patriarchal assumptions, namely, that men murder women in order to gain power. Tyrion dismisses of Tywin’s masculine practices, a change that is made clear when he reflects, “*if only I was better with a crossbow, I would have put [the bolt] through that cock you made me with*” (DwD 16, original emphasis). Tyrion recognises that his father “*made me*”—it was Tywin who sired him, and it was Tywin’s phallic masculine performance that allowed Tyrion to become intelligible—but he severs his repetition of this patriarchal gender model and its violence by diminishing his father’s phallic power to a fleshy and vulnerable penis, and

then expressing a desire to destroy it (and the phallic legacy that lingers). Tyrion's murder is highly symbolic: he destroys his father, the Westerosi patriarch who represents the Law of the Father/symbolic order, as he also resists this system of violence. At the same time, he uses violence to satisfy his personal desire for revenge and thereby reproduces patriarchal violence. Tyrion's escape to Essos on a boat can be seen as a metaphor for the liminal and ambivalent masculine space he enters, without a firm point of reference for his life or his gender.

When Tyrion lands on Essos he gives his gendered and political allegiance to Daenerys and her quest to reclaim the Iron Throne. More specifically, Tyrion shifts the object or intention of his performance of masculinity: where once he attempted to reproduce patriarchal strategies, he now emphasises his role as political negotiator. In the novels Tyrion has only just entered Daenerys's life, but his intentions are made clear. He tells his fellow Daenerys supporter, Illyrio Mopatis, "Knights know only one way to solve a problem. They couch their lances and charge. A dwarf has a different way of looking at the world" (DwD 87). The "different way" is elucidated later in the novel: Tyrion explains that "I can tell Her Grace how my sweet sister thinks, if you call it thinking. I can tell her captains the best way to defeat my brother, Jaime, in battle. I know which lords are brave and which are craven, which are loyal and which are venal. I can deliver allies to her. And I know much and more of dragons" (DwD 139). Political knowledge, persuasion, and negotiation are now Tyrion's gendered currency, and he intends to use them to make himself intelligible as valuable to the queen. It is significant that Tyrion is working against the members of his biological family by claiming queer kinship with Daenerys, both literally in the way he describes his skills to Illyrio, and symbolically as Daenerys intends to destroy the system from which the Lannisters gain their power. The transition from Tywin to Daenerys is made explicit in Tyrion's internal monologue. He thinks "*Are you down there in some hell, Father? A nice cold hell where you can look up and see me help restore Mad Aerys's daughter to the Iron Throne?*" (DwD 88, original emphasis). Tyrion uses an imagined version of Daenerys to legitimise and makes intelligible a masculinity that privileges intelligence, negotiation, and knowledge, and their application to the task of restoring Daenerys to the Iron Throne so that she may give Tyrion his birthright—Casterly Rock—and destroy Cersei.⁴²

In the television series Tyrion also references Daenerys's gender performance to validate his own masculinity, demonstrating his connection to a powerful figure and her family's symbolism, and

⁴² Tyrion implies that these are his goals in *A Dance with Dragons* (32).

the change is expressed through the similarities between their clothing. In seasons five, six, and seven, Tyrion's costumes mimic Daenerys's in colour, light/dark ratio, texture, or pattern. In "Battle of the Bastards" (S6E9) Tyrion and Daenerys wear brown tunics with an intricate pattern, a lighter trouser, a belt, and near-identical brown boots (fig. 35). The similarities between their costumes are emphasised because of the vastly different costumes of the other characters: the Unsullied soldiers wear dark grey leather, Missandei wears a blue dress, and the Great Masters wear loose white robes decorated with intricate knots in colourful fabrics. Similar examples abound: in "The Winds of Winter" (S6E10) Tyrion and Daenerys wear the same shade of dark grey (fig. 36); and when Daenerys lands on Dragonstone in season seven, she, Tyrion, Varys, and Missandei wear near-identical costumes but Daenerys stands and the others sit. The height difference implies that Daenerys is the most powerful person on the boat and that her costume is the one on which the others' repetition is based (fig. 37). Importantly, this is not to suggest that Tyrion's gender performance is derivative where other characters' performances are not; Tyrion's costumes have long been used to signal his masculine point of reference, as I have demonstrated with the similarities between his and Tywin's costumes in earlier seasons. Rather, Tyrion's change in costume reflects his privileging and citing of Daenerys as his new model of masculine conduct.

Figure 35: Tyrion and Daenerys both wearing brown fabric tunics in Meereen (S6E9 "Battle of the Bastards")



Figure 36: Tyrion and Daenerys both wearing dark grey when she appoints him Hand of the Queen (S6E10 “The Winds of Winter”)



Figure 37: Daenerys, Tyrion, Missandei and Varys approach Dragonstone in a rowboat as the Targaryen fleet is visible behind them (S7E1 “Dragonstone”)



In *A Song of Ice and Fire* Tyrion begins to enter into two forms of queer reproduction: authorship and kinship. While travelling to find Daenerys, Tyrion begins to transcribe his knowledge of dragons: “Griff had commanded him to set down all he knew of dragonlore. The task was a formidable one, but the dwarf labored at it every day” (DwD 215). Tyrion passes on his knowledge queerly: not through a heterosexual relationship and a biological heir, but through writing and books. Tyrion also creates new kinship ties by acting as a brother- and mother-figure to the only other short-statured character in the Martinverse, Penny, while they are enslaved in Essos. He reflects that, “Sometimes he wanted to slap her, shake her, scream at her, anything to wake her from

her dreams [...] Instead of giving her a good hard crack across that ugly face of hers to knock the blinders from her eyes, he would find himself squeezing her shoulder or giving her a hug” (DwD 888, original emphasis). Later in the novel Tyrion observes, “Penny had been searching for a new master since the day her brother Groat had lost his head. *She wants someone to take care of her, someone to tell her what to do*” (DwD 1014). Tyrion’s relationship with Penny demonstrates his new capacity to enter into the system of queer kinship, which Butler (1993, 94) describes as “a set of kinship relations that manage and sustain [...] in the face of dislocation, poverty, homelessness.” Now that Tyrion has severed ties with his biological family and the system of patriarchal reproduction and violence that it represents, he can build these queer kinship relationships in which he embraces the Other.

While Tyrion’s narrative is incomplete at the time of writing, the way his character arc has been expanded in *Game of Thrones* suggests that his subjectivity will also be reproduced queerly through his role as Hand of the Queen. Tyrion gains this position in “The Winds of Winter” (S6E10), a position wherein he has the potential to shape the future of Essos and Westeros. Tyrion’s queer reproduction is demonstrated in the season seven episode “Beyond the Wall” (S7E6), in which he and Daenerys discuss the succession: “How do we ensure your vision endures? After you break the wheel, how do we make sure it stays broken? [...] You say you can’t have children. But there are other ways of choosing a successor.” Tyrion cites “the Night’s Watch” and “the Ironborn” as two societies that have successfully broken from heterosexual biological reproduction (though not from the patriarchy). The Night’s Watch uses a democratic voting system not unlike those used in the real West, and the Ironborn host a debate known as a Kingsmoot/Queensmoot.⁴³ Tyrion’s knowledge of queer reproductive strategies makes him hyper-aware of the need for Daenerys to consider the succession. Tyrion’s kinship with Daenerys and his privileging of queer reproduction indicate that he will continue to champion peace and connection with others regardless of how Daenerys’s quest unfolds.

⁴³ Historically the Ironborn used a Kingsmoot, but over the past few generations they changed to the hereditary system used in Westeros wherein the king’s son becomes king. The Queensmoot is a new twist on this convention created because the monarchical heir to the throne, Asha Greyjoy, is a woman.

Conclusion

The characters I have examined here undergo symbolic rebirths that signal their decision to relinquish their attachment to patriarchal violence and the power structures that uphold it. Not only are these births messy, as might be expected; they are also partial in that they do not mark a point where the characters no longer perform acts of violence that subjugate others and/or reproduce patriarchal norms. In *Game of Thrones* Jaime rapes Cersei beside their Joffrey's corpse, snarling, "you're a hateful woman. Why would the gods make me love a hateful woman?" (S4E3 "Breaker of Chains"). In *A Song of Ice and Fire* it is implied that Tyrion rapes two prostitutes on two separate occasions (DwD 27; DwD 338-339) and he tells Daenerys that the only reward he seeks for his service is to "rape and kill my sister" (DwD 430). In *Game of Thrones* Tyrion brushes off his political pacifism in Daenerys's service, telling Jon Snow that he was "drunk for most of it" (S7E3 "The Queen's Justice"). When Bran has visions as the Three-Eyed-Crow/Raven in the television series, his dream-self is able bodied and he is obsessed with his long-dead father. Moving away from patriarchal and ableist structures proves to be rife with regression and ambivalence.

