CORE
Metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
Provided by Trepo - Institutional Repository of Tampere University

"Forgive me for all I have done and all I must do" – Portrayals of Negative Motherhood in George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings* and *A Storm of Swords*

Aino Tegelman
University of Tampere
School of Language, Translation, and Literary Studies
English Philology
Pro Gradu Thesis
Spring 2013

Tampereen yliopisto
Kieli-, käännös- ja kirjallisuustieteiden laitos
TEGELMAN, AINO: "Forgive me for all I have done and all I must do" – Portrayals of Negative Motherhood in George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings* and *A Storm of Swords*

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 85 sivua + lähdeluettelo

Englantilainen filologia

Toukokuu 2013

Tämän pro gradu -tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia negatiivista äitiyttä George R. R. Martinin fantasiakirjasarjassa A Song of Ice and Fire. Tutkimuksen kohteena ovat sarjan kolme ensimmäistä osaa A Game of Thrones, A Clash of Kings sekä A Storm of Swords. Tutkimuksen aiheena ovat teoksissa esiintyvät äitihahmot, sekä näiden kuvaus vallankäyttäjinä sekä poliittisella että yksityisellä tasolla. Tutkimuksen tutkitaan äitiyden kuvausta monitahoisena aiheena genrelleen epätyypillisen fantasiateoksen kehyksessä. Tämän avulla tutkimus pyrkii esittämään suhtautumista äitiyteen nykypäivän populaarikirjallisuudessa.

Tutkimuksessa sovelletaan feminististä teoriaa fantasiakirjallisuuden kritiikin, feministisen äitiyden sekä vallan käsitteiden osalta. Tutkimuksessa perehdytään myös nais- ja äitihahmojen kuvaukseen fantasiakirjallisuudessa. Negatiivista äitiyttä tutkitaan psykoanalyysin sekä kirjallisuuden historian kautta.

Tutkimuksen keskeinen pääväite on, että Martinin kirjoissa esiintyvät äitihahmot toteuttavat kirjallisuuden perinteestä tuttua käsitystä negatiivisesta äitiydestä, vaikka ne haastavat samanaikaisesti fantasiakirjallisuuden stereotypioita. Negatiivinen äitiys ilmenee kirjoissa psynoanalyyttisellä sekä yhteiskunnallisella tasolla. Vaikka äitiyttä kuvataan yksilöllisen olemassaolon sekä aktiivisen toimijuuden kautta, niihin yhdistyy myös äitiyden kuvauksen monimutkaisuus ja ristiriitaisuus. Tutkimuksen loppupäätelmänä voi pitää hahmojen tekojen sekä niiden seurausten tukevan mallia, jonka mukaan aktiivinen ja itsenäinen äitiys rikkoo väistämättä äitiyden perimmäistä luonnetta.

Asiasanat: fantasia, fantasiakirjallisuus, feminismi, äitiys, George R. R. Martin, A Song of Ice and Fire

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Fantasy fiction, femininity and motherhood 5

2.1. Representing women 5

2.1.1. The development of female characters in fantasy fiction 6

2.1.2. Fantasy fiction and feminist theory; power and gender 13

2.2. The many faces of mothers 19

2.2.1. Recurring themes regarding mothers in high fantasy vs children's/young adult fantasy 21

2.2.2. Negative motherhood in literature 25

3. Motherhood and power in the public sphere of Westeros 34

3.1. "What avails statecraft against the love of a mother for the sweet fruit of her womb?" Maternal motivations 35

3.2. "Would you condemn me too, and call it mother's madness?" Negative repercussions 47

4. Motherhood in the private sphere of Westeros 57

4.1. "The Mother gives the gift of life, and watches over every wife." The fairy tale syndrome and monstrous mothers 58

4.2. "It would not trouble me if the boy was wild, Ned. You don't know him as I do." The failure to mother 70

5. Conclusion 83

Works Cited 86

1. Introduction

In my pro gradu thesis I am going to study the first three volumes of American author George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series regarding their portrayal of mother characters who employ power on political and private spheres, as well as the negative repercussions therein. By analyzing these three novels, *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1998) and *A Storm of Swords* (2000) (from here on to be referred to as *GOT*, *COK* and *SOS*), I will argue that Martin both transgresses traditional high fantasy narratives but also employs other stereotypes found in general literature regarding motherhood and female power, often negative in tone. My thesis will thus serve to demonstrate the complicated nature of motherhood and maternal power not only in fantasy fiction, but popular literature in general.

George R. R. Martin (1948–) is an award-winning American author of science fiction and fantasy, who has been publishing novels professionally since 1977. His most notable work, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is a high fantasy[1] saga whose first novel was published in 1996 and its most recent installment in 2011. The series currently totals at five volumes, and was adapted into a successful on-going TV show for HBO in 2011. Although Martin's work follows in the footsteps of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, his success among readers and critics alike implies a cross-over appeal to those who do not typically favour narratives of this fantasy subgenre. While such fiction has proven popular with readers both young and old, its critical value has often been called into question: for example, upon his review on high fantasy author Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* (2009), *New York Times* reviewer Michael Agger commented that "[p]erhaps a fantasy novel meant for adults can't help being a strange mess of effects . . . sounds like fun, but aren't we a little old for this?" (Agger, 2009) This aptly describes the attitude towards high fantasy aimed at adult readers, which expands upon the concerns of editor Frances Sinclair in *Fantasy Fiction* (2008) that not only

[1] 'High fantasy', also sometimes called 'epic fantasy', is often used to refer to post-Tolkien sword-and-sorcery fantasy, and I have chosen to use this term throughout the thesis to differentiate Martin's work from the abundance of novels of fantastic nature.

has fantasy been "regarded as a poor relation to other literature," but also "dismissed or regarded suspiciously as escapism not needed in a real world" (3–4).

However, to simply disregard both fantasy and high fantasy as juvenile or irrelevant is to also overlook its possibilities of generating social commentary. Critics like Anne Cranny-Francis (1990) and Christine Mains (2009) use a term called 'secondary world fantasy', which refers to a form of writing where "the writer textually constructs another world which is implicitly and sometimes explicitly a comment on the writer's own society" (Mains, 77). These elements are clearly present in Martin's writing: although his work derives from the post-Tolkien tradition abundant with knights, dragons, and magic, it also draws close parallels with our own world, directly borrowing from European history such as the War of the Roses.[2] Moreover, Martin's work is laden with socio-political themes such as those of power, gender politics, and identity, which make his work ripe for analysis; of these, I have chosen to focus on his representations of motherhood, which encompasses both the private sphere (individual) as well as the public sphere (institutional).

The first three novels revolve around the fictional kingdom of Westeros, which resembles Medieval Europe with competing nations and nobility. What originally begins as the story of one such family, House Stark, soon expands into a multifaceted, complicated plot about political liaisons and treachery. The narrative consists of viewpoint chapters, in which Martin advances the story through various characters. In terms of high fantasy tradition, these feature a surprising combination of unexpected narrators, such as children, mothers, and even characters normally cast as villains. This provides a complex array of conflicting interests and a distortion of the traditional values of good and evil, which are vital for delving into the messy, exhausting political and personal affairs of the rulers of Westeros, most of whom are savagely fighting for power under a civilized pretense. In these battles, both physical and mental, relations of kinship often play a

[2] In an interview conducted by film magazine *Empire*'s online webchat, Martin noted that "[A]lthough I've drawn on many parts of the history, the War of the Roses is probably the one my story is closest to." (Empire Online, 2012)

pivotal role; the responsibilities and repercussions of the family unit thus construct the very core of the narrative.

"The use and abuse of power is a constant theme of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*," writes Caroline Spector in her essay, "Power and Feminism in Westeros" (169). Indeed, the choice to tell the story through noble men and women shifts the focus to the foundations of the societal structure. For this reason, many actions intended as private bear wider consequences: power is not, therefore, a black and white matter of political influence, but instead the act of people using their positions for personal gain. One of the recurring themes in the series touches upon the idea of political reform, which rarely yields expected results; the idea of "reform" can also be applied to several individual characters, who struggle to improve their conditions yet repeatedly suffer negative consequences. Among these characters, Martin introduces a number of mothers: as I will point out in my theory chapters, mothers are unusual protagonists in high fantasy stories, which makes *A Song of Ice and Fire* a curious exception in providing mothers with agency and individual ambition. However, the manner in which these characters encounter resistance and failure as both mothers and wielders of authority reveals a pathway into more traditional stereotypes of motherhood and female power, which provides the base for my analysis. As such, I will look beyond the weight of Martin's portrayals of motherhood against the backdrop of high fantasy tradition, and also juxtapose them with a more historical outlook found in literature, psychoanalysis and feminist theory. Given that the history of fantasy itself is heavily rooted in sexism (Helford, 2005, 709), for the purposes of this study it is worth surveying mothers not only from a parental but also female perspective.

Not many studies have been written on Martin's work yet, given its recent publication history and status as an unfinished work. I have therefore decided to preface my study by researching the history of the fantasy genre and its depictions of female characters, to pave way for an introduction on how mothers have been approached in high fantasy. I will juxtapose these findings with theories on feminism in fantasy as well as power and gender, to discover latent

attitudes against women wielding political authority. In regards to the how we read mothers in fiction, I will also reference the history of negative motherhood, to help contextualize my analysis on the various ways in which Martin's mothers follow pre-existing traditions of representing motherhood as a source of detriment. I have chosen to focus only on the first three novels of the series, mainly on the grounds that the initial trilogy comprises a set narrative body for one thirds of the saga. While there are a number of events regarding the same characters in later novels, which might understandably affect some of the analysis, I will deal with them mostly in footnotes when appropriate. The sheer volume of Martin's work calls for editing, and I have discovered the first three novels to suffice for a compact yet multifaceted basis for my thesis.

In the analysis I am going to study the way motherhood is represented in *GOT*, *COK* and *SOS* on institutional and individual levels, arguing that in both instances the narrative repeatedly portrays motherhood as a pervasively detrimental element. I will begin by elaborating on the role of mothers in their society, and the lengths to which one can gain power therein. Through numerous examples set by various characters, some major protagonists of the story, I aim to pinpoint patterns and themes which question the abilities of mothers in a position of power. Secondly, I will reflect on how active agency likewise affects them as individual mothers, the roles they adapt akin to various tropes found in literature, and finally the consequences of their methods of parenting. Through these examples, I aim to argue that while Martin subverts many genre tropes through his portrayal of mothers, the narrative nonetheless adheres to pre-existing stereotypes of motherhood as dismay and hindrance.

2. Fantasy fiction, femininity and motherhood

My theoretical approach will be divided in two subchapters according to thematic content. The first theory subchapter will focus on the representations and interpretations of femininity. In the first sub subchapter 2.1.1. I will present an overview of the development of female characters in fantasy fiction preceding Martin's work, through which I aim to illustrate how girls and women have not only featured but also evolved in fantasy fiction of the 20th and 21st century. As Martin's series features a noticeable number of girls and women as protagonists, this will help discern his work from the genre tradition. The second sub subchapter 2.1.2. will discuss theories on femininity and power, which I will later link to my analysis on Martin's mother characters and authority. I will also visit some of the more common feminist issues regarding criticism of fantasy fiction, to further contextualize the role of feminist themes in contemporary high fantasy and their effect on my interpretations of Martin's writing.

The second subchapter focuses more specifically on fictional mothers. I will first attempt to gauge a general view of how mothers have existed as characters in high fantasy in 2.2.1., and categorize some of the more prominent recurring themes therein. In order to compare and contrast, I will also employ some examples from children's and young adult fantasy to underline the absence of diversity within Martin's contemporaries. In 2.2.2. I will proceed to elaborate on the concept of negative motherhood in literature, which will later preface some of the more underlying themes in Martin's narrative. These two sub subchapters will therefore provide the theoretical basis for my analysis on the qualities of Martin's mother characters, as well as thematic background for conventions in literature regarding detrimental motherhood.

2.1. Representing women

Fantasy and science fiction are often coupled together as representatives of low-brow genre fiction

(or 'speculative fiction'[3]), yet my findings reveal that fantasy has generally garnered less research on the subject of female presentation. When it comes to high fantasy, even less research exists to explain the root of sexism I referred to in the introduction. In the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2005), Elyce Rae Helford quotes Helen Merrick over the idea that science fiction naturally excludes women due to its "predominantly masculine field which . . . [focuses] on science and technology" (709), yet no similar link is presented to account for the impression of fantasy as a traditionally male-dominated genre. One can certainly surmise that high fantasy, which so often emulates medieval Europe, is in particular laden with sexist attitudes simply because of its historical conventions; yet in order to avoid conjecture, in 2.1.1. I will theorize less on the reasons why these stereotypes have persisted, and instead focus more on factual examples of how femininity has been portrayed in fantasy and high fantasy over the years.

In 2.1.2. I will approach the subject of fantasy from the perspective of past and contemporary feminist theory. My goal is to explain some of the prevalent notions regarding gender and its representations within the fantasy genre. I will also address the question of Martin's gender as a potential influence on how his female characters may be analyzed from a feminist perspective. More importantly, as the apprehension and consequences of power are a theme which connects both Martin's work and a number of feminist objectives, I have included some of the most common arguments related to the topic of power wielded by women. These will become a key element in analyzing Martin's mother characters in both public and private spheres, i.e. connecting the political to the personal.

2.1.1. The development of female characters in fantasy fiction

Female authors such as Ursula Le Guin have long since written about the subversive qualities of fantasy in regards to the portrayal of the feminine: the nature of fantasy itself provides authors with

[3] Speculative fiction is used as an umbrella term for fantastical fiction such as science fiction, fantasy, horror, etc.

possibilities of transgressing the limitations of societies, often patriarchal, and the chance to establish worlds where female agency is not culturally limited (Cranny-Francis, 1990, 75–76). Critics like Cranny-Francis have noted that fantasy "scrutinizes the categories of the patriarchal real, revealing them to be arbitrary, shifting constructs: the subjugation of women is not a 'natural' characteristic, but an ideological process" (77). However, for a literary genre that has always thrived on the unlikely, the fantastic, and the unimaginable, the history of female characters in fantasy and high fantasy has rarely dabbled outside conventions of real life. Christine Mains and Deborah Kaplan have written extensive essays on the female characters of fantasy novels and short fiction in the 20th and 21st century in *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2009, ed. Robin Anne Reid), which I will use as my primary source for elaborating on their development.

The history of fantasy as a literary genre originates more or less from the 1950s and 1960s, with the emergence of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55). While a good number of fantastic fiction predates Tolkien's trilogy, the subsequent works have helped shape fantasy fiction as we understand it today. Since Tolkien's writing has been such an influence on the genre, his mode of medieval-inspired sword-and-sorcery fantasy is often considered a "template" for what is stereotypically understood as staples of the genre. Regardless, fantasy as a term is also applied to texts that predate Tolkien's, and the early half of the 20th century features a number of works which have since influenced the current conventions of fantasy, be it high fantasy or fantastic fiction in general. (Sinclair, 2008, 3)

According to Mains, fantasy gained a surge in readership around the first half of the twentieth century due to the rise of literacy, which created a new audience of regular readers in the United States and United Kingdom. Mains claims that many consider the first half of the century to be the "golden age" for pulp science fiction and fantasy, when a number of such stories were published in a niche manner in literary publications such as *The Strand Magazine* or *The New Yorker*. However, these authors did not gain a wide readership until what Mains calls "the post-Tolkien surge of interest in Secondary World fantasy" provided a general market for their stories.

(ix, 34) Nonetheless, Mains considers the narrative structures of the earlier works to have remained an influence on fantastic literature today (34).

Thus, it is not only Tolkien who has therefore influenced the way we read female characters in fantasy fiction. Mains mentions H. Rider Haggard (1856–1925) as one specific author whose legacy persists in the stereotypical depiction of "the heroic male warrior or adventurer and the dangerously exotic woman", from works such as *Ayesha, the Return of She* (1905). (ibid.) Other notable tropes of fantasy originating from this time period include the "*the puer eternus*, the eternal boy who never grows up, and the women who take care of him" (ibid., 35), perhaps most famously witnessed in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911). The stereotype of "adventuring males and bewitching females", on the other hand, persisted in the works of male authors during the majority of the early half of the 20th century, by adventure writers such as James Branch Cabell (1879–1958). *Jurgen, a Comedy of Justice* (1919) and *The Music Behind the Moon* (1926) are both examples of stories where "women are either wives or seductive witches" (36). Some male authors of the same era approached female characters with more diversity: David Garnett's *Lady into Fox* (1922) criticized marriage through the treatment of its titular character, while George Viereck and Paul Elridge's trilogy *The Wandering Jewess* (1930) features a female character striving towards "the liberation of women from the female curse of oppression", a quest which ultimately fails. John Erskine, meanwhile, would often play with the reversal of the general depictions of male and female characters by, for example, adapting ancient Greek myths into novels about domestic unhappiness (*The Private Life of Helen of Troy*, 1925) or making social commentary through modified fairy tales (*Cinderella's Daughter, and Other Sequels and Consequences*, 1930) (ibid., 37).

The aforementioned stories, while preceding and undoubtedly influencing genre fantasy depictions of women, nonetheless only represent the early stages of genre fantasy. Mains cites E.R. Eddison as one of the authors often considered involved with originating the genre along with his novel *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922), which falls under heroic fantasy and only features women in supporting roles. (36) Robert E. Howard, the "father of sword and sorcery", as he is often called

according to Mains, created nothing short of a masculine paragon in his Conan the Barbarian warrior stories, but even Conan's travels were not completely devoid of powerful females (such as the pirate queen Bélit and Valeria from "Queen of the Black Coast" in 1934 and "Red Nails" in 1936). The image of an Amazon, a strong female warrior, was popular among writers at this time, though Mains points out that "more often than not, these warrior women are the hero's companions (and usually come to a bad end) rather than the heroes themselves" (40). Polarizations continued rampant in the field during the 1940s, as both male and female authors became fascinated with the concepts of witchcraft and virginity, yet Mains differentiates between the chosen approach of authors based on their gender by commenting that "While male authors are more likely to depict the witch as a figure of evil, female authors describe the witch as empowered and liberated from her oppression". (42)

As the history of fantasy chronologically approaches the mid-1950s, Tolkien once again becomes the main focus of many scholars due to his immense impact on the genre. It is worth noting, though, that he had published *The Hobbit* as early as 1937, and that *The Lord of the Rings* itself was conceived in the interwar years. Some studies have presupposed that this is in part one of the main reasons Tolkien's work features so few notable female characters; his stories focus almost exclusively around a male band of heroes fighting male villains, which can be seen as a reflection of the all-male atmosphere of the World Wars.[4] The most prominent women in *The Lord of the Rings*, then, are mainly filling in for love interests or maternal aid-givers, such as the elf maid Arwen or elf queen Galadriel; even the warrior maiden Éowyn ultimately abandons the battlefield in order to wed a man. According to Mains, Tolkien's impact on genre fantasy also "meant cementing these limited roles for female characters for many of Tolkien's imitators" (43), which is also why Tolkien's influence regarding women must not be understated.

[4] "[Tolkien] ... left for the front in the war against France —World War I. Fighting in the trenches and seeing his best friends die, Tolkien was understandably marked by the war, which is at the core of *The Lord of the Rings* — the war for the One Ring" (Beahm, 205).

The consequent portrayals of exceptional females are more anecdotal than anything. Mains mentions T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* from 1958, a collection of novellas featuring both stereotypical seductresses and more versatile female characters, with narration that aims to sympathize rather than objectify. (ibid.) Lloyd Alexander, who published his Chronicles of Prydain over the course of the 1960s, featured some varied female characters within his fantasy worlds. Another noteworthy author in this regard in Mains's opinion is C.S. Lewis, whose *Till We Have Faces* (1956) and the Narnia Chronicles may be slightly inconsistent yet generally more favourable towards varied female characterization. Even Lewis, however, succumbs to problematic portrayals, such as depicting the character of the White Witch as the proverbial Eve to Narnia's Garden of Eden, "taking on the familiar role of temptress and deceiver" (ibid., 43). Yet one cannot help but point out how C.S. Lewis's work, specifically the Narnia Chronicles, is widely considered to belong more to the field of children's literature; this would seem to further strengthen the belief that multifaceted female characters are, more often than not, restricted to this particular field of writing rather than serious, 'adult' fantasy. I will briefly return to mothers in children's literature anew in 2.2.1.

Deborah Kaplan points out that female characters have always had more options for exposure in children's fantasy literature as opposed to adult fantasy literature, given that "the post-Tolkien epic fantasy, so frequently lacking in any strong female characters at all, has never been a mainstay of fantasy for young readers" (2009, 270). Many of the elements we now consider to be children's writing can be found in some of the fantastic writing of the early 20th century, when fantasy as a genre was not yet properly conventionalized nor geared for a specific audience. Mains brings up the example of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) by L. Frank Baum, later turned into a multi-part series, which features not only a female protagonist but more notably "an adventuring female hero" (35). Today, we would place *The Wizard of Oz* among children's literature similar to the Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* series, published in the 1950s, another female writer in the 1940s and '50s whose works were aimed towards children, yet which also loosely fit under the category of

fantasy. Mains considers these stories to feature "many adventuring girls with whom to identify", such as Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* (1945). (35)

Female protagonists have thus theoretically existed within the fantasy tradition as early as the beginning of the 20th century. However, according to my findings, the influence of such portrayals on the post-Tolkien interpretation of genre fantasy has remained limited at best; therefore, it is problematic to consider their position in regards to the portrayal of women in fantasy, and I have only included their presence as an example of the complicated gender division within the genre. Fantasy, as a mode of writing, has certainly allowed female writers to pursue protagonists of their own gender, but they have done so largely in the confines of children's literature. As such, the examples of fantastic fiction for children cannot definitely be said to have any great bearing on high fantasy fiction in general.

Again, the distinction between fantasy as a post-Tolkien genre, and fantasy as a mode of writing with fantastic elements, is important to make; within the latter, even authors as notable as Virginia Woolf can be considered to have made contributions with *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), a story of time travel featuring a gender-switching main character. However, including such works in an attempt to gauge the female presence in genre fantasy is as misleading as to include children's literature, because they operate on a very different scope of audience. For the purposes of my thesis, I have thus chosen to mostly ignore such writers and novels in order to better reflect the conditions in which authors such as George R.R. Martin have originally conceived their own high fantasy stories.

The aforementioned examples of fantasy writers would easily suggest a strong masculine presence. This does not mean no women were involved in the process of shaping the genre, although according to Mains, during the first half of the century many of the female writers submitting stories to pulp magazines were more interested in science fiction than fantasy. She marks the emergence of the first female protagonist on the field of sword-and-sorcery through Catherine Lucille Moore's character Jirel of Joiry, debuting in 1934 in the story "The Black God's

Kiss" and earning a collection of her own, *Jirel of Joiry*, in 1969. Mains calls her a "female Conan", which can be construed as a commentary on the nature of the character save for her physical gender. (40) Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea trilogy (1968–74) is another point of reference, yet again debatable in regards to its target audience.[5] Its sequels, *Tehanu* (1990) and *The Other Wind* (2001), however, are specifically written for adults, and LeGuin has written a number of essays on feminism in fantasy fiction (on this, see Cranny-Francis, 1990).

In the decades following Tolkien's popularity, a great number of female authors again chose to write science fiction rather than fantasy, but the few who did also preferred secondary world fantasy (or high fantasy) wherein they could write women as warriors and wizards; some of the more notable authors to have made use of high fantasy in this manner are Patricia McKillip (*The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*, 1974), Mercedes Lackey (*Arrows of the Queen*, 1987) and Jane Yolen (*Sister Light, Sister Dark*, 1988). Lois McMaster Bujold's *Paladin of Souls* (2003) even features a middle-aged mother as a hero. (Mains, 64) Tamora Pierce's *The Song of the Lioness* series (1983–1988) may lean more towards young adult fantasy, but is nonetheless notable for her protagonist Alanna, who challenges traditional gender roles and "upsets the social structure of the world" by disguising as a boy knight (Kaplan, 271). Additionally, writers such as Robin McKinley and Sharon Shinn have portrayed female protagonists in their novels well into the 21st century, in both stand-alone novels such as *Chalice* (McKinley, 2008) and on-going series such as *The Twelve Houses* (Shinn, 2005–).

In conclusion, regardless of the potential subversive qualities of fantasy fiction, the genre has largely recycled similar tropes of femininity in the 20th and 21st century. Male high fantasy authors in particular appear to step outside the stereotypes established by J.R.R. Tolkien only with caution. Before fantasy was properly established as a genre, examples of diverse female characters were present mostly in children's fiction written by women. Likewise, multifaceted female

---

[5] The Earthsea trilogy is generally considered to fall under children's literature, although its themes appeal to an older readership as well.

characters have existed in high fantasy since the 1960s in the works of female authors, yet these have not attained similar exposure or popularity as their male counterparts. As the aforementioned studies have pointed out Tolkien's influence in shaping characterization stereotypes for high fantasy, it can be said that contemporary popular authors such as Martin are equally capable of influencing genre tradition and attitudes where many of the less well-known female writers may not.

2.1.2. Fantasy fiction and feminist theory; power and gender

In *Postmodern Feminist Fantasy* (2008), Joanne Benford quotes Rosemary Jackson on the subversiveness of fantasy, of the fight to "free itself from society's narratives" (1). The attempt to question the constructive nature of societies can, then, be considered a key aspect to all fantasy in general; as a derivative of the Greek word *fantasia*, the etymology of 'fantasy' refers to making another order of reality visible, to challenge what we would otherwise take for granted (íbid.). However, as Benford states,

> Fantasy shows the underside of realism, the things that are not dealt with, and therefore fantasy is not completely divorced from the real world. Fantasy writing produces something apparently new, but still comes from our world, and is produced in a social context. Fantasy needs to be aware of the historical context: it is, therefore, not universal, but relates to specific social conditions and therefore both utopias and dystopias become dated. (ibid.)

In other words, while fantasy may supposedly provide us with a means of escaping reality, its roots and subsequent content are always grounded in the social conditions they are conceived in. Moreover, according to Cranny-Francis, fantasy is capable of displaying the fragmented nature of what we perceive as real; this challenges us to rethink the conditions in more realistic texts as something supposedly unchanging, definite, or pertaining to an arbitrary idea of 'human nature' (1990, 76). For authors such as Martin, this offers a chance to examine the complexity of our own societies through the fantasy world he has created, by allowing the reader into the mindset of (female) characters bound by duties, restrictions and pressures that we, as ourselves, would

regularly not be forced to consider as senseless and/or even unfair.