These partial re-births reflect Butler's argument about the challenges of gender subversion: that "*working the weakness in the norm* [...] becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation [...] [exposing] the failure of heterosexual regimes ever to fully legislate or contain their own ideals" (Butler 1993, 181, original emphasis). In other words, the subject can never be free of the law because they are produced by it; rather, one must find the weaknesses in that production and twist them into something more empowering. Bran, Jaime, and Tyrion must work within the "ambivalent condition of the power that binds" (Butler 1993, 185) to maintain their subjectivity and power, and to work against it by showing a masculinity that embraces the Other.

Tyrion's tangled relation with, and relapses into, patriarchal masculine violence are perhaps the most significant of those I have discussed throughout the thesis. At the time of writing Tyrion has the most perspective chapters in the novels and as of season six of *Game of Thrones* he is featured in fifty-four episodes and he has 293.3 minutes of on-screen time, the most of any character (Payne 2017). He is venerated among fan blogs and discussion boards (Moglia 2014; Sparky 2012; Winteriscoming 2013), and a collection of his witticisms has been published as a companion text (Martin 2013). It is impossible to say what has struck the 21st century audience about Tyrion's character, but my analysis of his relation to patriarchal violence indicates that he may well reveal to

audiences the possibilities for re-working destructive norms without destroying them entirely, capturing the complexity of any attempt to negotiate masculinity.

Conclusion: Queer Magical Violence and Gender Fluidity

The Martinverse is the site of many varied depictions of gender, which are shown to tens of millions of fans and inspire a growing body of critical work. This thesis expands these debates and adds to the understanding of genre, gender, and violence in literary and cultural studies more broadly, in the first in-depth study of violence and masculinity in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*. I argue that when masculine characters in the series use violence to gain power at others' expense—what I call patriarchal violence—their bodily autonomy is dismantled and they are presented as monstrous in a cycle that sees them destroyed by the same acts they wrecked on others. In contrast, when masculine characters use violence in ways that empower others—whether through what I call chivalric violence or other forms such as selfless political violence—they are able to maintain their bodily borders and proliferate their knowledge and values through queer kinship. This conclusion emphasises the meaning of this argument for the portrayal of masculinity in the Martinverse while also pushing the implications of its framework further in exploring how violence is re-staged by queer characters who are often (but not always) more successful in their violence because they act out of care for others rather than themselves. The importance of masculine subjects caring for others in the Martinverse is significant to our cultural understanding of men because it reverses dominant masculine discourses in the real world that encourage a lack of emotion and discourage close personal relationships, and suggests that these can have beneficial results for individuals and for society. Generic conflicts (between the classical and postmodern ends of the high fantasy spectrum) create the space for challenging the normativity or naturalness of the gender performances of male-embodied masculine characters; for characters where their female embodiment or disability disrupts the assumed naturalness of their performances of masculinity, these generic conflicts are still present but less prominent.

To make this argument I weave together insights from gender studies, especially Judith Butler's notion of performativity, and from psychoanalysis, namely Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Barbara Creed's notion of the monstrous feminine: theoretical perspectives I elaborate in chapter one. This queer feminist psychoanalytic and poststructuralist framework permits me to explore how the novels and the television series negotiate relationships between masculinity and bodily boundaries in relation to acts of violence. While Butler's theory of gender performativity offers a basis for explaining how gendered acts are changeable, and that subversion can be used for

numerous political projects, Kristeva's account of abjection elucidates the mechanisms of critique of patriarchal society in the Martinverse via the capacity of characters to negotiate and overcome (or be destroyed by) their loss of bodily and subjective borders.

Chapters two and three examine violence perpetrated by normatively masculine men: that is, cisgender, white, heterosexual, and able-bodied characters. Chapter two focuses on the Martinverse's most evil characters—Joffrey Baratheon, Gregor Clegane, and Ramsay Bolton—and how the violence they inflict on women is turned against them and mirrored in their deaths as they are unable to reproduce the paternal law, become abject, and are linked to images that connote what I refer to as the “queer monstrous feminine.” This concept enables me to explore the queer as a mode through which monstrosity arises, a reflection of heteropatriarchal fears about femininity and queerness that can be utilised by conservative and progressive ideologies. I am not the first to link monstrosity to queerness, but I make a unique contribution to theorising a specifically queer monstrous feminine because Creed's work has rarely been used to illuminate these debates. Incorporating queerness into Creed's theory allows me to illuminate how masculine characters retain their male bodies and masculine gender performance while simultaneously being linked to feminine imagery, with the implication that patriarchal violence is critiqued without losing its ties to masculinity or maleness.

Patriarchal violence is also turned against the characters who use it in chapter three, which examines the ways in which Eddard Stark and his sons Robb and Jon and his ward Theon attempt to replicate or reproduce legal and legitimate sovereign violence, but fail because they use it as a result of individualistic (especially affective) motivations. Each character chooses to perform an execution to deal with a minor problem that is unacceptable according to the system of inflexible reproduction (patriarchy) that constitutes them, but in each case they lose their bodily borders through abject signifiers. They also face dire political consequences and are later killed in ways that echo their sovereign violence. The aggression is turned against itself, a reversal of the law from within the terms of the law, a process that Butler claims is also key to gender subversion. In charting how patriarchal forms of violence follow this trajectory regardless of whether they are perpetrated by antagonists or protagonists, I show that in the Martinverse, it is violence that is used to empower the self at the expense of others that is critiqued and exposed as the source of monstrosity.

Turning to female masculinity in chapter four, I show that Cersei Lannister also reproduces these existing power structures through patriarchal violence, and like the men I have examined, is

critiqued as she becomes monstrous. As in chapter two, Cersei's violence is narrated in ways that connote queer monstrous feminine imagery, and she enters into a queer kinship with the re-animated corpse of one of her cronies, exposing both the positive and negative potential of this form of reproduction. But it is in relation to female masculinity that alternatives also become intelligible: the female knight Brienne of Tarth uses violence to perform chivalry and honourable deeds out of a fundamental respect for others who are less powerful than herself. When she comes into contact with the abject during her quests, she resists becoming grotesque because characters who recognise her honour intercede by restoring her bodily borders on her behalf. Instead of becoming grotesque, she builds alternative kinship bonds that have generative rather than destructive outcomes, first with Jaime Lannister, and later with Podrick Payne and Arya Stark. These kinship bonds allow her to share her skills and knowledge with others: to reproduce queerly, that is, apart from heterosexual reproductive practices that privilege biology.

Kinship bonds are also integral for the disabled masculine characters I examine in chapter five. Bran Stark, Jaime Lannister, and Tyrion Lannister begin the series citing patriarchs who inform their masculinity and lead them to enact or attempt to enact forms of patriarchal violence. But these characters learn that these patriarchal models cannot be fully mapped onto disabled bodies. As a result, they reject patriarchal violence and undergo symbolic rebirths wherein they adopt different points of reference for their masculinities and learn to embrace the Other. At the same time, these re-births are ambiguous, as the characters never fully abandon patriarchal violence. This ambivalence reflects the difficulty of resisting the matrices of power that we rely upon for our articulation as subjects.

“When the snows fall and the white winds blow,” Eddard tells his daughter Arya early in the series, “the lone wolf dies, while the pack survives” (GoT 216). In a sense, wolves are always violent; but their violence is directed toward hunting and caring for one another: acts that are necessary for survival not of the individual but of the group. While wolves operate within biological family packs, direwolves move beyond them in the Martinverse, particularly in their intense bonds with the Stark children. New packs formed through queer kinship do not ensure success in the game of thrones, but they provide the support and adaptability needed to survive, whereas the heterosexual family pack falls apart under the weight of its own inflexibility: the biologically linked family groups (direwolf pack/Stark children) are undone, but the queer kinship between individual humans and wolves (such as between Jon and Ghost, or Bran and Summer) often survive. What I suggest is that

the Martinverse privileges masculinities that reject individualistic models which reify existing matrices of power and instead open themselves to radical connections with other subjects. Both classical and postmodern ends of the high fantasy spectrum have long privileged these kinds of relationships, but this is the first in-depth study to consider these relationships with the Other in conjunction with masculinity. The others I examine in this thesis are variously figured—as squires, enemies, trees, dragons, wolves, or birds. But in the real world they could just as easily be co-workers, mentors, or friends. These types of connections are the only way in which humankind can face the threats of the future, whether they be societal challenges, such as mental health and sexual violence, or existential threats including war or environmental change.