According to Elyce Rae Helford, issues such as oppression and the social construction of gender are significant themes for employing feminism in both science fiction and fantasy (2005, 290). In general, it can be argued that genre fiction such as fantasy offers vehicles for feminist agendas, relating theory to practice. Within this field it is possible to construct worlds in which our cultural history bears no weight on women's role in the society, and instead recognizes female contributions, rejects sexism, "explores the diversity of women's desire and sexuality," as well as simply moves beyond the concept of gender altogether. Fantasy can, thus, be used as a means of advancing progressive social change. (291) Therefore, the concept of power and how it pertains to women remains a key element in discussing femininity; moreover, Martin's mother characters each play a societal role in the story as the daughters, wives, and widows of influential noblemen, and to separate them from their status would be impossible. As such, the narrative calls for a study on how power influences these characters, and how they influence power. To do this, I shall first preface my eventual analysis with a background on contemporary feminist attitudes regarding power and the nature of power and gender.

> The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. (Foucault, 1976, 93)

French philosopher Michel Foucault, one of the most influential theorists on the subject, specifically focused on the nature of power through its effects and control on knowledge. In the above quote he discusses the fluctuating qualities of power, which refer to it as an impermanent entity; in "The Subject and Power" (1982), Foucault further challenges the reader to consider power based on "'How', not in the sense of 'How does it manifest itself?' but 'By what means is it exercised?' and 'What happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?'" He argued that relationships of power by definition are not direct and immediate, but instead operate as counter-actions to either pre-existing or potential actions of others; moreover, "Power is tolerable

only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (1976, 86). Combined with the idea of power being more a question of governing individuals or groups, Foucault's views are relevant also in understanding why issues specifically concern matters of gender (in)equality.

As we move to define power in the decades following Foucault's influence, it quickly becomes apparent that the issue is still far from straightforward: in the *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender* (2002), Judith Worell combines both the dictionary definition from *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* and the views of scholars such as Belle Ragins and Eric Sundstrom to describe power as not only interpersonal (including "positions of ascendancy, ability to compel obedience, capability of acting or producing an effect, influence, prestige, and legal authority"), but also operating on "different levels: individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal" (848–849). In addition to this, she refers to Hilary M. Lips's *Women, Men, and Power* (1991), wherein it was argued that these levels often overlap (848).

If the concept of power can present itself as fragmented, methods of applying it in feminist theory are equally varied. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* argues that power is a "central concept for feminist theory" with a "rich variety of feminist work on [the] topic" (Allen, 2011). This suggests that power is particularly relevant for feminist discussion given how inherently tied it is to gender discrimination; therefore, what lies at the heart of these views is the understanding of gender as a social construction, which is employed to maintain differences of power among men and women (Worell, 819). In the late 1970s, sociologist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow wrote influential feminist work including notions on how the legal status of women may have greatly improved in the past century, but physical violence and discrimination remained an issue in the labor force and within the family (1978, 6). If we review more recent texts on the subject of gender discrimination, many of the same conditions still apply: negative repercussions such as exclusion, attitudes of motherhood as a hindrance, and even sexual harassment are but examples of the obstacles still faced by women in workplaces (Roscigno, 2007, 5). In the private spectrum,

gendered stereotypes often deem women to belong to, yet not provide for their homes (ibid, 188). All of the aforementioned issues deal with power in various levels by creating hierarchies between genders, which is why gendered use of power will ultimately always affect both the public as well as the private spheres of living.

One major issue regarding gender and power in particular stems from the effectiveness of power when viewed as legitimate: sociologist and anthropologist theorists such as Jessie Bernard and Michelle Rosaldo have claimed that when we contrast women's use of power with that of men, the latter is often viewed with more legitimacy. Worell argues that this evaluation "springs from and reinforces cultural notions that femininity and power are incongruous." (Worell, 849) The image of femininity and power becomes even more complex when approached from the perspective of duality: that there are two types of power, "power-over (domination) and power-to (personal empowerment)," as labeled by Janice Yoder and Arnold Kahn in 1992. This approach, on the other hand, has garnered criticism from Joan Griscom, who has pointed out that a duality of this sort emphasizes one type as good and the other as bad, in addition to defaulting power-over as a masculine trait and power-to as feminine. Worell therefore refers to Griscom's argument that "in daily life, domination and nurturance overlap in complex ways and cannot be clearly distinguished as bad or good." (ibid.) These ideas of dominance and nurturance as separate yet overlapping displays of power, as I will point out later in my analysis, will be relevant specifically when discussing female characters who not only possess a high societal status, but are also mothers.

Another noteworthy aspect of power comes in the form of thematic content. In 1982, Jean Baker Miller researched the fears among women regarding power; what emerged were "themes of selfishness, destructiveness, and abandonment, as well as concerns about inadequacy and loss of identity" (ibid.). Observations of this sort would appear to support the aforementioned notions of women's power as "illegitimate," where even women themselves are quick to associate corruptive elements to their usage of authority. If fantasy theoretically then provides the means of subverting stereotypes, yet is bound to societal conditions at the same time, observing the presence of recurring

themes in popular contemporary high fantasy literature might help offer us an idea of how prevalent such ideas about women and power remain to this day.

As 2.1.1. has already noted, high fantasy in particular is often viewed a limited and sexist field among the most popular of authors. It is true that regarding feminist critique, theorists have brought up the "hermeneutic suspicion" directed towards male authors as early as the 1970s (Eagleton, 1996, 226–227). This refers to the underlying assumption that the intentions and unconscious agendas of a male writer will always differ from those of a female author, and that the gender of the author will undeniably play a role in how their work is analyzed in terms of their portrayal of the feminine. However, with more recent notions such as those from the field of poststructuralist criticism,[6] the concept of interpreting an author solely on the grounds of their gender becomes partly outdated, and shifts my focus of analysis onto a more neutral ground: for example, in *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism* (1990), Laura Partridge and Elizabeth Langland draw attention to this dichotomy by pointing out the issue of labeling a male author misogynistic merely based on the images of women they have created in their work, calling for a study on the "tension between a mimetic and a discursive approach to gender in literature" (12). What this refers to is essentially the notion that in trying to emulate reality, we are bound to encounter generalized representations of both men and women alike, ones that may reinforce patriarchal stereotypes because of the manner in which fiction directly emulates reality in this aspect. The point Partridge and Langland argue is that images of men are "equally culture-bound", and that while "male is the privileged term in patriarchy, the images seem less restrictive" yet "are, nonetheless, confining" (ibid.). The aforementioned is relevant to my analysis given their argument that analyzing male writers through feminist themes is not based on the expectation of "*representing* what is not and never has been, but breaking down or dismantling the terms and

[6] The view poststructuralist feminism takes is that subjects like 'man' or 'woman' do not exist outside of discourse, and thus "no 'lived experiences' ... can be taken as authentic statements of what (marginalized) women really think, feel or want" (Hansen, 24).

forms that have preserved the status quo of two genders" (ibid., italics original).

For a more recent outlook on the issue, Joanne Benford claims that many feminist critics admit to there being differences to a text depending on whether it is written by a male or a female author, although the quality of the work is not relevant to defining those differences. In their opinion, these are derived mainly of social and cultural origin. While in many cultures there are no longer similar gender-specific limitations, the role of a woman can be, and to an extent still is, fixed to specific societal norms which render her opportunities to write seriously to a smaller scope as opposed to their male counterparts. (2008, 34) In other words, their narrowed options in regards to career and life choices have ultimately reflected certain undertones of their work, regardless of whether it has any bearing on the actual quality of it. Following that line of thought, Benford also considers fantasy writing as a means of "[breaking] the hold of patriarchy," which coincides with previously discussed ideas on fantasy's subversive qualities. Benford has even coined a term called 'wild-zone' to refer to a state of non-gender specific writing within fantasy fiction, one that can be accessed by and offers "infinite flexibility available to both genders" (ibid.), meaning she considers fantasy to allow for imaginative space which need not be specifically restricted or influenced by the gender of the author. (1)

Therefore, while I acknowledge the potential influences of Martin's gender and socio-cultural background on his work, I will attempt to analyze his work neutrally along the lines of Partridge and Langlang above. By presenting a number of female viewpoint characters, all of whom subjectively control the plot for the duration of their chapters, Martin's methods – uncommon to high fantasy in general – can be argued to reflect Benford's 'wild-zone'. It can thus be presupposed that he approaches his female characters with equal objectivity, and in my analysis chapters I will proceed to study the manner in which this objectivity is presented regarding mothers and the power they possess.

2.2. The many faces of mothers

If female characters in general struggle to gain agency or even proper exposure in fantasy, as discussed in 2.1.2., are mothers an even more marginalized category among them? Or are they featured within stories as more or less gender-neutral objects, with less agency than their independent female counterparts? According to Liz Felden in the *Greenwood Encyclopedia*, mothers in fantasy fiction exist both in a literal and figurative sense, the latter referring to abstract concepts such as Mother Earth, a familial place of security or sanctuary. Literal mothers, on the other hand, are approached with more ambivalence, representing both security and oppression alike. Equally dualistic for many feminist critics, the concept of motherhood can be construed as a symbol of "both limitation and empowerment" (2005, 537). Therefore, she considers motherhood to be generally celebrated in fantasy fiction, the evil side of which is represented through stepmothers and other similar figures of maternal authority (ibid.). For comparison, Gary Westfahl's article on fathers in the same encyclopedia features an array of qualities such as devotedness, caring, and absence among those displayed in fantasy fiction, with father figures as a recurring theme (288).

When looking further into mentions of motherhood in fantasy, it quickly becomes apparent that the source material often features works that are actually categorized as children's or young adult fantasy, even fairy tales. Most likely the reason for this lies in the origin of the word 'fantasy', which in broad terms can encompass a wide variety of works with fantastic themes, as I already discussed; likewise, as the readership and even content of fantasy can vary to a staggering degree, drawing direct parallels between each depiction of motherhood and those found in Martin's novels would quickly become misleading and unfocused. Therefore, I have independently researched some of the more popular works of high fantasy in the recent decades, and sought out recurring themes in the mother characters therein (assuming the characters are present at all). By limiting my research to high fantasy mothers I have attempted to gauge a more accurate portrayal of the genre preceding Martin's work.

However, in my research I also discovered that on numerous accounts, it is far from simple to draw direct lines in readership between young adult fantasy and high fantasy. Although Martin's work clearly falls on the more adult side of writing, given his recurring portrayals of adult themes and imagery, the writers I have selected as his contemporaries in high fantasy – often shelved right next to the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels in bookstores and libraries – are not necessarily as indistinguishable. As I contemplated on the issue of inclusion/exclusion regarding such works with a wide audience, it quickly became apparent that my limited findings on high fantasy mothers is best elaborated upon through the juxtaposition with material found in similar stories aimed at younger readers. Given the large amount of diverse examples of motherhood found in young adult fantasy alone, the sparseness and thematic stagnation in Martin's predecessors and contemporaries is a stark contrast, and comparable to my findings in 2.1.1. on the different approaches to female characters in fantasy and children's fantasy. Therefore it is possible to theorize that the lack of mother characters is directly proportionate to the limited amount of female characters in general.

Thus, I will first elaborate on mothers in fantasy fiction aimed at adults, where I will focus specifically on Martin's subgenre of high fantasy. Afterwards, I will give a brief look into how such characters have been treated in similar works of children's and young adult fantasy, pinpointing themes concerning motherhood that remain more or less absent in high fantasy. Through this I hope to establish the current trend of mother portrayals in high fantasy, which will also preface subchapter 4.1., wherein I will eventually argue that Martin's mother characters differ greatly from their predecessors in the genre.

In my second subchapter, I will introduce another literary stereotype: negative motherhood. This refers to the concept of 'bad mothers', a recurring phenomenon in literary works of all types. By introducing this stereotype, I aim to point out ways in which various aspects of motherhood are traditionally interpreted in a negative manner, which creates an important onset for the study of how we, as readers, approach characters like Martin's – or set expectations for them, even unconsciously. This will become one of the more pivotal keys to the analysis of Martin's work in subchapter 4.2.,

providing a background for the way we read mothers as characters in texts of all genres.

2.2.1. Recurring themes regarding mothers in high fantasy vs children's/young adult fantasy

The scarcity of mentions of motherhood, even among discussions of female characters in fantasy fiction, says perhaps more than any hypothetical study dedicated to the subject probably could. As discussed in 2.1.1., high fantasy, or fantasy aimed at a specifically adult readership in general, seldom presents pivotal female characters or even protagonists; the chances of those same characters also being mothers (or their narrative being linked to motherhood) appears to hover at an even lower rate. Given the action-packed, family-disoriented nature of many fantasy stories, this is not an entirely unreasonable conclusion to come to; yet, as one starts to ponder the ways in which an author of secondary worlds could theoretically subvert the demands of motherhood of real life, or simply instill situations where traditional motherhood does not pose boundaries for adventure, the explanations are less straightforward. George R.R. Martin's decision to include a number of active mothers within his primary set of characters, especially in a fantasy world that so closely parallels our own, would therefore suggest a notable departure in genre conventions.