I investigate these alternative bonds with respect to masculine characters in chapters four and five. But the Martinverse is vast and composed of many characters who do not fit the category of masculinity or its supposed opposite, femininity. The implications of these queer characters in relations of violence and kinship point to further questions for exploration. In the final part of the conclusion I explore how the violence I have examined throughout the thesis is restaged by queer characters, including those who are masculine some of the time, as well as those who shift between masculinity and femininity so quickly and with such overlap between the two supposed opposites that they could more accurately be described as gender fluid, genderqueer, or androgynous. Enactments of violence by these characters—as queer kinship interacts with magic in these acts—have strong resonances with the intersections of masculinity and violence I have discussed, in that their coding as acceptable or reprehensible hinges upon whether their violence is individualistic or stems from care for others. But they also differ from these other performances in the sense that they offer a reenactment of other types of violence from a queer perspective that reveals empowering the self at the expense of others as the true source of horror, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator.

I focus on gender fluidity and magic because they are seen to be radically untethered from the real world and its assumed binary genders/laws of physics, but in reality offer metaphorical ideas that can be applied to the real world. Multiple critics emphasise magic's connection with gender and sexuality in fantasy fiction. Most read it, as Anne Balay (2012) and Jes Battis (2006) do, as a queer force. As I note in chapter one, Battis (2006, para. 2) argues that magic is “both *gendered* and *transgendered*” because it incorporates gendered constraint and subversion. Magic signifies departures from gender norms, such as when the female body is linked to phallic symbols such as the magic sword, but it also affirms those norms by presenting the masculine as more valuable than the

feminine. Fantasy texts do not always subvert dominant gender discourses, but it has a unique capacity to play with gender possibilities through magic.

I examine three characters who use magic to perform violence: the experienced warg Varamyr Sixskins, the feisty tomboy Arya Stark, and the dispossessed heir to the Iron Throne and Mother of Dragons, Daenerys Targaryen. I have chosen these characters because they are resistant to normative gendering, explicitly engage with magic, and use it to enact violence. Each of these characters perpetrates violence that is very similar to the characters I analyse in the previous chapters: Varamyr echoes Ramsay Bolton and Gregor Clegane, Daenerys re-works Eddard's sovereign violence, and both she and Arya share parallels with Cersei. When these "queer" characters, a concept I explore in more detail below, use violence for their own personal gain—as is particularly the case with Varamyr and his attempts to magically dominate a human woman's body—they are presented as monstrous. But when they use violence because they care about others—as do Arya and Daenerys when they use magic to violently destroy patriarchal men, families, and institutions—their actions are presented as acceptable and heroic. The presence of magic, in its association with sexuality and gender, emphasises and expands the themes I discuss throughout the thesis to suggest that the fantasy genre and its conventions, especially as they are deployed in the Martinverse, make it a unique site where caring for others is venerated, as opposed to dominant masculine discourses that privilege singularity and impenetrability.

The Way of the Warg

The prologue of *A Dance with Dragons* features the only chapter narrated from the perspective of the warg Varamyr, a minor character in the novels who does not feature in the television series. I read Varamyr as a queer character because he is known in the Martinverse for spreading his subjectivity across multiple sites ("Sixskins" refers to his six animal companions). In this dispersal Varamyr feels little inhibition about changing sex: his human body is male and he appears to identify as masculine, but he takes the skin of multiple male animals as well as a female wolf (DwD 11), a female bear (DwD 9), and attempts to do the same with a human woman (DwD 14). Varamyr lacks the stable, firm, and enclosed borders that are expected of the male body. Yet rather than embracing interconnectedness with others, he perpetuates patriarchal domination and violence. Like the characters I examine in chapter two, especially Ramsay, Varamyr uses aggression to dominate

women, but has this violence turned against him in death. Varamyr's chapter at the start of *A Dance with Dragons* echoes Bran's in *A Game of Thrones*, in the sense that both reveal an ongoing pattern of older men teaching younger men how to be masculine. In each case, the repetition of patriarchal violence leads the characters who pass on their violence, and those to whom it is passed, to lose their bodily boundaries and become abject.

Varamyr cites his mentor Haggon as the alleged original for his warg masculinity. Varamyr was sent to Haggon after his wildling parents learned that he was a warg,⁴⁴ and in his perspective chapter he reflects on how much of his identity stems from the older man: "*Haggon taught me much and more. He taught me how to hunt and fish, how to butcher a carcass and bone a fish, how to find my way through the woods. And he taught me the way of the warg and the secrets of the skinchangers, though my gift was stronger than his own*" (DwD 7). Haggon taught Varamyr, and Varamyr takes Haggon's place literally and symbolically as an adult: "he lived alone in a hall of moss and mud and hewn logs that had once been Haggon's, attended by his beasts. A dozen villages did him homage in bread and salt and cider, offering him fruit from their orchards and vegetables from their gardens" (DwD 8). Repetition is central to both of these memories. The repeated phrases ("*taught me*" and "*how to*") and Varamyr's uptake of Haggon's cultural and spatial position suggests the repetitive and citational practices that I have explored in this thesis in terms of Butler's theory of gender performativity. It is a specifically masculine form of performativity through which Varamyr becomes intelligible, in the sense that his masculine subject position is centred on acting against supposedly passive others. He describes learning to "*hunt and fish,*" "*butcher,*" "*bone,*" all of which are active verbs that describe doing something to someone or something else, and specifically to their bodies. Likewise, he is "attended" by animals and "villages did him homage": like Ramsay and his hounds, or Joffrey and his kingsguard, Varamyr actively dominates the less powerful subjects around him. His masculinity is based on controlling others for his own personal gain.

Explicitly sexual domination is tied to Varamyr's masculinity and his magic powers. While thinking of his adult life, Varamyr recalls, "whenever he desired a woman he sent his shadowcat to stalk her, and whatever girl he'd cast his eye upon would follow meekly to his bed. Some came weeping, aye, but still they came. Varamyr gave them his seed, took a hank of their hair to remember them by, and sent them back" (DwD 8). Varamyr constructs an active position for himself and

⁴⁴ Varamyr's warging abilities were discovered when he murdered his younger brother while wearing the skin of one of his parents' pet dogs.

relegates his female victims to passivity through his language. He “cast[s] his eye upon” women, “gave them his seed,” and “sent them back,” leaving no room for them to have agency besides crying, which is, in any case, presented more as a passive and helpless response. Varamyr’s domination and objectification of the women is exaggerated through the grisly trophies he keeps, “hanks of hair” (DwD 5). Varamyr, like Ramsay in chapter two, keeps a physical part of his victims’ body, signifying his view of women as objects. Hair in particular carries significant cultural and personal meanings (Freedman 1994; Hansen 2007; Reed and Blunk 1990; Synnott 1987), and in reducing the women to their hair and stealing it against their will, Varamyr demonstrates his patriarchal views of women. Varamyr uses his warg abilities to perform sexual violence, repeating the same practices that are perpetrated with more mundane means by Gregor, Ramsay, and Joffrey.

Varamyr’s objectification of women is critiqued when he attempts to magically possess a human woman’s body, a patriarchal act of violence that is linked to the abject. Varamyr “leapt out of his own skin, and forced himself inside her. Thistle arched her back and screamed” (DwD 14). The phrase “forced himself inside her” reflects the deeply corporeal experience of having one’s mind taken over, as I have argued in relation to Bran and Hodor. The language connotes rape because psychological domination is experienced as a forced entry into the mind. The act is rendered monstrous through the abject, specifically a loss of borders, blood, auto-cannibalism, and castration: “the spearwife twisted violently, shrieking” and “when he tried to scream, she spat their tongue out” (DwD 14), not simply projecting it from her mouth but biting it off from her body and spitting it away. The corporeality of the act and its likeness to sexual violence are emphasised through phrases such as “twisted violently,” which are coupled with abjection by the biting off and spitting out of “their tongue.” The shift from “he” to “she” to “their” presents a sudden and significant change in subjectivity: in one moment Varamyr is a singular man (“he”), then he is Thistle (“she”), and the next she and Varamyr combine as an ambiguous “they.”

The accidental self-mutilation evokes blood, self-cannibalism, and severed limbs, all of which threaten Thistle/Varamyr’s remaining borders. It is significant that it is Thistle’s tongue – a phallic body part (Butler 1993, 55) – that is subject to this amputation. When spat out, this can be seen as a symbol of castration—a fitting metaphor considering that Varamyr is symbolically relinquishing his phallic power and his penis by abandoning his human male body. Thistle’s seeming control over the act of spitting the shared tongue can be viewed as an attempt to abject Varamyr from her mind and reinstate her own borders; Kristeva (1982, 3) claims that “I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject

myself within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself.” The tongue-spitting is at once literal abjection, symbolic castration, and grotesque image, all of which work together to associate Varamyr’s psychological domination with feelings of disgust.

Varamyr’s anticipated and actual death are narrated in ways that suggest a circularity between the patriarchal aggression he used in life and his murder. I have noted this kind of circularity in chapters two and three, although Varamyr’s case is made even more abject through the aid of magic. Midway through his chapter Varamyr thinks about his death and says of his wolves, “*When I die they will feast upon my flesh and leave only bones to greet the thaw come spring*” (DwD 9). The alliteration in “*feast upon my flesh*” makes the sentence feel poetic, yet the choice of the word feast also highlights the reversal because it is being used to describe animals eating a human, rather than the normal use of the term to describe humans eating animals. Varamyr sees a “queerly comforting” circularity in this death, as “his wolves had often foraged for him as they roamed; it seemed fitting that he should feed them in the end” (DwD 9). Like Ramsay, who uses his hounds to enact violence and is later eaten by them, Varamyr foresees himself as part of the cycle of life and death. However, where Ramsay denies the possibility of his wolves turning on him and is horrified when they do, Varamyr’s queer perspective on the world makes him open to the revelation and the idea that he will be inhabiting one of the wolves’ bodies while they eat him: “he might well begin his second life tearing at the warm dead flesh of his own corpse” (DwD 9). Varamyr poses this fate as an interesting and poetic end as opposed to a horrifying moment of abjection, and his failure to react to the abject possibility of self-cannibalism—the fact that he finds it “queerly comforting”—makes him seem more and less than human. The border between human and animal, inside and outside the body, has collapsed long ago. Varamyr’s total embrace of the Other suspends the scene’s abjection.

The warg’s actual death is more circular than he anticipates; he is murdered by Thistle, the woman whose body he attempted to seize, when she becomes a white walker. Varamyr dies as a human while he is fighting Thistle for control over her body, likely bleeding to death from an existing wound as Thistle attacks him bodily while he attacks her mentally. As Varamyr’s man-body dies, he narrates an experience wherein his soul flies into the air and settles within the body of his wolf One Eye. His reprieve is short, as it is implied that he dies a “true death” when he is murdered by the Thistle-wight. From inside One Eye’s skin he observes the white walkers and identifies Thistle: “Pale pink icicles hung from her fingertips, ten long knives of frozen blood. [...] *She sees me*” (DwD 15). As I have noted in chapter three, the white walkers are living corpses that create terror

by troubling countless boundaries. The description of frozen blood as icicles and knives weaponises this abject fluid. It is frozen as it flows from Thistle's hands, permanently reflecting the uncanny blurring of inside and outside the body. While Varamyr observes the Thistle-wight from One Eye's body, he claims that "*she sees me*," and the chapter ends. Varamyr receives no more perspective chapters in the series to date, an absence that implies that he is murdered by the woman he tried to use violence to dominate, and joins the army of the dead. As in chapter two when Joffrey, Gregor, and Ramsay are killed, the feminine figure that they sought to conquer in life returns with a vengeance, and Varamyr loses his bodily autonomy as an undead soldier.

"Tell them Winter Came for House Frey"

Where Varamyr learns to magically enter the bodies of other characters, Arya Stark learns to use magic to change her appearance and enact violent vengeance upon patriarchal figures. Arya is the daughter of Eddard Stark and sister to Jon, Robb, Bran, and Sansa. She reflects the fantasy tomboy convention because she can be read as a masculine girl,⁴⁵ a non-normative gender identification that lays the foundations for her gender swapping. At the beginning of the series Arya is given a sword called "Needle" by Jon, and she learns to fight throughout the series, first in Westeros and later in Essos. After witnessing her father's treatment and execution in Westeros, as well as the torture practices of Gregor Clegane and his men, she creates a hit list of people she plans to enact violent revenge upon. I explore her violence as a queer restaging of Cersei's torture scenes, and I argue that while both women use violence for revenge, Cersei acts out of a selfish desire to gain power and enjoys the act, whereas Arya is motivated by her connection to her family and its honour. The end of *A Dance with Dragons* sees her training among the Faceless Men in Essos, a group of magical assassins, although *Game of Thrones* has expanded her narrative. In the television series Arya chooses to return to Westeros, murders several men on her list, and is reunited with Sansa and Bran at Winterfell. She masters the art of magically wearing other people's faces and uses this skill to disguise herself as she empowers her family.

In Essos Arya murders one of the men on her hit list, Ser Meryn Trant, and the act is presented as acceptable if disturbing because he is characterised as a sadistic paedophile who

⁴⁵ At the beginning of the series Arya's youth means that her masculinity is more socially acceptable, that is, less subversive. As the series progresses she becomes an adult (she is roughly seventeen in season seven), but she maintains her masculine demeanour.

engenders young girls. Ser Meryn's misogyny has been well established—for example, he beat Sansa on Joffrey's orders—and in Essos his violence takes an even darker turn when his paedophilia is revealed for the first time (“Mother's Mercy” S5E10). Arya spies Ser Meryn when he lands in Essos, so when he visits a brothel and demands a selection of young girls to be brought for him, it is implied that one of them is Arya wearing a different face. Ser Meryn takes a turn at whipping each of the three prepubescent blonde girls on offer, but the third girl/Arya does not respond. Ser Meryn orders the other girls to leave and punches the quiet girl/Arya in the stomach, knocking her to the ground. She begins to rise, but as she does so her body moves unnaturally. The camera lingers on her hunched body in a medium shot for six seconds, moved back to Ser Meryn, and then back to the girl/Arya for four seconds. The lengths of the shots are made uncanny when paired with the high pitched, eerie music that becomes louder as the shot goes on.

Arya's violent attack on Ser Meryn is coded as masculine and phallic as she magically transforms from the girl/Arya to Arya. The ability to change her face with a magical flesh mask disturbs identity and bodily borders in a way Kristeva would link to the abject. The transition also highlights Arya's violence as masculine because of the dramatic change in her gender presentation. The quiet girl/Arya has long blonde hair and delicate features, whereas Arya has shoulder-length brown hair styled in exactly the same way as her father, and large, thick eyebrows. I do not mean to suggest that she shifts fluidly from feminine to masculine, but that the magical change emphasises the masculine aspects of her appearance. As Arya becomes more masculine her phallic knife also becomes visible: after the reveal the audience sees a medium shot that shows Arya's face, and then a knife in her hand as she lunges at Ser Meryn and knocks him to the floor, stabbing first his left eye and then his right as he screams.

The loss of one's eyes is linked to castration in psychoanalytic theory (Freud 1919), making Arya's violence visible as an attack on Ser Meryn's masculinity, both the normatively patriarchal kind he displays in public and the sexually deviant one he has revealed in private. By graphically slaughtering powerful, misogynistic white men through her magical powers, Arya challenges patriarchal power structures and saves the other young girls, and her violence is celebrated. This is one of the main ways in which Arya re-figures Cersei's violence. Where Cersei enacts violence to further her own ends, such as the pleasure and power she feels when she tortures less powerful characters such as Septa Unella and the Dornish women called the Sandsnakes, Arya uses violence to avenge herself, her family, and the other girls Ser Meryn threatened, subverting Westerosi power

structures that would expect her to be a victim. Arya breaks free from the destructive cycle of patriarchal violence, whereas Cersei repeats it by making her own victims.