However, the absence of mentions of high fantasy mothers within studies on fantasy does not directly mean there are no examples to be found. If only to construct broad generalizations on the state of those mothers in popular high fantasy fiction in the past decades, I have attempted to compile a short list of frequent themes I have discovered within some of the more commonly referenced titles, i.e. Martin's contemporaries and the authors who predate him. I have conducted this research by familiarizing myself with the works discussed; however, some of this familiarization has, due to time constraints, occurred on a more surface level, and therefore there is a margin of error over mistaken interpretations. Nonetheless, I have strived to only include examples which I have enough knowledge and confidence to use as background material.

As it happens, Martin is not entirely alone within his chosen genre by including mothers –

or as is usually more to the point, maternal figures taking the place of biological mothers. Among the most famous of such in high fantasy is Galadriel from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*, who serves as a beacon of comfort and hope for the adventurers throughout the novel. Galadriel's role is certainly very maternal, yet this is less so because she actually *is* a mother (and a grandmother). She rather functions through words of gentle wisdom bestowed on the main characters of the story, who themselves are unrelated to her. As is the case with Galadriel, many of the older women – sages, sorceresses, queens, etc. – in high fantasy may be biological mothers, yet their maternal care and insight are often directed towards the actual protagonist of the story. Their actual children are rarely of any great importance to the plot. Some of Tolkien's other female characters subsequently become mothers after the main events of the story, such as his more adventurous Éowyn, but this is not a trait which defines them either; motherhood is something that appears to fundamentally belong to the life cycle of a woman in most fantasy worlds, as an extension of their role as a wife, often occurring only after the adventure is over.

Some of the high fantasy mothers I have unearthed amidst the countless trilogies, sagas, and epics follow more or less in Tolkien's footsteps. Robert Jordan's massive *Wheel of Time* (1990–2013) series features a few noteworthy mothers in its set of minor characters, such as Morgase Trakand, a former queen. One of her children, daughter Elayne, is a main character in the series; in the second to last installment she is pregnant with the protagonist's twins, which in turn lessens her role in active adventuring. Jim Butcher's *Codex Alera* series (2004–2009) portrays a rather similar situation with Isana, a respected 'watercrafter' who is revealed to be the protagonist's mother, and Kitai, the protagonist's love interest who ultimately bears his child. The relevance of these characters is thus directly linked to the male protagonist, which would seem to mirror another recurring mode of writing mothers in high fantasy: subtle erasure. Authors of popular series such as Christopher Paolini (the *Inheritance Cycle*, 2002–2011) introduce male protagonists whose mothers have either died soon after childbirth or remained anonymous after unwillingly giving up their child. Robin Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* (1995–1997) is a notable exception to this trope, where

the protagonist's mother is revealed to be alive and in direct communication with her son; nonetheless, she exists as little more than a supporting character.

Although orphanhood is often used to highlight the adversities of main characters, motherhood has existed also as a vessel of tragedy. In Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's vast *Dragonlance* universe (1984–), not only does the character of Goldmoon lose a daughter and husband to the war, but series regular Tika Waylan also has five children later in the novels, two of whom die. The latter example is also connected to a trend in many series with several installments, which progress by embarking upon the adventures of the sons and daughters of the original protagonists. This naturally usually shelves the former female characters (now mothers of the second generation) in the background, save for the instances where they are re-visited to lament their children's endeavors. For comparison, the role of characters who become fathers in the same series (such as Tika's husband, Caramon) might lessen, yet not diminish altogether in terms of agency. In general, my research on the former titles has led me to conclude that while fatherhood might not exist as a prevalent theme in works of high fantasy any more than motherhood does, it does not limit men as characters due to the primary caregiver's role defaulting to women. Moreover, master-apprentice narratives are a staple in many stories about sword and sorcery, reflecting Westfahl's earlier notion about father figures in fantasy fiction.

The conclusion to draw from the majority of popular high fantasy novels is that examples of motherhood are scarce, and often limited in portrayal. What makes this curious is that when broaching over to the territory of children's and young adult fantasy, the examples quickly grow more frequent and diverse; the leap in audience from the works of Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman to writers such as Eoin Colfer may ultimately not be that lengthy, yet the complexity of mother-child relationships in his *Artemis Fowl* series (2001–2012) can hardly go unnoticed when compared to the *Dragonlance* universe. Where mothers of noblemen and fair maidens are rarely anything but kind, self-sacrificing and loving (thus adhering to Liz Felden's note about celebrating motherhood), the master thief Artemis Fowl's mother Angeline is a mentally unstable woman, with

symptoms of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. At the beginning of the series, she even dislikes Artemis calling her his mother because of her depression. Lyra Belacqua, the heroine of another popular young adult fantasy series, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995–2000), has an even more troubled relationship with her estranged mother. Mrs. Coulter, to whom Lyra finds out she is biologically related only halfway through the first book, approaches her daughter with a combination of ruthlessness and maternal instinct. While she is both capable of sacrificing Lyra and sacrificing herself *for* Lyra, to her daughter she remains a person to be feared and loathed for the majority of the series. While undeniably capable of coldhearted deeds, Mrs. Coulter is also seen clearly expressing her love for Lyra, but their mutual interaction is more reminiscent of a child's struggle for individual identity, thus rendering the mother inevitably monstrous in her eyes (see Kristeva in 2.2.2.).

It could be theorized that children's and young adult fantasy provides many examples of motherhood due to the younger audience's affinity to themes of parenting in general. However, this does not completely explain the lack of nuance found in high fantasy novels regarding mothers. To compare with another well-known fantasy series enjoyed by children and adults alike, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series even borrows from a different source of literary tradition altogether: according to Lucie Armitt, good and bad parenting is among one of its key themes, but she considers "the treatment of basic familiar structures in the series [to be] more typical of nineteenth century rather than contemporary fiction" (2005, 100). Armitt likens Harry's portrayal as an orphan boy brought up by surrogate parents to characters like Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist, and that Rowling thus treats motherhood in a valorized manner as opposed to the works of writers such as Tolkien (100). Nonetheless, Harry's self-sacrificing mother is not the only type of mother in the series: equally relevant examples come in the form of his best friend Ron's mother (familial and loving, yet critical and overbearing) as well as Harry's godfather Sirius's late mother, who is "her son's greatest enemy" (ibid., 107). Diana Wynne Jones, on the other hand, has authored several popular fantasy novels for children; according to Deborah Kaplan, her works include "a large

number of truly horrifying mothers," but that she "also provides a fair number of girls wrestling with what it means to be caregivers/babysitters/mother surrogates" (2009, 269–270).

After observing the manner in which motherhood is portrayed in various types of fantasy fiction, one of the more prominent questions one can draw from these findings is the concept of active motherhood posing issues for high fantasy narrative: is motherhood as an established identity a concept that is difficult to weave into stories organically, or is there no conflict or drama to be found for a character whose primary agency is prefaced by motherhood? Do high fantasy authors consider motherhood an obstacle for the narrative unless it directly relates to the character's growth as a person, through events such as the loss of a child or, alternatively, adopting and adapting to a child? I will attempt to contextualize some of these questions by discussing the history of negative motherhood in literature, to give background for possible origins of these issues.

2.2.2. Negative motherhood in literature

> I attempt to provide a theoretical account of what has unquestionably been true – that women have had primary responsibility for child care in families and outside of them; that women by and large want to mother, and get gratification from their mothering: and finally, that, with all the conflicts and contradictions, women have succeeded at mothering. (Chodorow, 1978, 7)

The above quote summarizes Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mother: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), a groundbreaking feminist study on mothering at its time. Chodorow's attempt was to challenge the social construction of parenting seen as inherently 'female', that "the contemporary reproduction of mothering" is conceived through psychological processes induced by social structures, and that mothering is "neither a product of biology nor of intentional role-training" (7). Many of the concepts in her work remain relevant to this day; in the past years, critics such as Andrea O'Reilly have written on the politics of mothering and how gender inequity persists in patriarchal motherhood (2008, 8). The urge to 'emancipate' mothers thus originates from the obligation to fill the profile of the 'good mother' in order to receive societal acceptance; by refusing to follow this pre-ordained script, women are regarded to be in need of

societal correction (10). The concept of feminist mothering thus relates to various ways of empowering mothers, and challenges customary approaches to motherhood as culturally constructed.

As O'Reilly argues, mothers are still subjected to the pressure of complying with a limited set of features, all of which supposedly define a good mother; among these, qualities such as altruism, selflessness and devotion remain frequently idealized (ibid.). But as there are a number of ways to characterize the ideal mother, there are likewise many ways to describe what constitutes a bad one: malevolence, selfishness, and neglect represent the antonyms of the aforementioned self-sacrificing ideal. Literature has always proved a valuable asset in enforcing these stereotypes: what Martin's mother characters are thus analyzed upon is a backdrop of decades, even centuries' worth of internalized images of what differentiates a good mother from an obscene, even monstrous one. Shaped by not only literature but other similar cultural works (including films and TV), the trope of the monstrous mother thus persists in various forms to highlight the differences between good and bad parenting on a more unconscious level than is at first apparent: it focuses on motherhood not only because of a mother's role as the primary caregiver,[7] but also as a means of controlling female sexuality and identity.

We might initially connect the idea of monstrous mothers primarily to science fiction and horror stories; Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) even features a speculative world wherein motherhood is a thing of repulsion (Felden, 2005, 537). However, the trope of negative, detrimental, or monstrous motherhood extends far beyond genre fiction and colloquial notions of the word 'monster'. Traditionally, theorists such as Foucault have described monstrosity as culturally defined, where the blending of two very distinct elements (such as two different sexes, individuals, or even realms) produces a thing of abnormal nature (Owens, 2009, 67); however, in

[7] According to John Bowlby's theory, babies identify with the primary caregiver between 6-8 weeks to 6-8 months; the person in question is usually the mother, yet any responsive, caring bond with an adult will suffice. Around 6-8 months most infants have formed 'true attachment' to this specific individual (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2010, 173-174).

1982, Bulgarian-French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's introduced the concept of *abjection*, through which she regarded "maternity, as a category of existence, [to be] always monstrous already" (ibid., 68). What this refers to is the idea that behind any culturally constructed notions of bad motherhood, there is an element of underlying, necessary need for each child not only to repel its mother, but to also brand her as monstrous in order to reconstruct itself (Kristeva, 1982, 2). To gain a multi-faceted understanding of the monstrous mother in fiction, we must therefore first understand the psychoanalytic background for the trope.

Kristeva's influential essay "Powers of Horror, an Essay on Abjection" (1982) maps through the various formations of the *abject* which, according to her, "is 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). What this refers to is the idea of a deeply unconscious simultaneous desire and rejection towards concepts which may not possess actual form or purpose, but instinctively repel us by "[disturbing] identity, system, order" (ibid.). For example, bodily waste and filth, even corpses do not signify death, but instead literally show us what we "permanently thrust aside in order to live" (3); originating from us and expelled from us, these natural processes do not "respect borders, positions, rules," and are thus impossible to understand or accept (3–4). Abjection thus functions as a means of self-preservation, to protect the self from the abject, which often exists in an indefinable part of the psyche as neither object nor subject (1–2).

One of the earliest confrontations with abjection, according to Kristeva, is the attempt to separate oneself from the maternal entity. This is done in order to establish one's individual self in a "violent, clumsy breaking away," necessitated by the fact that "the child can serve its mother as a token of her own authentication; there is, however, hardly any reason for her to serve as go-between for it to become autonomous and authentic in its turn" (13). In other words, the child must instinctively initiate its quest for independence. Kristeva argues that we perform various rites and rituals of defilement to prevent the child's identity from "sinking irretrievably into the mother,"

many of which originate from religion (64). Kristeva also draws from other known psychoanalysts, such as Sigmund Freud, as she describes the complicated relationship of motherhood and inherent monstrosity, including the relationship between a mother and her son in particular for representing the primal of all incest taboos (59).

What Kristeva thus describes is a state of inevitable rejection of the mother in order to gain a sense of autonomous self. Motherhood is therefore primarily monstrous only in the unconscious mind of the child striving for individuality. This is also paralleled in literature: the struggle for autonomous self has persisted in works of fiction since ancient history. The Greek legend features many literal female monsters such as the Sphinx, the Gorgon, and the Chimera, whom heroes must defeat before ascending to kingship and marriage. According to Jean-Joseph Goux, "the victory over the monster, a typical, universal exploit of countless mythological heroes, thus has the deep meaning of matricide" (1993, 26); by conquering the maternal element, the hero is thus eligible for autonomous success. To contrast this "natural" development, Goux particularly references the story of Oedipus, who causes the Sphinx to self-destruct by answering her riddle correctly: while this "frees the young man from his agonizing and abyssal attraction to the maternal dimension" (36), Oedipus also fails to commit successful matricide and thus represents "an incomplete and, as it were, involuted and atrophied sensitivity to the feminine" (39). The tradition of female monsters as adversaries to be defeated was later adapted into folk and fairy tales, such as the legend of Baba Yaga in the Slavic folklore. Evil stepmothers and cruel birth mothers are likewise a staple in fairy tales: *The Juniper Tree*, *Snow White*, and *Hansel and Gretel* are among many stories that feature abusive and malicious mother figures.[8] Additionally, a number of contemporary children's books reference monstrosity through abjection as narratives of independence: a prime example comes in the relationship of Lyra and Mrs. Coulter in *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000), where the experience

[8] According to scholars such as Heinz Rölleke and Marina Warner, the Brothers Grimm may have changed many of the mothers in *Children's and Household Tales* (1812-15), their collection of fairy tales, into stepmothers instead; this was done "in an effort to preserve ideals of German motherhood" (Lee, 2008, 638).

of the child is a vital factor in how the parent is portrayed. This type of narrative would certainly explain some of the persistence of the trope – or as Steven Bruhm writes, the violent nature of this emancipation means that "the mother is continually reinvented as monstrous but in a way the child incorporates as much as she/he abjects" (2002, 266).