Arya's acts of violence are also presented as successful when she murders Walder Frey and later decimates his House, both of which are presented as triumphant attacks on the Westerosi patriarchy. As in her murder of Ser Meryn, the principal way in which Arya's aggression differs from similar scenes featuring Cersei—such as when she blows up the Sept of Baelor—is because she acts out of care for her family and its honour rather than a desire for personal power. In the season six finale “The Winds of Winter” (S6E10), Arya wears the face of a serving girl who brings Walder a pie that (unbeknownst to him) is made from the flesh of his heirs, Black Walder and Lothor. Arya draws inspiration for this act from the Westerosi story of the Rat Cook, a cook at the Nightfort who murdered a king's sons, cooked them in a pie, and was punished for the act of murdering a guest by being turned into a rat who could only ever eat his own young (S3E10). The notion of a man-rat eating his children is especially harrowing for patriarchal society, wherein culture and power are expected to be seamlessly reproduced from father to son. The fear of interrupting the patriarchal line of succession is emphasised at the start of the scene when, after the woman/Arya sets the pie down and Walder tells her that she is pretty and pinches her backside, he demands to know where his heirs are. The serving woman/Arya repeatedly tells him, “they're here, my lord.” Viewers already know Walder to be misogynistic and venal from his interactions with Robb and Catelyn Stark in season three, and his treatment of the serving woman/Arya—objectification, sexual assault, and rudeness—cements his characterisation as a villain and patriarch. Walder almost ingests his sons, a subversive reversal of his status as a patriarch and the patriarchal logic wherein culture is perfectly reproduced through the heteronormative family.

Despite the insistent gestures towards cannibalism there is very little abjection in this scene and many references to the cause of Arya's ire, the Red Wedding where her mother and brother were killed, which position Arya's violence as morally acceptable and emotionally satisfying because it was intended to empower her family. After Arya shows Walder that the pie is made from his heirs by telling him that they are “here” in the pie, she peels off her serving woman face and says, “My name is Arya Stark. I want you to know that. The last thing you're ever going to see is a Stark smiling down at you as you die” (S6E10). The dialogue, specifically the repeated use of Arya's family name, is intended to remind audiences about the violence that Walder inflicted upon the Stark

family, that is, to justify her aggression and emphasise the fact that it is motivated by revenge for her family rather than empowering herself.

However, the Stark name alone does not make Arya's act of violence acceptable; the lack of abject signifiers such as blood and corpses positions Arya's violence as reifying borders and rules about hospitality in Westeros. Arya slits Walder's throat and blood is visible flowing from the gash in his neck for a total of 12 seconds. Yet his death takes up a total of 31 seconds, making the 12 seconds of blood roughly a third of the death, a very brief moment of abjection when compared with others I have examined, such as Joffrey's. The remaining 19 seconds either hide his neck wound from view with his own arm, or show a high angle shot that imitates Arya's point of view, the Stark "smiling down." In this time Walder's neck is not visible and the blood is hidden against his black clothing. Not even his corpse is shown on-screen; just as his hand slips away from his neck, the camera moves to a close up of Arya and the music changes from high-pitched and eerie to low, triumphant-sounding drum beats. Importantly, Arya does not actually smile; if anything, her facial expression is expectant, but it is a far cry from Cersei's smiles as she performs torture and terrorism. Arya's lack of emotion, the music within the scene, and the references to the Starks do considerable work in making clear that her violence is not patriarchal because it is motivated by a desire to empower her family and the Stark name. Arya restages Cersei's failed patriarchal violence, making it successful—though ideologically ambivalent—because she acts out of care for others.

Arya extends her vengeance against Walder to all of House Frey in season seven when she wears his face and poisons all of his male relatives, and as in season six, the violence is presented as heroic because it enfranchises the Starks. Walder's patriarchal attitudes in life are turned against him and his family when Walder/Arya encourages the men to raise a toast and s/he stops Walder's wife from drinking the wine, saying, "not you. I'm not wasting good wine on a damn woman" (S7E1). Walder/Arya reverses Walder's characterisation as a misogynist by using it to save Walder's wife from being unjustly murdered. Similarly, s/he uses Walder's slaughter of the Starks against the Frey family to inspire them to drink a deadly toast: s/he says that s/he is proud of the "brave men" in the room, who "helped me slaughter the Starks at the Red Wedding. [...] Butchered a woman pregnant with her baby. Cut the throat of a mother of five. Slaughtered your guests after inviting them into your home" (S7E1). Arya raises the spectre of the Red Wedding and cites the crimes that the Freys committed as she kills them. She uses dramatic visual language to position the Red Wedding as horrifying: the words "slaughter" and "butchered" are commonly used to describe animals being

killed, and so suggest that the Freys treated the Starks with unnecessary brutality. The timing of Arya's dialogue is pivotal to presenting her violence as successful: she speaks right before the Freys begin to choke, cementing a connection between her love for her (mostly slaughtered) family rather than an individualistic desire for power. Arya's explicit reference to her family separates her violence from Cersei's: the latter regularly claims to use violence to protect her children, but they are rarely cited alongside her violence. When she destroys the Sept of Baelor she watches alone in her bedroom and her son commits suicide because of her actions (S6E10 "The Winds of Winter"). Even when Cersei's violence is explicitly linked to her children, such as when she tortures and kills the SandSnakes in revenge for her daughter Myrcella's death (S7E3 "The Queen's Justice"), she is acting on her own desire for revenge because there is no one left to empower: all of her children are dead and she has no living family besides Jaime, and the act is committed in secret and so cannot even bolster the Lannister legacy. In contrast, Arya learns that Sansa lives and needs her help after she witnesses a satirical play about the Lannisters in Essos (S6E5 "The Door"), so she is actively aiding Sansa and the Stark family when s/he says, "you didn't slaughter every one of the Starks" (S7E1), and around her the Frey men begin to clutch their necks and chests, cough, spit up blood, and die. As in the season six finale, there is very little abjection, and what is present is balanced with music. Aside from the blood that the men cough up, there is no visible damage to their bodies.

After Arya/Walder takes off Walder's face, she walks out of the hall, right through the middle of the tables where the men were sitting. The corpses are barely visible; most fell to the floor while choking, or else lie slumped on the tables, hardly recognisable. The only moment when Arya comes into contact with the abject is when the camera moves to a high angle shot of the entire hall (fig. 38), clearly showing the dead men and the horrified serving women. Yet even this room full of corpses is made palatable through music that changes the tone. Arya's theme, the song "Needle," plays from the moment she leaves the dais, and it becomes louder as she walks through the room, reaching its crescendo at the moments when the corpses are visible, right before she walks off-screen. The music is typically associated with Arya's triumphant moments; for example, it plays when she decides to return "home" to Westeros (S6E8 "No One) and when she practices sword fighting with Brienne of Tarth (S7E4). The music makes the scene feel triumphant and heroic, transforming the abject corpses into the site of just vengeance on behalf of her family. Using violence to enable one's family proves to be the defining difference between Arya's heroic

vengeance and Cersei's monstrous torture scenes, between patriarchal and non-patriarchal violence, and between failure and success.

Figure 38: Arya walks through the Great Hall in the Freys' castle after poisoning its male inhabitants (S7E1 "Dragonstone")



Arya's violence against the Freys is underscored by narratives—both the one about the Rat Cook I have noted, and the one she gives to Walder's wife as explanation of the events—that position her as a hero. I note in chapter three that the Red Wedding is highly theatrical, orchestrated so that it makes for a fitting story as it is re-told throughout the narrative. Arya's vengeance on Walder Frey is even more theatrical. She cites the Rat Cook story by making a pie of the Frey heirs, as discussed. As in the Red Wedding, Arya's actions are theatrical enough to be part of a chilling story, building on existing Westerosi tales and leaving not one but two memorable last lines. After watching the men choke to death Arya removes Frey's face, turns to his wife and says, "when people ask you what happened here, tell them the North remembers. Tell them [pause] that Winter came for House Frey" (S7E1). Arya directs the narrative that is told about her violence, making it an act of just vengeance that empowers her family rather than a young girl's revenge on the man who killed her mother. Right after this line Arya's theme music begins to play, encouraging the audience to feel immensely satisfied with her actions. The patriarchy—the Frey patriarchy at least—has been righteously destroyed by Arya, who is coded as vengeful angel of death.

Breaking the Wheel?