However, while the concept of the monstrous mother may have existed in philosophy, psychoanalytic theory, and literature in this unconscious sense, what is more important to my study is its subsequent adaptation into a socio-cultural matter. What this refers to is understanding the monstrous mother as a tool of gender politics, instead of operating purely on a psychoanalytical level – in other words, the ingrained attitudes rejected by Chodorow and O'Reilly. According to O'Reilly, "a theory of feminist mothering begins with the recognition that mothers *and children* benefit when the mother lives her life, and practices mothering, from a position of agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy" (2008, 11, italics original); what this argument challenges is the notion of passive and self-sacrificing motherhood, which has persisted as pivotal themes in literature to enforce specific social sensibilities. Motherhood combined with agency is ultimately a question of power; critics such as Marilyn Francus have therefore criticized the manner in which "the traditional maternal narrative is largely a patriarchal fiction, designed at once to sustain the population and ensure the lines of inheritance, while fostering an agenda of maternal erasure that severely limits female power" (2003, 258).

Francus's work also comments on some of the issues in representing mothers as characters with an agenda: since as primary caregivers mothers "are able to withhold comfort, care, and food," there is theoretically something unsettling about narratives where matters such as self-preservation overcome maternal instinct. In Francus's opinion, this creates a paradox in the idea of the nurturing mother as an individual entity, since "for a mother to be acknowledged and represented as a character, she must violate the very definition of motherhood by manifesting some agency, desire, or will" (259). According to Francus, then, the mere inclusion of mothers as three-dimensional characters would seem to challenge the traditional norm of maternal passivity or erasure altogether.

Furthermore, the failure to comply with the requirement of subordination through motherhood "leads to marginalization" (274).

Early examples of fiction wherein agency is deemed detrimental to motherhood range from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) to Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857): the characters of Gertrude and the eponymous Emma share similarities in prioritizing their personal interests, particularly over motherhood. Of the two, Emma is a more direct portrayal of a frivolous, lusty woman, who regards traditional family life as dull and meaningless and engages in adulterous affairs. Gertrude's involvement in her husband's murder, supposed adultery and disregard of her son Hamlet is more ambiguous, yet critics such as T. S. Eliot have characterized the entire play as "the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son" (1920, 48), implying that Gertrude's death at the end of the story nonetheless symbolizes a ritual of self-sacrifice to gain redemption as a mother. Emma, on the other hand, fails to commit even suicide correctly, and thus cannot redeem herself in her final moments. For her, death becomes the ultimate marginalization for having lived a life in direct opposition to the social norm. Even after *Madame Bovary*, "commonplace maternal failure" remained a common theme for writers in the 18th-century (Francus, 259); in the light of this trend, Francus argues that

> The traditional narrative insists upon the containment of maternal sexual desire and will, which unchecked could destroy the existing social order through the production of adulterous and illegitimate offspring. Accordingly, women who produce legitimate children are valorized, for they symbolize a female fertility that has been appropriated by a male system of value; women who produce adulterous or illegitimate children – like [Defoe's] Moll Flanders, Roxana, and Swift's "breeders" – are stigmatized as lusty, headstrong, unnatural, and monstrous. (258)

The unnaturalness and monstrosity Francus refers to may originate from the same source as Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory, yet serves a very different purpose: instead of representing the autonomous struggle of a child regardless of age, the characters are stigmatized on a social level and forced into repentance by the society. While Francus regards narratives like Swift and Defoe's (which include extreme themes such as child abandonment and infanticide as social commentary) as transgressive to the tradition itself, she nonetheless views them in the same continuum of enforcing

the "criminalization of the autonomous mother" through negative repercussions:

> In other words, even as Swift and Defoe make the case for social change – for parental responsibility for children; for female authority to control their social and economic positions; and for a social system that provides options for distressed mothers other than starvation, crime and death – they also argue that mothers who thwart social order and expectations, even in dire circumstances, are monstrous. (274)

This presupposes another paradox in the discussion of the monstrous mother: while it is imperative to feature alternate depictions of motherhood in literature, at what point does the transgressive transform into yet another supporting block for that which it is attempting to subvert? Is it a matter of re-evaluating the monstrous, then being advised to avoid the monstrous nonetheless? Owens offers one explanation to this dilemma by differentiating the words *monstrosity* and *obscenity* from one another. According to him, the difference between the two can be described by the following: "Obscenity is too much of something; monstrosity is the *wrong thing* altogether" (73). Therefore, mothers who display too much of what we traditionally consider features of motherhood (love, care, protectiveness) are simply *obscene mothers*, as opposed to those who commit acts that go against the nature of motherhood completely (infanticide, abandonment). They, in turn, could be called *monstrous mothers* (ibid).

Ultimately, the concept of 'too much' is as culturally bound as it is arbitrary; literature can thus provide means of gauging general attitudes to defining obscenity. Explorations of this theme have surfaced in fiction in the 20th century particularly in horror fiction. While I began this chapter by explaining the difference between colloquially understood monstrosity and the history behind monstrous mothers, the two themes invariably interconnect in horror by eliciting reactions which partially originate from the unconscious psyche discussed by Kristeva, as well as the patriarchal narrative criticized by Francus. Cultural critic Barbara Creed has referenced Kristeva particularly regarding links between femininity and monstrosity in popular media. In *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) she argues that several horror films employ thematics similar to Kristeva's abjection by representing maternal figures as the "monstrous-feminine." Creed uses examples such as *Psycho*

(1960) and *Carrie* (1976)[9] to illustrate stories where mother characters "refuse to relinquish [their] hold on [their] child," thus "[preventing] it from taking up its proper place in relation to the symbolic", where the symbolic again refers to the child's eventual state of autonomy (12). Kristeva's theories on the improper and the unclean also become an important factor in Creed's studies, as she argues that more or less all horror texts "represent the monstrous-feminine in relation to Kristeva's notion of maternal authority and the mapping of the self's clean and proper body" in order to gauge reactions of "disgust and loathing" from the audience (13). As she specifically focuses on bodies and how they are interlinked with the maternal authority, I will address Creed's views on filth, maternity and horror anew in 4.1.

In conclusion, the history of monstrous motherhood could be said to exist in a junction of Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach and Foucault's theory of monstrosity as culturally defined. While themes of abjection may exist as 'necessary' components in children's literature to this day, negative portrayals of motherhood which are closely connected to socio-cultural circumstances have grown increasingly more frequent since the 18th and 19th century. Compared to earlier texts, these often served the intention of ideologically controlling female sexuality and lines of succession through notions of 'appropriate' motherhood in a more deliberate manner. In the 20th century, on the other hand, the psychoanalytic theory related to motherhood was adapted into stories of horror: the obscene mother, who goes beyond what is considered acceptable mothering, now co-exists in horror fiction alongside the literally monstrous one. For critics such as Creed, this has resulted in audiences further associating various features of femininity and motherhood with disgust. The concept of motherhood can thus elicit negative reactions on several overlapping levels simultaneously.

Since my analysis will mainly focus on the representations and consequences of power, for

[9] While Creed refers to film adaptations in her book, both were originally published as novels: by Robert Bloch (*Psycho*, 1959) and Stephen King (*Carrie*, 1974). The examples thus also work in literature to illustrate famous instances of monstrous maternity.

the purposes of my thesis I have chosen to approach motherhood in Martin's novels primarily through the idea of the obscene rather than the explicitly monstrous mother. Francus's notions of a paradox within the concept of mothers with agency equally presents a thematic base for the study of motherhood and individual power. To continue with the concept of negative repercussions and their inherent link with active mothers, the idea of "maternal failure" through child abandonment will also become prevalent later on in my analysis.

3. Motherhood and power in the public sphere of Westeros

In 2.1.2. I discussed power from a feminist perspective. The two important issues raised were concerned with perceptions of legitimacy over power wielded by women, as well as some of the fears women themselves have over their own use of power. In my first analysis chapter, I will approach the idea of power-over (Yoder and Kahn in 2.1.2.) by studying political power used by Martin's mother characters, in order to argue that their political and emotional agendas are inherently tied to one another in the novels through motherhood. I will also analyze the ways in which they consciously and unconsciously make use of their power for both personal and political gain, reflecting the fears of feminine power addressed in 2.1.2.

To preface my analysis, I will begin 3.1. by elaborating on the pre-existing power structures of Westeros, to explain the ways in which a mother can gain unusual amounts of authority even within its patriarchal society. I will continue by addressing recurring themes in the displays of political (or otherwise institutionally authoritative) power conducted by mothers. In conclusion, I will argue that the world of Westeros provides few opportunities of direct power, and the few seized by the mothers in the story are characterized by negative emotions even when concerning political decisions. Moreover, these decisions can inherently be traced back to their children, which suggests that the political is influenced by an element of motherhood.

In 3.2. I will proceed study the thematic repercussions of these actions. By illustrating the circumstances and results of mothers employing political power my aim is to show that in *GOT, COK* and *SOS* the consequences are generally negative, regardless of the motivations or intentions of the characters themselves; this I will again link to the idea of gender and the legitimacy of power, as well as the paradox of mothers with agency, as discussed in 2.2.2. The conclusion to draw from here is that such actions are often viewed as either misconduct, illegitimate, or inappropriately enabling, and that motherhood itself is inherently tied to these displays of power. This further stresses the complicated nature of motherhood and agency.

3.1. "What avails statecraft against the love of a mother for the sweet fruit of her womb?" Maternal motivations

> "Should you ever have a son, Sansa, beat him frequently so he learns to mind you. I only had the one boy and I hardly beat him at all. A lion is not a lap cat, I told him, and he gives me a 'tut-tut Mother'. There is entirely too much tut-tutting in this realm, if you ask me. All these kings would do a deal better if they would put down their swords and listen to their mothers." (Lady Olenna Redwyne in *SOS,* 84)

In Westeros, political reign has traditionally fallen only into the hands of men. This reflects a gender divide similar to real life agricultural history, or as the character of Aeron Greyjoy describes their world, "Men fish the sea, dig in the earth, and die. Women birth children in blood and pain, and die. Night follows day. The winds and tides remain. The islands are as our god made them" (*COK*, 159). While this statement makes the divide sound equally unrewarding for both genders, the underlying implication is that men provide for the family whereas women create it, as though this is simply nature's intention. Subsequently, the focus of male authority lies in governing, while influential women are almost without exception simply the product of their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters, thus reigning in the private sector of their families. Or, as Caroline Spector states in her essay on feminism in Westeros, female identity – and therefore any power therein – is "largely dependent on designations of male power – the rank, land holdings, and wealth of their fathers or husbands" (2012, 177). Although the vast majority of men inherit their position of authority through a line of succession in a similar manner, the key difference is that this power can also be usurped or otherwise achieved – yet only by other men, and generally through force. In Westeros, which becomes the primary setting for the first three novels, direct female rule is mostly unheard of.[10]

Regardless of any ingrained attitudes over the "natural" order of the gender divide, there are a number of female characters within *GOT*, *COK* and *SOS* who seek autonomous power, mainly to

[10] House Martell, the ruling house of Dorne, is a notable exception: according to their laws, a woman is as legitimate an heir as a man, and the current Dorne was founded by a warrior queen. However, the rest of Westeros do not share these views, and not many female lords have emerged from Dorne since. A civil war called "The Dance of Dragons" was also waged between Princess Rhaenyra and her brother some hundred years prior to the novels, yet this resulted in the rightful Queen to the Iron Throne being executed as a traitor.

determine their individual destinies as opposed to blindly accepting pre-set ones. For example, we meet the sensitive lady knight, Brienne of Tarth, who is ridiculed by her peers yet consistently overcomes adversaries in a world where a woman's most primary value is determined by rank and beauty, thus subsequent eligibility for marriage. Asha Greyjoy, the tough-as-nails daughter of a warlord from the Iron Isles, desires no husband save for her axe, but is well respected in her community. The illegitimate daughters of the prince of Dorne, 'Sand Snakes', possess tremememdous self-determination and options in their society, as per Dorne's more liberal approach to female independence. However, such instances are exceptional; they might unbalance the status quo within a smaller scope, but fail to make an impact on a wider, societal scale. Moreover, if we use Yoder and Kahn's idea of power-to, this type of autonomy is ultimately only enabled by men as well.[11] Female independence might thus be possible on individual, if rare accounts, but if we apply Yoder and Kahn's concept of power-over, the examples grow even fewer.

This is not to say there are no female characters in the three novels with political power akin to power-over. As discussed earlier, the story takes place primarily in the courts and highborn Houses, and therefore all of the mothers I have chosen to study in detail wield political authority of varying degrees. This authoritative stance is more complex than might at first glance seem apparent: inheritance plays a crucial role, as does marriage to the right, influential man. Depending on the husband, the wife may or may not gain a hand in political endeavors. This persuasion may range from seemingly innocent involvement, such as when Catelyn Stark as she convinces her husband to become the next King's Hand,[12] or more deliberate political scheming behind the scenes, such as House Tyrell's implied matriarchal rule.[13] As one of the most explicit examples, in *COK* these

---

[11] Beyond the great Wall in the North, separating Westeros from the icy realms beyond, the women among a tribe called wildlings live as 'spearwives', as capable of defending themselves as the men; yet they are outcasts to Westeros, looked down upon for their uncivilized ways.