Where Arya moves fluidly between identities with her magical powers, Daenerys Targaryen, the Mother of Dragons and Breaker of Chains, encompasses multiple identities at once as “woman, man, and beast [...] a queer figure that defies category” (Gresham 2015, 157). She embraces the Other from an early point in the series and is undone—she sets herself alight on her husband’s funeral pyre—only to be reborn stronger than ever as her three dragons hatch in the flames. Daenerys’s queerness comes from her adaptability, her willingness to straddle masculinity and femininity simultaneously, and her dragons. Catherine Pugh (2018, 81) argues that “Daenerys has a habit of combining masculine and feminine traits as a leader (being both the merciful ‘Mother’ and the brutal authoritarian who burns people alive), utilizing both ‘feminine’ cooperation and ‘masculine’ domination to successfully achieve power.” Daenerys’s gendered fluidity stems from her embrace of the grotesque, claims Gresham (2015), who uses Bakhtin (1984) and his concept of carnival to explain Daenerys’s ongoing association with bodily filth as Martin’s way of positioning her as a forerunner for the Iron Throne. I agree that grotesque bodies serve a narrative and political purpose in the Martinverse, but I argue that the disgusting imagery that surrounds Daenerys is used to depict her “‘masculine’ domination,” her “burn[ing] people alive” with her dragons, as a queer restaging of Cersei’s attack on the Sept of Baelor and Eddard Stark’s sovereign violence that is made morally ambiguous because she “*work[s] the weakness in the norm*,” as Butler (1993, 181) says of gender subversion, by using violence to enable her community and thereby making her violence non-patriarchal. As in Arya’s case, Daenerys’s violence flirts with acceptability and monstrosity.

Daenerys murders scores of men in *A Storm of Swords* in vengeance for their killing the same number of slave children, although unlike Cersei she does not enjoy satisfying her individualistic desire for vengeance, and consequently her contact with the abject is brief and the act is presented as ideologically ambivalent. When Daenerys travels from Yunkai to Meereen, she learns that the Meereen nobles “had nailed a slave child up on every milepost along the coast road from Yunkai, nailed them up still living with their entrails hanging out and one arm always outstretched to point the way to Meereen” (SoS2 204). Daenerys is disgusted and enraged, but insists upon looking at each one of their faces and counting the corpses, where they total “one hundred and sixty-three” (SoS1 205). She affirms her vow to take the city, and after doing so later in the novel she orders the citizens to bring her “one hundred and sixty-three” of their leaders, and “had them nailed to the wooden posts around the plaza, each man pointing at the next” (SoS2 406). Daenerys murders one

Master for each slave child, using violence to satisfy her desire to avenge the bodies of the children, whom she views as her own queer kin.

Daenerys' circular vengeance is presented as acceptable, if morally ambiguous, because she is shown to act on behalf of her queer kin rather than to empower herself, despite the fact that her violence was initially motivated by her own rage. Thinking about the mass murder after the fact, Daenerys questions whether her actions were just: "the anger was fierce and hot inside her when she gave the command; it made her feel like an avenging dragon. But later, when she passed the men dying on the posts, when she heard their moans and smelled their bowels and blood..." (SoS2 406). The "bowels and blood" are abject fluids, but the past tense reduces their unsettling effect. Daenerys's self-reflections, namely her awareness that she acted in "anger" only to find that this leads to a wordless sense of horror ("..."), also shifts her masculine violence into moral ambiguity. Her internal monologue and her persistent justification are perhaps the most visible critique of her actions: she says "*It was just. It was. I did it for the children*" (SoS2 406), "*I made a horror just as great, but surely they deserved it. Harsh justice is still justice*" (SoS2 407), and "*whatever I do, all I make is death and horror*" (SoS2 409).

The lingering self-critique performs a double function. On the one hand, Daenerys's reference to "the children" justifies her actions by suggesting that she is acting to empower her community, even though she has a highly subjective view of who constitutes her community; she chooses to kill the Masters because of their social class rather than the individuals responsible. On the other hand, Daenerys demonstrates an evolving awareness that her violence was too brutal—from "*it was just. It was*" to "*all I make is death and horror*"—which shows a willingness to admit that she was wrong and to intervene in the repetitions of patriarchal violence and produce something different and superior. It is Daenerys's openness to adaptation and deeper awareness of the consequences of her violence for her community that tips her violence into ambivalence rather than monstrosity. Unlike Cersei, who acts in her own interests, Daenerys finds the brief indulgence of her own violent desires distasteful. In this case Daenerys's individualistic revenge happens to be targeted at those who would otherwise harm her kin, much like Arya, but because she has conquered Meereen the Masters no longer pose an active threat to them. For this reason Daenerys's violence is less successful, as demonstrated by her self-critique. While her quest is long and fraught, readers are constantly invited to ask whether violence is just, and whom justice serves. Daenerys's violence

resists both the naturalisation of violence and the binaries in which feminine subjects are always and inevitably the subjects, rather than the perpetrators, of violence.

In *Game of Thrones* Daenerys's narrative has moved considerably past where it ends in *A Dance with Dragons*, adding a scene wherein she enacts violence on a large group of powerful men and, like Arya, is presented as heroic. "Book of the Stranger" sees Daenerys imprisoned by the Dothraki Khals (male tribe leaders) after they find her alone in the middle of the Dothraki Sea, a grassy inland region in Essos. Daenerys knows Dothraki customs because she was married to a Khal, Drogo, at the beginning of the series, making her a Khaleesi (wife of the tribe leader). She uses her knowledge of Dothraki cultural practices to save herself from being raped and enslaved on sight, reminding the men that she is a Khaleesi. According to Dothraki custom, Khaleesi become Dosh Kaleen after their Khals die, where they live in Vaes Dothrak, the Dothraki holy city, and are guaranteed safety for life even as they are segregated from the community. Daenerys escapes this fate in *A Game of Thrones*/season one after Khal Drogo dies, but now that she has been found the Khals meet to discuss her future, that is, whether she will be gang raped for her insolence, be sold into slavery, or a combination of these. In short, gender is emphasised and the men's patriarchal attitudes are highlighted. The situation shares many resonances with Cersei's planned trial in season six, where her future is similarly to be judged by a patriarchal institution. Yet both women refuse to be judged. Daenerys interrupts the men, after which she recounts the last time she was in Vaes Dothrak before telling them in Dothraki, "you are not fit to lead the Dothraki. But I am" (S6E4). When the men refuse her, she says, "you're not going to serve. You're going to die" and pushes over the torches that light the room, trapping them in an inferno.

The destruction of the men in Vaes Dothrak is highly symbolic: Lindsey Mantoan (2018, 90) argues that Daenerys "sets the temple on fire, burning not only the specific men who threatened her, but also the structures and symbols of male dominance and patriarchal rule that had governed the Dothraki." The same is true of Cersei's terrorism in King's Landing: she murders the people who condemned her as well as the structure—the church—that legitimised them. The key difference is whether the women were using patriarchal violence, that is, whether they acted on behalf of their community or their own ends. Cersei is explicitly shown to smile as she watches the city fall, suggesting that the violence is fulfilling her own personal desire for revenge. This individualistic motivation is emphasised in shots showing innocent bystanders being killed by falling rubble, showing that Cersei did not think of anyone but her own safety and that of her immediate family

when planning the attack (S6E10). In contrast, Daenerys is not motivated by her own emotions but a logical realisation that the Dothraki need to be led by a single person, as is implied when she tells the Khals that they are not fit for this task. In other words, her violence is not patriarchal because it intervenes in patriarchal repetition and enables the community. She believes that the patriarchal culture is not serving the Dothraki because it does not allow them to adapt to change (which conveniently means aiding her as she travels to Westeros). As in Arya's destruction of House Frey, and unlike Daenerys's murder of the Masters, her violence is successful because it is used to aid her kin. This difference is what separates Daenerys's violence from Cersei's, showing how the latter must be (re)imagined for it to become acceptable in the Martinverse.