[12] 'King's Hand' refers to a reigning King's second-in-command, his most trusted advisor and ally.

[13] The mother of Lord Tyrell is shown in *SOS* to plot behind his back with the aid of other women in the court, considering him an "oaf."

circumstances are present in the character of Melisandre, a priestess/sorceress, who is shown to gain control of an entire army through her initially innocent role as a mere advisor. For the most part, however, such influence is only granted to a woman who is not only the wife of a notable ruler, but the mother of his children as well – this guarantees her an ounce of independence should her husband pass away. However, unless one is widowed at a very late age, women of high status are expected to remarry.

What connects all of the mothers in Martin's Westeros at the beginning of *GOT* is thus the indirect nature of their political power: power-over through influence or reputation. However, although the highborn women differ from one another in how they view this opportunity, one recurring theme connects acts both selfish and noble: at the heart of even their wildest political endeavors lies the well-being of their children. As I have pointed out in my findings of high fantasy mothers in 2.2.1, maternal rulers, such as Tolkien's Galadriel, traditionally reign with pure intentions; what often characterizes kindhearted queens and mothers handing out sage advice is their maternal empathy, which we relate more to the idea of power-to. However, Spector considers the nature of power to be so inevitably corruptive, that even those women who manage to seize agency in Westeros ultimately "fall prey to the same potentially corrupting influences the men experience" (169). What this suggests is that in Martin's world, even maternal motivations are not synonymous with altruism – quite on the contrary, on many occasions they would even appear to cloud the judgment of the mother in question. As one of my main arguments lies in the inherent connection between motherhood and political power, I have divided notable instances of mothers employing this power into three of the most prevalent themes of motivation in *GOT*, *COK* and *SOS*: vengeance, fear, and pride.

The most glaring example of the corruption Spector refers to comes in the form of Cersei Lannister, Queen of Westeros, whom Spector calls "one of the most appalling, wicked, and morally bankrupt characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*" (181). As the only daughter of House Lannister, known for its wealth and influence in the kingdom, Cersei became Queen of Westeros through

marriage to Robert Baratheon. She is mother to three children: sons Joffrey and Tommen, and daughter Myrcella. She is beautiful, but above all "a mass of female rage," as Spector describes her (181); underestimated and restricted by her gender all her life, Cersei has grown up in the shadow of her twin brother Jaime. Her marriage, likewise, involved repeated physical abuse and rape. Unbeknownst to King Robert, though, all three of their children are actually sired by Cersei's twin; in regards to personal agency, Spector views this almost as an act of vengeful emancipation:

> Cersei strives to gain power any way she can. She sleeps with her twin brother and passes their children off as the heirs to the throne. In Westeros, as with many male-dominated societies, a man's power lies not just in himself but also in the line of sons he leaves behind. Cersei usurps the line of succession, substituting another man's child for Robert's own, an act that is both treason and the ultimate emasculation. The only sons who will sit on the Iron Throne after Robert dies are those of the queen Lannister's bloodline. That they are children by her twin implies a mirroring of herself in their creation, a startling statement of control and self-defined identity. (182)

Cersei's desire for power is thus embodied in her children: although theoretically indebted to the King for her political influence, this treason also renders Cersei symbolically autonomous. As the Queen, Cersei literally controls more power than any other female in Westeros, but only if she is not subdued by her abusive husband; to literally remove him from the equation, she arranges the King's death, in order to rule as Queen Regent until her firstborn, Joffrey, comes of age. Since many of her acts are committed behind the scenes, her character is easily regarded as manipulative and treacherous, thus deviant. However, as Spector points out, when compared to the men who have sat on the Iron Throne, Cersei's actions are not well out of the norm: "The history of the Iron Throne is one of brutality, murder, and manipulation, and Cersei is merely utilizing the standard toolset to achieve her aspirations of power." She goes on to describe this as a way of "[revealing] hypocrisy at the heart of Westerosi culture," given that where men who deploy such tactics are heralded, Cersei on the other hand is "judged negatively" by the other characters (182–183). At the same time, Spector is of the opinion that the character's shortcomings on a personal and ethical front are what ultimately prevent Cersei from gaining the power and respect she yearns for (171).

For a period of time, Cersei is the most influential person in all of Westeros, ruling as Queen

Regent in her son's stead. Slighted for her gender all her life, Cersei is of the firm opinion that she should have been born a man; her character is a bitter, ruthless, and vengeful example of internalized misogyny, where she both rejects her limitations but does not question their origin. Her calculated efforts at gaining power clearly differ from the traditional fantasy mother: unlike the trope of kind and emphatic queens I discussed in 2.2.1, her actions are largely fueled by a set of more selfish intentions instead. As such, this directly places her in the continuum of the "temptress and deceiver", as characterized by Christine Mains in regards to the White Witch in the Chronicles of Narnia (2009, 43): in other words, a villain. Therefore, while Cersei's life fundamentally revolves around her children, they largely exist to enable her other actions – her emancipation, her treason, her political safety. These, meanwhile, are primarily motivated by revenge, towards not only her husband but the whole society as well.

Compared to Cersei, the character of Catelyn Stark may seem like the complete opposite. With five children, Catelyn is content with her role as the lady of her household, House Stark. Married to the honourable and morally just Northern lord, Eddard Stark, Catelyn may at first glance appear to adhere to the other half of the fantasy wife and mother trope: even the House words of her parents, House Tully, spell "Family. Duty. Honour." Unlike Cersei, Catelyn does not aspire towards personal power, but is responsible for the upbringing of their children and noble in her duty as a highborn wife. Her character might easily become but another example of the subtle erasure I discussed in 2.2.1., where a lack of agency renders the mother virtually nonexistent in most high fantasy stories. However, Catelyn's character is far from a stagnant chess piece throughout the novels; more to the point, when spurred into action, the techniques she employs in her few conscious acts of power more than resemble those of Cersei's, in terms of being motivated by bitterness and revenge.

In her essay, "The Brutal Cost of Redemption in Westeros" (2012), Susan Vaught writes of Catelyn as follows:

> Catelyn Stark has many excellent qualities as a human being, including a loving

> nature, fierce loyalty, and keen intelligence. She also has difficulty forgiving, demonstrates a tendency to seek vengeance, and acts on impulse. When in an emotional state, Catelyn lashes out, without significant attention to the long-range consequences of her tantrums. She cannot see her own need for retribution, and never truly acknowledges her own faults, to herself or to anyone else. (94)

Catelyn and Cersei both seem to be driven by anger, manifesting itself in vengeance. However, what separates Catelyn from Cersei is that her use of political authority would probably remain latent and undiscovered, were it not for maternal instinct spurring her on when one of her children faces danger. To identify and punish the man behind the assassination attempt of her son, Catelyn embarks on an individual journey, armed with only a few trusted men. Where Cersei's authority is at its core dependant on the King and her father's wealth, Catelyn is equally politically influential only through status: as Lord Tully's daughter and the wife of Lord Stark, Catelyn is capable of commanding troops loyal to both her father and her husband in their stead. We witness this specifically in the scene where Catelyn suspects the dwarf Tyrion Lannister as the culprit of the attempted crime. Cornering him in a tavern by a chance encounter, she impulsively calls upon her bannermen to seize Tyrion:

> Tyrion Lannister sniggered. That was when Catelyn knew he was hers.
> "[Tyrion] came a guest into my house, and there conspired to murder my son, a boy of seven," she proclaimed to the room at large, pointing. Ser Rodrik moved to her side, his sword in hand.
> "In the name of King Robert and the good lords you serve, I call upon you to seize him and help me return him to Winterfell to await the king's justice." She did not know what was more satisfying: the sound of a dozen swords drawn as one or the look on Tyrion Lannister's face. (*GOT*, 283)

The above suggests that Catelyn draw a sense of accomplishment not only from her unexpected display of authority, but also from the "look on Tyrion Lannister's face," i.e. his surprise at its effects. However, her "success [is] not as complete as she might have liked" (*GOT*, 316), when in reality only few men react to her words without doubt.[14] This would further seem to imply that for all her positive qualities and insight, Catelyn's actions are viewed as unusual for her character, and

[14] "There were close to fifty in the common room by his rough count. Catelyn Stark's plea had roused a bare dozen; the others looked confused, or frightened, or sullen. Only two of the Freys had stirred, Tyrion noted, and they'd sat back down quick enough when their captain failed to move. He might have smiled if he'd dared" (*GOT*, 316).

that people are surprised to witness her directly take advantage of power for her own benefit. Juxtaposed with her image as a compassionate mother, there is a similar contrast to her character in *SOS*, where Catelyn and her son Robb are ambushed at his wedding. Catelyn, distraught, takes a mentally disabled boy as hostage; upon watching the assaulters murder Robb, she slits the innocent boy's throat in an act of desperate vengeance, knowing it will not bring her own son back. Her impulsiveness coupled with a naturally vengeful nature have their own negative consequences, which I will discuss in 3.2.; yet these incidents are prime examples of how more than one mother uses power on different levels as a tool for revenge, regardless of whether it is used offensively or defensively.

Besides vengeance, fear is what characterizes many of the authoritative actions taken by Martin's mothers. Catelyn's sister, Lysa Arryn, is the most notable character to base virtually all of her displays of power on fear, cultivating in outright paranoia. The vast majority of Lysa's political power is gained through marriage to Lord Arryn, head of House Arryn and former Hand to the King; when he dies, Lysa relocates herself and their six-year-old son, Robert, back to House Arryn's castle in the vale of Eyrie. Until Robert comes of age, Lysa rules the Eyrie in his stead, which mirrors Cersei's situation with her son Joffrey. There are several parallels between the way Cersei and Lysa rear their firstborns, which I will readdress in 4.2., but while Cersei uses her position of Queen Regent to wreck vengeance on those who have belittled her, Lysa isolates her court from the rest of the society. Prioritizing the safety of her son, she goes as far as to refuse any involvement in the struggle for the throne – including turning her sister Catelyn away when she pleads for support. In a strangely grotesque manner, Lysa's actions do adhere to the same Tully words that embody Catelyn ("Family. Duty. Honour."), except she does so by dedicating herself to her son, severing ties to her birth family in the process. Her fear and unsuitability for rule are brought up by Catelyn's uncle, as the two discuss Lysa's recent isolation, including her disdain towards marrying anew:

> ". . . it seems to me Lysa is only playing at courtship. She enjoys the sport, but I believe your sister intends to rule herself until the boy is old enough to be Lord of the Eyrie in truth as well as name."

> "A woman can rule as wisely as a man," Catelyn said.
> "The right woman can," her uncle said with a sideways glance. "Make no mistake, Cat. Lysa is not you."
> . . .
> ". . . Your sister is afraid, child, and the Lannisters are what she fears most. She ran to the Vale, stealing away from the Red Keep like a thief in the night, and all to snatch her son out of the lion's mouth; and now you have brought the lion to her door." (*GOT*, 354–355)

The conversation brings up two notable points, the first of being the rare acknowledgement of female rule, as non-existent as it is in Westeros save for special occasions. Even Lysa is expected to remarry, but it appears less so for traditional roles and more for Lysa's unsuitability for ruling in her son's stead. Their uncle appears to view Catelyn in a better light in this regard: this might imply that we, as readers, are meant to consider Catelyn as inherently different from characters like Cersei and Lysa, who do not follow in the tradition of "good" maternal rule. Secondly, their uncle attributes one of Lysa's biggest downfalls to her fears – fear of the Queen's family, fear of losing her son. Fear would, then, appear to be the main motivator behind Lysa's authoritative actions, even in the eyes of her relatives.

Although perhaps clouded by vengeance, an element of fear lies in the recesses of some of the actions of Catelyn Stark and Cersei Lannister as well. At the end of *COK*, Catelyn hears false news of the deaths of her two youngest sons back in Winterfell; at this point the Starks are at an open war with the Lannisters, and her son Robb, who has crowned himself "King in the North," has taken the Queen's brother Jaime Lannister captive. Given her earlier displays of impulsive power, most would expect Catelyn to avenge her sons by taking Jaime's life. Instead, she recognizes the threat her daughters are still in at King's Landing with the Queen, and secretly bargains with Jaime a safe return for her daughters in exchange for setting him free. Acting of her own accord, Catelyn is yet again impulsive upon finding herself in a position of power, yet this time she values the consequences, acting out of fear.

Cersei Lannister is, perhaps surprisingly, similar to her in this manner. If her children are a source of bizarre emancipation, they also pose an equal source of danger should the deception come

to light; it is implied that Cersei systematically uses her influence to have all of her late husband's bastard children murdered, should they pose any kind of threat to Joffrey. Likewise, when others plot to manipulate Cersei into making decisions in their favour, they do so by frightening her into submission by insinuating threat towards her other children:

> "How safe do you think Myrcella will be if King's Landing falls? Renly and Stannis will mount her head beside yours."
> And Cersei began to cry. Tyrion Lannister could not have been more astonished if Aegon the Conqueror himself had burst into the room, riding on a dragon and juggling lemon pies. He had not seen his sister weep since they were children together at Casterly Rock.
> . . .
> Cersei sniffed. "I should have been born a man. I would have no need of any of you then. None of this would have been allowed to happen. How could Jaime let himself be captured by that boy? And Father, I trusted in him, fool that I am, but where is he now that he's wanted? What is he doing?" (*COK*, 290–291)

Again, the above highlights two relevant things: when Tyrion attempts to coax Cersei into marrying her daughter to another House to gain allies, she shocks him by being distraught to tears. Ultimately, the plan works, as it plays on Cersei's biggest fears; yet we can also see her fear transforming into bitterness, as she recognizes her own helpless position in a world where she is forced to rely on her twin brother and their father to intervene. Save for her indignant stance that all her problems are the result of incompetent men, it is also in these rare instances that we are shown a glimpse of the more vulnerable side of Cersei, as subject to fear and pressure as Lysa Arryn, whom critics such as Brent Hartinger refer to only in passing as a "petty, easily manipulated fool" (165).

Lysa Arryn herself may exhibit certain vengeful qualities herself. She insists that Tyrion not only tried to assassinate Catelyn's son, but also murdered Lysa's husband and thus deserves capital punishment. Yet what characterizes her more than fear or vengeance is actually pride and the resulting denial; this, as it turns out, is a feature shared by more than one mother when it comes to political rule. When confronted by her sister over the likely prospect of war, Lysa is adamant that her strategic choice of distancing the Eyrie from all conflict will prove fruitful:

> "We're safe here," Lysa was saying. Whether to her or to the boy, Catelyn was not sure.
> "Don't be a fool," Catelyn said, the anger rising in her. "No one is safe. If you think

> hiding here will make the Lannisters forget you, you are sadly mistaken."
> Lysa covered her boy's ear with her hand. "Even if they could bring an army through the mountains and past the Bloody Gate, the Eyrie is impregnable. You saw for yourself. No enemy could ever reach us up here."
> Catelyn wanted to slap her. Uncle Brynden had tried to warn her, she realized. "No castle is impregnable."
> "This one is," Lysa insisted. (*GOT*, 365)

Lysa's naïvety is underlined by her sister's reaction: in Catelyn's inner narrative, she is frustrated to the point of wanting to slap Lysa, realizing their uncle's implications of Lysa not being fit to rule. The above can also be read as more proof of Catelyn's own, impulsive nature, yet the message is clear: instead of allying herself with an army, Lysa would rather take her chances by barricading her court on the top of a mountain, regardless of the effects on the lives of her actual subjects. Not only are they facing a war, but also a long and exhausting Winter; Lysa's pride and fear are both factors in her refusal to confront and prepare for the reality of her situation.

Pride and denial would therefore seem closely connected. This is most apparent in the actions of Daenerys Targaryen, another pursuer of the Iron Throne, who hails her army from all the way across the sea. Since women explicitly in rule is such a rarity in Westeros, Spector considers the character of Daenerys particularly noteworthy, since "her very existence is perilous to the current power structure" (170). Daenerys, a girl of fourteen at the beginning of *GOT*, is one of the last surviving members of House Targaryen, a dynasty which ruled the seven kingdoms for nearly three hundred years. After her father was overthrown in a revolt, Daenerys fled across the sea, where her brother Viserys plotted an uprising of his own. Through an arranged marriage to a powerful horse lord, Daenerys breaks free from her brother's oppression and becomes a *khaleesi*, the queen to her husband Khal Drogo. She is soon pregnant with their son, but tragic events claim both the child and her husband; when Daenerys pleads for a witch to use forbidden magic to aid Drogo, the results are disastrous. Unable to cope, she throws herself into a funeral pyre along with her husband, the treacherous witch, and three dragon eggs; yet she emerges virtually unscathed, and the human sacrifice triggers the eggs to hatch into tiny dragons – the first the world has seen in centuries. As Spector notes, "as she awakens the dragons, she also awakens in herself a mystical

knowledge that she – not her brother, Viserys – may be the true inheritor to the Iron Throne" (183). Daenerys is, therefore, possibly the most important example of female power in the novels, because her power is not proportionate to the men currently in her life; instead she considers it a birthright, and spends the rest of her journey actively pursuing political power.

Daenerys begins her story as a submissive pawn, but soon gains agency through her husband and pregnancy, mirroring many of the highborn women in Westeros. What separates Daenerys from the rest is the extent to which she is able to maximize her potential power-to and ultimately even power-over. Spector describes this as something that happens "first through Khal Drogo, who grants her both his protection and the authority that comes from being his mate, and later, through her own agency when she emerges unscathed from Khal Drogo's funeral pyre with the baby dragons" (185). Embracing her upcoming maternity allows Daenerys to connect with her new people, who have formerly intimidated her as alien, even savage; by partaking in their customs she gains their respect, as the future mother of "the Stallion Who Mounts the World." As Daenerys gains more confidence in her individual authority, she not only commands her brother to cease physical abuse, but also bans rape within her tribe. However, although her intentions are to protect her new people, Daenerys's attempt at enforcing a Westerosi moral code is viewed as misguided moral pride and even weakness from the perspective of her new subjects.

Upon the death of her husband and son, Daenerys is initially rendered powerless and without purpose. Spector describes this state as "non-people" (177), the loss of whichever patriarchal role defined a woman before. Yet as Daenerys's symbolically gives birth to her dragons, she is likewise "born again", as the Mother of Dragons – eventually with enough authority to command armies. The thematic of motherhood is greatly underlined in her second rise to power, even if her biological pregnancy results in premature death. She repeatedly treats and refers to her

dragons as her children,[15] fully embracing her role as the mother to her new people, tribe and slaves alike:

> *Mother. They are calling me Mother.*
> The chant grew, spread, swelled. It swelled so loud that it frightened her horse . . . it swelled until it seemed to shake the yellow walls of Yunkai. More slaves were streaming from the gates every moment, and as they came they took up the call.
> . . .
> Ser Jorah urged her to go, but Dany remembered a dream she had dreamed in the House of the Undying.
> "They will not hurt me," she told him. "They are my children, Jorah."
> . . .
> "Mother," they called from a hundred throats, a thousand, ten thousand. "Mother," they sang, their fingers brushing her legs as she flew by. "Mother, Mother, Mother!" (*SOS*, 589, italics original)

The above encapsulates both the slaves' perception of Daenerys, as well as her own reaction to her subjects: she views them as her "children," and trusts them likewise to mean her no harm. As opposed to regarding them as subjects or the slaves her as a ruler, their mutual bond resembles that of a caregiver. With a supposedly devoted following, Daenerys is an undeniably dangerous female force; so great a threat, to be precise, that King Robert has called for her assassination, even if she is only a teenager. Daenerys's initial pull of authority is indeed foreboding:

> "We follow the comet," Dany told her khalasar. Once it was said, no word was raised against it. They had been Drogo's people, but they were hers now. The Unburnt, they called her, and Mother of Dragons. Her word was their law. (*COK*, 171)

However, during Daenerys's journey, not only does it become more and more apparent that her potential is far more dangerous than her actual capabilities as a ruler; her increasing following begins to shatter with each crack. Her actions are motivated by the well-being of her family, then her subjects, which mirrors the maternal motivations of other birth mothers I have discussed thus far; yet most of Daenerys's attempts to overcome societal odds repeatedly backfire, since like Lysa, she struggles to confront the reality of her situation because of pride. Daenerys is indeed proud of

[15] "Drogon was curled up beneath her arm, as hot as a stone that had soaked all day in the blazing sun. Rhaegal and Viserion were fighting over a scrap of meat, buffeting each other with their wings as smoke hissed from their nostrils. *My furious children*, she thought. *They must not come to harm*" (*COK*, 530, italics original).

her power, apologizing to no-one, but her actions fail to provide intended repercussions regardless of good intentions; moreover, as children rebel against their parents, the failure of her new people to view her as a ruler instead of a mother eventually grows to affect her ability to govern politically. I will discuss these consequences in greater detail in 3.2.

In conclusion, the Westerosi culture is very limited when it comes to providing women with opportunities of power. The most direct path to authority is through influence and marriage to the right highborn lord. However, the mothers who do find themselves in notable positions of authority do so mostly through circumstance; the motivations behind their actions are characterized by vengeance, fear, and pride, which are presented as negative. These actions are also similar to one another in that the well-being of their family, most specifically their children, lies at the root of each choice. The private scope of motherhood is thus linked with the public sphere, through the political nature of their literal actions. In this sense, the instances of power-over are intertwined with a definite element of power-to, further implying an overlap between the two modes of power.

3.2. "Would you condemn me too, and call it mother's madness?" Negative repercussions

> "Mothers." The man made the word sound like a curse. "I think birthing does something to your minds. You are all mad."
> He laughed. It was a bitter sound. (*GOT,* 79)

The aforementioned is spoken by Jaime Lannister, Cersei's twin and the father of her children, in a discussion over Lysa Arryn's mental state. In a number of ways it perfectly describes the attitudes of not only every character much like himself – fathers devoid of paternal instinct, which is perceived normal in the culture they inhabit –, but also the world in which the characters live, perfectly willing to label the inherent quality of motherhood 'mad'. The way Jaime is described laughing, although "bitterly," further draws attention to this trait that is simultaneously viewed by many men as laughable, yet also a source of frustration and bitterness. It is worth pointing out that even in an off-handed comment from a person who regards women as subservient to men in

general, Jaime makes the distinction between femininity and motherhood: it is "birthing" that "does something" to the minds of women, branding them mad. He is as willing to make this connection with a woman he barely knows (Lysa Arryn) as he is with Cersei, his sister and lover, as he equally addresses her with a collective "you."

Yet where does this attitude stem from? In the context of the three novels, Jaime certainly appears to have plenty of examples to draw upon, but they vary in purpose and intent. An element of conscious usage of authority is always involved, which places these actions in the territory of decisions rather than strings of bad luck. The examples I have provided for further analysis can loosely be said to fall in three thematic categories: misconduct, illegitimacy, and enabling. The first of these, political misconduct, is something both Lysa Arryn and her sister Catelyn Stark specifically find themselves blamed for, regardless of any initial reluctance of being in a position of power. With Lysa, her misuse of authority is perhaps overlooked by many, as it is pointed out at the very early stages of the story: against former arrangements between her husband and the King, Lysa refuses to let the Queen's family foster her son,[16] breaking off all contact after the death of her husband:

> "Catelyn fears for her sister. How does Lysa bear her grief?"
> Robert's mouth gave a bitter twist. "Not well, in truth," he admitted. "I think losing Jon has driven the woman mad, Ned. She has taken the boy back to the Eyrie. Against my wishes. I had hoped to foster him with Tywin Lannister at Casterly Rock. Jon had no brothers, no other sons. Was I supposed to leave him to be raised by women?"
> Ned would sooner entrust a child to a pit viper than to Lord Tywin, but he left his doubts unspoken. Some old wounds never truly heal, and bleed again at the slightest word. "The wife has lost the husband," he said carefully. "Perhaps the mother feared to lose the son. The boy is very young."
> "Six, and sickly, and Lord of the Eyrie, gods have mercy," the king swore. "Lord Tywin had never taken a ward before. Lysa ought to have been honored. The Lannisters are a great and noble House. She refused to even hear of it. Then she left in the dead of the night, without so much as a by-your-leave. Cersei was furious." He sighed deeply. "The boy is my namesake, did you know that? Robert Arryn. I am sworn to protect him. How can I do that if his mother steals him away?"

[16] There are also accounts that Robert was meant to be fostered by Stannis Baratheon, brother of the King. Various characters are either of the opinion that Robert was to be raised with the Baratheons or the Lannisters, yet the Queen and the King sided with the latter. Lysa herself later admits to having been aware of both plans.

(*GOT,* 41–42)

The above dialogue between the King and Eddard Stark cues us in on a number of relevant aspects of the society; not only has Lysa defied a great House, but her conduct in doing so has also left them furious. Secondly, it is interesting that the King considers the fate of her son being "brought up by women" as something unarguably negative, even when the alternative is to entrust him with a man detested by many. We can see Eddard trying to speak for his sister-in-law, excusing her behaviour, but even if all parties were to consider Lysa's actions as the ravings of an over-protective mother driven mad with grief, the point still stands: by making a personal decision, Lysa has also committed a political one. This places House Arryn in direct opposition with House Lannister, which bears greater consequences for the subjects of the Eyrie as the relationships between the various Houses eventually degenerate into war.

Moreover, Lysa functions as a catalyst for her sister's similar political demise. She confides in Catelyn over a secret letter how the Lannisters are to blame for her late husband's death, which further leads Catelyn to suspect the House of her own son's assassination attempt. However, by the end of *SOS* we learn that Lysa has lied to her sister: Lysa herself poisoned her husband at the persuasion of Petyr Baelish, a childhood friend, with whom Lysa desperately wishes to build a family after being forced to abort his child in her youth. Petyr makes use of the emotional turmoil of both women, and tricks Catelyn into holding Tyrion Lannister at fault for her son's demise. With Lysa already having wedged a stake between several Houses with her conspiratorial actions, Catelyn follows in tow as she seizes Tyrion in the scene shown in 3.1. Although he narrowly avoids death after Catelyn brings him to court, the consequences have already taken effect: in South, the royal family learns that Catelyn Stark has independently captured and nearly executed the brother of the Queen. Lysa's motivations can certainly be argued to originate partially from unrequited love, but the events nonetheless also show both women easily manipulated into action if the well-being of their children (past, present or future) is at stake.