After the fire starts every khalasar, or Dothraki tribe, comes to see the building, and soon thereafter Daenerys emerges from the temple naked, with the inferno behind her. The Dothraki bow in awe, signalling their acknowledgement of her power. She has succeeded in using violence to unite them for the first time, making them an incredibly powerful group in Essos as well as a stronger weapon for her to use in her quest to reclaim the Iron Throne. The people of colour bowing to a white character rings of a "white saviour" narrative also evident in previous seasons. The most discussed example is the infamous "Mhysa" scene in the season three finale (S3E10 "Mhysa"). Writing on the episode, Mantoan (2018) points out that "Dany has been worshipped, literally, by the brown slaves she has emancipated, and their deification of this white savior figure has seeped into the fandom." The exact same racial dynamic takes place in "Book of the Stranger": Daenerys uses violence to overthrow patriarchal structures and to empower the Dothraki by uniting them, but in doing so she reinforces the existing racial hierarchy. In acting on behalf of her community, she effectively colonises the Dothraki by assuming that she knows what is best for them. Audiences are encouraged to focus on the former rather than the latter, and the violence becomes heroic rather than horrifying, even as ambiguity remains.

Daenerys's mass-murder at the temple is incredibly violent, and yet there is almost no abject imagery to speak of. It bears mentioning that the violence is perpetrated in a dark, cavernous room—as in Arya's case—that may evoke the monstrous womb, but this suggestion is fleeting. No blood is present and no corpses or burning bodies are shown onscreen. The only moment that disrupts order is that when Daenerys steps out of the temple unscathed because of her magically fire retardant body. However, it is the maintenance of Daenerys's bodily borders under incredible duress

that is unsettling—not a typical moment of abjection, and one that is smoothed over by the music, the sweeping song “Fire and Blood” investing the scene with a triumphant and heroic tone.

While Daenerys’s violence in Essos is a queer restaging of Cersei’s that pushes it in a new direction, when Daenerys returns to Westeros and her violence becomes intelligible as sovereign violence, it can be viewed as a queer restaging of Eddard’s actions at the start of the series. As I note in chapter three, Eddard’s power as a sovereign is related to the phallus: his sovereign violence is positioned as a means of re-asserting his phallic power because his sword is emphasised as a phallic symbol. The sword is described at length by Bran in the novel, and in *Game of Thrones* the pommel is visible in multiple shots of Eddard, where its angle is suggestive of an erect penis. Daenerys repeats and re-makes the connection between the phallus and sovereign violence through her dragon. Speaking to the captives she has taken after the battle at Casterly Rock, Daenerys steps up onto a boulder to be seen above the crowd of men, and as she does so, Drogon is visible in the background (fig. 39). The pair take up almost the entire bottom half of the frame, and the colour of Daenerys’s coat almost perfectly matches the colour of Drogon’s wing, making the two characters appear as one. Daenerys’s phallic power and her desire to maintain that power through sovereign violence are highlighted through these shots of Drogon, much like the shots of the sovereigns and their swords in chapter three. Similarly, Daenerys is marked as masculine through her clothing and costume: she wears a dark brown coat with accentuated fabric on the shoulders that makes her appear broader, she wears breeches, and her long silver hair is pulled back into a braid. Combined, these performative acts code Daenerys’s sovereign violence as queer and masculine, a duality that is likewise reflected in the ambivalent depiction of her violence. Daenerys tells the soldiers that they must “bend the knee and join me” or “refuse, and die” (S7E5 “Eastwatch”).

After Daenerys finishes speaking some men kneel, but when Drogon roars behind her, the vast majority also submit to her phallic prowess. Several men remain steadfast, including two named characters, the highborn patriarch Randyll Tarly and his heir Dickon. Daenerys speaks to Randyll about why he refuses to yield and afterwards she gestures to her blood riders, who seize him. Randyll has been established as a patriarchal and racist character in previous episodes/novels (S6E6/FfC 234): as in her murder of the Khals, the victim of her violence is written off as an antagonist with whom the viewer should not sympathise. Nonetheless, Daenerys’s Hand of the Queen, Tyrion, intercedes and suggests that Randyll be imprisoned or sent to the Night’s Watch.

When Daenerys refuses, Tyrion says, “your Grace... if you start beheading entire families—” to which Daenerys says, “I’m not beheading anyone” and Drogon roars (S7E5 “Eastwatch”).

Figure 39: Daenerys addresses defeated men after the battle at Casterly Rock, with Drogon in the background (S7E5 “Eastwatch”)



Tyrion’s mention of “beheading” makes the act intelligible as sovereign violence, discussed in chapter three as a cluster of promises relating to language, bodies, and power that serve to legitimise violence in relation to patriarchal law and the law of the land. Daenerys can be seen to make these promises materialise as she says, “Lord Randyll Tarly. Dickon Tarly. I, Daenerys of House Targaryen, First of my Name, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons, sentence you to die” (S7E5). Sovereign sentencing materialises in the same way that Butler (1993, 177) argues that gender does: Daenerys is “compelled to ‘cite’ the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject [...] thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm.” Daenerys cites previous acts of sovereign violence by phrasing her sentence in this way. And yet, where Eddard’s sovereign violence becomes grotesque as his bodily borders are disrupted, Daenerys’s is positioned as successful because there is almost no abjection: no blood or viscera are shown, and there are no corpses left behind.

Even though there is little abjection in this scene, Daenerys can withstand significant threats to her constitutive borders because she is already undone and remade through her embrace of the Other, her connection to her community, which allows her to act on their behalf. The only moment when the borders between life and death are disrupted is a medium shot of Randyll and Dickon burning in the flames, but they are barely distinguishable as human and the shot is only three

seconds long. The most unsettling thing about the scene is the music; an eerie string reprise of the House Targaryen theme, “Fire and Blood.” The song plays throughout, creating a sense of looming danger. Besides this unsettling tone, Daenerys’s sovereign violence is almost completely void of abjection despite the way her phallic dragon is emphasised, a significant contrast when compared with the other sovereigns I have examined, who are overwhelmed by the blurred boundaries between themselves, the criminals they execute, and the presence of blood and corpses. Daenerys’s successful restaging of sovereign violence indicates that this act is not necessarily destructive: when it is repeated in ways that separate it from patriarchal violence, such as when it is informed by a genuine care for the community, it can make the world a more livable place. There is considerable emphasis in the series—and this thesis—on unsuccessful repetitions of sovereign violence, but Daenerys’s success demonstrates that this practice is not inherently destructive; rather, the patriarchal structures that often inform often beget deformed repetitions. Patriarchal masculine discourses actively discourage connection to others, so patriarchal violence is likely to fail in fantasy fictions like the Martinverse, where caring for the community is one way of making violence successful.

Daenerys manipulates the weakness in the act of sovereign violence because she does not use a sword but a dragon; after she makes the sentence she pauses and then says simply, “*Dracarys*,” the High Valyrian word for fire (S7E5). Daenerys uses Drogon to execute the men, an act that effectively obliterates the patriarchal House Tully. There are strong resonances between this scene and Cersei’s destruction of the Sept of Baelor, as well as the scenes where Daenerys kills the Khals and Arya destroys House Frey. What makes Daenerys’s and Arya’s violence successful where Cersei’s fails is empowering others, which differentiates their violence from patriarchal violence. Daenerys wields the power of the phallus, but unlike Cersei, she uses it to help her kin rather than to further her own ends.

A key component of sovereign violence proves yet again to be logical rather than emotional motivation, even in its queer forms: Daenerys’s clear thinking allows her to critically assess what will be best for her community and this enables her to fulfil the promises of sovereign violence, unlike Robb, Theon, and Jon, who act on their own individualistic desires because their judgement is clouded by their feelings and their attachment to patriarchal structures. Because Daenerys is speaking to a large group of people—a fact that is emphasised as her dialogue is intercut with long shots from within the position of the crowd—it is implied that her sovereign violence is informed

by a logical decision about what will safeguard her kingdom, rather than an emotional one. Daenerys performs sovereign violence because she prioritises the needs of her community and this allows her to make an intellectual decision to use brutal justice, and this fulfilment of the act's promise is shown to be part of its success. Daenerys's sovereign violence is not patriarchal because it is borne out of her connection to others, which makes this act of sovereign violence more successful than earlier ones I have noted, even as it also contains ambiguity.

Daenerys's ongoing attempts to empower her community are tied to her restoration of order in Westeros through sovereign violence, another aspect of the act that is promised but rarely fulfilled. Indeed, Eddard and his sons cause more damage to the kingdom through their sovereign violence, losing political information and allies because of their inflexible morals. In contrast, Daenerys restores order: after Randyll and Dickon are executed, all of the men who remained standing (literally refusing to bend the knee) drop to the ground in awe and terror. Daenerys knows that this is not the ideal way to gain power over her people,⁴⁶ but it is effective in the short term. There are also potential long term benefits: Daenerys's murder of Randyll and Dickon means that she will not be contested by his bannermen, and unbeknownst to her at the time, it means that she will be able to formally acknowledge Randyll's other son and Daenerys's future ally, Sam Tarly, as the Lord and heir of Horn Hill if he chooses to leave the Night's Watch, thereby securing faith with the entire House. In other words, murdering Tarly and Dickon allows Daenerys to shore up a society where a son who performs a peaceful version of masculinity can be acknowledged because the patriarch is dead.

This necessarily brief exploration of violence, magic, queer subjectivities, and kinship has shown that, even when violence is restaged from a queer angle, its patriarchal forms lead to horror, whereas *working the weakness in the norm*' (Butler 1993, 181) by using violence to care for the community enables successful enactments that make the world more livable. Like the sovereigns I examine in chapter three and the disabled men I examine in chapter five, Varamyr insists upon repeating the patriarchal domination he learned from his mentor. He is faced with an onslaught of circular abjection, revealing him to be a part of the cycle of masculine violence regardless of his ability to magically spread his subjectivity, similarly to the sovereigns as well as the monstrous men I examine in chapter two. Like Ramsay and Gregor, Varamyr uses violence to dominate women and

⁴⁶ For example, in "Stormborn" Daenerys agrees with Tyrion when he reminds her that she has no desire to conquer with violence and be "queen of the ashes" (S7E2).

animals, but these are the exact same figures that later kill him. Daenerys's and Arya's violence reimagines Cersei's torture scenes and her destruction of the Sept of Baelor, showing that caring for others is key to making violence tolerable. Arya's gender and sex shift entirely as she learns to embrace the Other in a new way, magically donning the faces and bodies of other people and using these guises to destroy patriarchs, including Ser Meryn Trant and Walder Frey. And Daenerys is from the outset queer: a mother of dragons who uses this kinship with magical creatures in her efforts to "break the wheel" (S6E10 "The Winds of Winter"), which we may read as the pseudo-medieval patriarchy, killing patriarchs who refuse to change their ways so that she can forge a more enabling future for her community. Even when she appears to adopt patriarchal forms of violence by restaging Eddard's sovereign violence, she avoids reifying patriarchal structures because she uses violence to empower her queer kin, and this allows her to be successful where Eddard and his sons fail. Daenerys's relationship to the phallus is integral to all of my discussions of sovereign violence in chapter three, to my discussion of female masculinity and prosthetic swords/monsters in chapter five, and to her sovereign violence against Randyll and Dickon. In most of the executions in the Martinverse, including the one Daenerys performs and which echoes Eddard's, the act is carried out by the sword, whether wielded by the monarch or their representative, the sword being a symbol and expression of their phallic power. Daenerys maintains the presence of the phallic weapon, whiteness, masculinity, and the family lineage that comes with it by using her dragon to set the men alight, even as she challenges the need for maleness, the exclusion of femininity, and the able body. Drogon can be read as Daenerys's detachable phallus, the phallic weapon through which she enacts sovereign violence. Not only does Daenerys share a deep emotional connection with Drogon as his "mother" and the only human allowed to ride him, but she links herself to him biologically by continually referring to herself as "blood of the dragon."⁴⁷ This is made explicit in the television series as Daenerys's costumes slowly incorporate more charcoal, as I have noted, which is the colour of Drogon's scales as well as that of House Targaryen's banners. Daenerys contests the idea that subjectivity is stable and singular because her identity resides in multiple locations and is not corporeally bound. It is her embrace of the Other that allows her to gain access to the phallus and use it to perform sovereign violence, to use the norm's fragility against its originating aims. Where the desire for phallic power leads other rulers to become abject, it is Daenerys's willingness to

⁴⁷ In the novels their connection is also expressed through interior monologue. When Drogon is attacked in the fighting pits of Meereen in *A Dance with Dragons*, "Dany and Drogo screamed as one" (DwD 812) and she realises that Drogon "*is fire made flesh [...] and so am I*" (DwD 814, original emphasis).

transcend her constitutive borders that allows her to resist the negative connotations that come with becoming grotesque. Her violence is ambivalent because it confirms her phallic power while also challenging patriarchal structures that inform sovereign violence because, as a woman, Daenerys is more successful than any other sovereign in fulfilling the act's promises. Such success stems from the fact that Daenerys is acting for the good of her community. Like the disabled characters I have analysed, as well as Brienne of Tarth and Arya, Daenerys draws power from her connections to others, and uses them to forge a future that can sustain her kin. Even when masculinity is pushed to its limits of intelligibility, the Martinverse presents its relationship with violence as moral or immoral based on the way it bolsters or challenges existing power structures, which demonstrates that the fantasy genre's conventions are uniquely suited to a critical engagement with normative masculine discourses.

Daenerys's violence in particular highlights the fact that in the Martinverse, violence can be put to radically different uses. This ambivalence is also demonstrated in the ways that the series has been taken up in other arenas. Donald Trump (2018), President of the United States of America, tweeted a photo of himself overlaid with the phrase "Sanctions are Coming" in the *Game of Thrones* title typeface, to announce the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, a clear citation of the phrase "Winter is Coming," the House Stark words. More recently still, he issued a similar graphic with "The Wall is Coming" to promote the wall he plans to build at the border between the United States and Mexico (Trump 2019). Trump instrumentalises *Game of Thrones* to highlight his violent rejection of the Other, though his substitution of sanctions or a wall in place of winter inadvertently suggests that rejecting the Other is a destructive force. The statement from Trump draws on a prominent cultural association of masculinity and violence with white, male, able, cisgender bodies to threaten Iran or subaltern subjects seeking asylum.

But this co-option of the Martinverse does not exhaust the potential meanings of violence and masculinity for this series. Hence, the series is cited by Shangela, a drag queen in *RuPaul's Drag Race: All Stars*, to highlight the necessity of working with others: "Baby, if Daenerys is gonna conquer the seven kingdoms, she's going to need allies. Me and my dragons can't do it alone" (S3E2 "Divas Live"). The quote from Shangela, in referencing female characters who take on leadership roles and, in the Martinverse, thus engage in violent acts, challenge this association in linking violent "conquer[ing]" with other bodies: non-white, queer, female. The political concerns echo Shangela's

personal concerns in the drag competition: in relation to the other contestants, Shangela's individual embodiment and kinship connections with other people and ideas are privileged.

Both Shangela's and Trump's references to the Martinverse are examples of the series' significance and the radically different ways it is being taken up by its audiences. Shangela and Trump see the series' violence as simple, but as I have demonstrated, it is complex in its relation to gender and power. Neither monstrosity nor masculinity nor violence are inherently negative in and of themselves. Despite the crisis rhetoric that circulates around contemporary manhood, masculinity itself is not a problem: rather, it is the ways in which it interacts with violence, power, affect, and kinship that directs its popular cultural representations into being positive, negative, or somewhere in between. The technology of the fantasy genre, especially magic, provides a unique space for reimaging alternative masculinities and queer kinships that negotiate, refuse, or work the weaknesses in patriarchal logics of reproduction and repetition that maintain a lack of opportunity for certain subjects unable to access these privileged power dynamics.

Because the fantasy genre's conventions often work in ways that encourage a divergence from normative masculinity, it is an ideal place for masculinity scholars to interrogate alternative versions of manhood. As the field's major theoretical frameworks have changed their focus from dominant masculine discourses to those that are divergent, it is useful to find other models of non-normative masculinity and to trace their similarities and differences. Fantasy fiction offers a textual site where the patriarchal law comes into conflict with another law, genre, with the result that violence, emotion, bodies, and kinship are often contested. The ambivalence at the heart of postmodern fantasy in particular is useful for masculinity studies, as the field's focus on sociology has prevented it from conceptualising the (mis)use of ambiguity.

Such ambiguity is key to the fantasy genre's status as a unique site for the study of masculinity within cultural texts, including as those texts proliferate through fan art and fiction and online forums as fans of the series negotiate their own performances of gender in relation to the models that the Martinverse and other popular works present. As the first major study of masculinity in contemporary fantasy fiction, this thesis has emphasised the ideological complexity of violence in such enactments. While male characters make up over 70% of violent deaths in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* (Lystad and Brown 2018), connection to others proves to be the only magic strong enough to see characters past the winds of winter and into the rebirth that spring promises.

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