While the impending war eventually has the Houses warring against one another regardless

of Catelyn or Lysa's input, their actions contribute to escalating the strained atmosphere following King Robert's death. With Catelyn's husband and two daughters at the Queen's mercy, Catelyn's decision in particular presents itself in a questionable light: it bears direct political consequences, especially as she employs her authority as the daughter of House Tully and the lady of House Stark to carry out her plan. If Lysa's misconduct in defying the King's will is considered thoughtless and potentially harmful by the parties involved, Catelyn's act of revenge is similarly hazardous from a political standpoint. With her husband Eddard appointed as the Hand of the King, Catelyn's opposition to the Queen's family in an act of open rebellion leaves him tied between his duties and his family. When the King's death further strains relations between Houses, the political atmosphere exposes Eddard and their two daughters to explicit danger. Susan Vaught considers this act particularly damaging, claiming that Catelyn not only "dishonors [the Starks'] purpose as Wardens of the North" but also "pursues her own emotional satisfaction and commits an ultimate sin in Westeros by further dividing society and greatly damaging the chances that inhabitants can make themselves ready for Winter" (95).

In a manner of speaking, Catelyn unknowingly admits to her shortcomings as a wielder of authority in a conversation with the much ridiculed lady knight, Brienne of Tarth: "I will tell you true, Brienne. I do not know. My son may be a king, but I am no queen... only a mother who would keep her children safe, however she could" (*COK*, 507). The aptness of confession is further underlined in the light of Catelyn's other impulsive act of authority, the decision to set Jaime Lannister free in exchange for the safety of her daughters. It is a promise that he can neither ensure nor vouch for, yet Catelyn is willing to risk a valuable political hostage even for a theoretical chance that she will one day reunite with her children. As a result, many of the men around her are quick to call the incident but another example of mother's madness:

> "The news must have driven you mad," Ser Desmond broke in, "a madness of grief, a mother's madness, men will understand. You did not know..."
> "I did," Catelyn said firmly. "I understood what I was doing and knew it was treasonous. If you fail to punish me, men will believe that we connived together to free Jaime Lannister. It was mine own act and mine alone, and I alone must answer

> for it. Put me in the Kingslayer's empty irons, and I will wear them proudly, if that is how it must be." (*SOS*, 34)

Catelyn is reprimanded and placed under house arrest for her actions, which implies a violation of the powers given to her by the men in her life; regardless of any former, accurate insight into political matters as an advisor, this one act of individual agency is enough to strip her off their trust. Although Jaime's release ultimately bears few actual political consequences, Catelyn's attitude towards these acts changes from pride to shock when two young boys are slain in the aftermath:

> "It was no murder, ser," said Lord Rickard Karstark, no more discomfited by the ropes about his wrists than by the blood that trickled down his face. "Any man who steps between a father and his vengeance asks for death."
> His words rang against Catelyn's ears, harsh and cruel as the pounding of a war drum. Her throat was dry as bone. *I did this. These two boys died so my daughters might live*.
> . . .
> Lord Karstark look instead at Catelyn. "Tell your mother to look at them," he said. "She slew them, as much as I."
> Catelyn put a hand on the back of Robb's seat. The hall seemed to spin about her. She felt as though she might retch. (*SOS*, 275–276)

The paradox here is that Lord Karstark, responsible for slaying two young boys in revenge, speaks of a father's vengeance as a matter of self-evidence; yet it is Catelyn, who has committed no literal act of physical crime, who feels the weight of the blame. While he receives punishment, Lord Karstark's actions are not considered "a father's madness" by his peers. I will refer to themes of fatherhood in Westeros again in 4.2., but the effect here is to contrast Catelyn's guilty conscience with his lack of remorse, the origin of which is hardly questioned by onlookers. This attitude coupled with Catelyn's former words to Brienne would suggest that she mentally identifies her use of authority with fears of selfishness and destructiveness, which I discussed as recurring themes among women and power in 2.1.2.

In Daenerys Targaryen's case, simple misconduct does not specifically describe the obstacles that fall in her way. As she is not responsible to anyone for her strategic or political moves, the repercussions of her actions present themselves in a different form: they are often perceived illegitimate. Daenerys's journey from a political pawn to a self-governed ruler is a never-

ending struggle of adapting into new societies, and as such she balances on the fine line between reinventing and offending pre-existing customs. As stated in 3.1., the outlawing of sexual assault is among her most prominent acts of command; yet the manner in which her good intentions eventually turn against her is but a marker of what is to follow. Alyssa Rosenberg describes the incident where Daenerys initially stops one of her men from raping the mage, Mirri Maz Duur, as one which "earns Daenerys no favors – the woman she saves from assault views her actions as naïve paternalism, and it convinces many of Drogo's followers that Daenerys is alienating him from their common values" (2012, 20).

Daenerys later manages to win over the trust and support of those who witness the birth of her dragons, implying that she symbolically legitimizes herself through this magical motherhood even after her husband's death. However, Daenerys's later attempts to liberate slaves and uproot inhumane practices fail to provide her subjects with a greater quality of living. At the prospect of gaining allies to overtake Westeros, she turns down several opportunities as they would require her to part with her dragons, her *children*. When she realizes how much this limits her options, Daenerys promises the leaders of a slave city one of her dragons for an army of eunuchs, but betrays them and sacks the city. She proceeds to liberate all the slaves and establishes a new council prior to her departure, but by the end of the third novel we learn that her efforts have been in vain: peace has not been restored, and instead, her new subjects are overtaken by a leader more familiar with their ways. Daenerys manages to repeat her victory in another slave city, which ultimately fares no better in the wake of her liberation; it is obvious that Daenerys's power is perceived as easily overthrown and thus not legitimate in the eyes of her subjects. This forces her to finally rethink her strategy, and thus upon besieging a third, far larger city, Daenerys attempts to engage the people by directly governing it herself.

Daenerys's inexperience with political rule undoubtedly contributes to her hardships, but ultimately many of her efforts are thwarted due to societal conditions. Rosenberg comments on the wider perspective as follows:

> After Drogo's death, when Daenerys emerges as a military leader in her own right, her proscriptions against rape may be principled, but they don't eradicate sexual assault in the territories, known as Slaver's Bay, that she conquers. In fact, her efforts to rule compassionately, of which her focus on sexual assault is one aspect, mark Daenerys as a vulnerable ruler, someone who is unable to practice the kind of total war favored by other successful warlords on the continent. It's a tragic testament to the limited power of good intentions in the face of deeply ingrained and intractable cultural practices. (20–21)

As discussed in 3.1., Daenerys strives to take heed of the changes required in her strategy, to emulate a more traditionally masculine method of rule: she becomes more ruthless and even more proud as her attempts to spread her power and authority. Spector views this change as a "sacrifice" on behalf of Daenerys's personality: "She becomes harder and less compassionate, her choices less personal. A sweetness that she had at the beginning of the series is slowly burning away as she becomes more and more powerful" (185–186). Although the nature of these qualities as directly feminine or masculine can be debated upon, they again mirror the idea of a woman's power gaining legitimacy through masculinity – and the subsequent fear of a loss of identity in the process.

Daenerys's encounters with suspicion and resistance as she attempts to enhance the lives of others can certainly also be read as subverting the trope of the noble, kind queen, but this is not to say less altruistic intentions fare much better. Although Cersei Lannister attains great power as Queen Regent, the question of the legitimacy of her power follows her long after her husband's death. This doubt manifests itself literally in Stannis Baratheon's claims that her children are not truly the King's heir, but while the royal family dismisses most of these rumours as simple propaganda, Cersei faces more direct opposition from her own kin. By *SOS* her father removes Cersei from the royal council and threatens to remarry her – thus implying that as a widow and Queen, Cersei is not fit to wield political authority on her own. The scene where her father reveals his plans to thwart the Starks by using Cersei as another pawn highlights the futility of her attempts at autonomous power, given the deep-rooted patriarchy of her society:

> "We must forestall him."
> "How?" asked Cersei.
> "By marriage. Yours, to begin with."
> It came so suddenly that Cersei could only stare for a moment. Then her cheeks

> reddened as if she had been slapped. "No. Not again. I will not."
> . . .
> "So long as you remain unwed, you allow Stannis to spread his disgusting slander," Lord Tywin told his daughter. "You must have a new husband in your bed, to father children on you."
> "Three children is quite sufficient. I am Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, not a brood mare! The Queen Regent!"
> "You are my daughter, and will do as I command."
> She stood. "I will not sit here and listen to this—"
> "You will if you wish to have any voice in the choice of your next husband," Lord Tywin said calmly. (*SOS*, 265–266)

As much as Cersei desires power, the consequences of her explicit actions only remind others of the importance of subduing her with another husband. It is obvious that even her father disregards Cersei's aspirations, viewing them misguided and in need of male supervision. However, her role as a mother is inherently tied to this treatment, because her father's intervention is also related to another kind of misuse of authority: enabling. Both Cersei Lannister and Lysa Arryn are repeatedly shown guilty of using their own positions to grant power to those incapable of properly employing it; namely, their children. While I will address the participation of fathers regarding Joffrey and young Robert's behaviour in 4.2., there are not generally many parallels with fathers enabling their children's negative behaviour save for Roose Bolton's monstrous bastard son Ramsay. Prince Oberyn of House Martell is shown to encourage his daughters to exhibit belligerent tendencies, yet these are viewed more as invitations of independence. Lysa and Cersei's misuse of authority as enabling mothers is thus presented in a rather aberrant manner altogether.

Of the two, Cersei's situation is more problematic. As stated before, following the death of the King his presumed firstborn, Joffrey, succeeds the throne and therefore control of all Westeros. While I will further elaborate on Joffrey's sociopathic nature in 4.2., the premise alone appears questionable as Cersei allows her thirteen-year-old son to make political decisions as he feels inclined. She mistakenly considers Joffrey to be under her direct influence, unaware of his contempt and instability. Joffrey's unpredictability does not even begin to dawn on Cersei until he single-handedly destroys any prospect of peace in Westeros by having Eddard Stark, Lord of the North, executed. Only Cersei's father's intervention subdues Joffrey from destroying the entire House of

Lannister with his senseless decisions; as his direct guardian, the blame falls on Cersei as the sole enabler of Joffrey's behaviour. Much like Cersei, Lysa is also guilty of allowing a minor to decide over matters that affect governmental relations; her son Robert, at six years of age, is as valid an authority as his mother when deciding on the fate of criminals. When Catelyn presents Tyrion Lannister on trial, he is more or less at the mercy of the child's whims:

> "Make him fly," Robert said eagerly. Lysa stroked her son's hair.
> "Perhaps we will," she murmured. "Perhaps that is just what we will do."
> . . .
> Lysa gave an impatient shake of her waist-long auburn hair. "Lord Robert wants to see him fly," she said, as if that settled the matter. (*GOT*, 365, 420)

Although this scene also serves as an opportunity to avenge the supposed murder of Lysa's husband, the flippancy in which Lysa reacts to a six-year-old's desire to execute a man she knows is innocent, leaves even her sister concerned for her mental well-being. Given that young Robert will eventually rule the Eyrie, the more Lysa encourages a flippant, indifferent approach towards rule, the more her court grows restless with her influence on the child. However, in addition to political consequences, Lysa and Cersei's enabling is a sign of a more troubling result regarding their method of mothering, which I shall discuss in greater detail in 4.2. These instances pave enough way for the argument that in this regard, power-over and power-to distinctly overlap as per Griscom's theories (Worell, 2002, 848), rendering the outcome potentially harmful for all parties involved.

Thus, I have illustrated various repercussions for instances in which mothers have employed political power and authority. Whether the consequences lie in misconduct, legitimacy or enabling, the society views their actions as negative, which not only subverts the trope of the high fantasy mother as a wise, altruistic ruler, but also raises a questionable element in the way they are portrayed to handle explicit power. It must be noted that there is a great likelihood of failure in all political pursuits within the novels, male or female, yet not all men succumb to their emotions (often greed) or face a gradual change of personality in possession of political authority: for example, Eddard Stark's sense of justice may become the character's personal downfall, but brands him a respected ruler nonetheless. Meanwhile, Cersei's younger brother and scorned imp Tyrion

may at first appear to make political decisions for his own selfish ends, but his rational and sensible actions subsequently also save the lives of hundreds as he commands the King's troops. Successful female rule may not be an outright impossibility in the world of Westeros, as implied by the attitudes of characters such as Catelyn's uncle and the history of Dorne, but the close narratives in the novels are nonetheless also aligned with pre-existing notions of feminine power as not only questionable in legitimacy but also damaging in intent; even the characters themselves sometimes consider their authority as potentially harmful. Additionally, the society of the novels views this use of power as something that is inherently tied to their motherhood, and therefore any 'erroneous' acts of political conduct are quick to be labeled as "mother's madness." The "paradox of motherhood" discussed by Francus in 2.2.1. pertaining to the discrepancy between mothers and agency would thus seem to mirror these sentiments: mothers are not meant to employ explicit power, lest there be inevitable negative repercussions. In chapter 3. I have dealt with the political side of these repercussions, but will proceed to analyze the private sphere in chapter 4.

4. Motherhood in the private sphere of Westeros

As I discussed before, the socio-cultural world of the Seven Kingdoms emulates real life history in a multitude of different ways; regarding this thesis, the most important of these is the division of gender roles regarding nurturance of children. In Westeros, it is customary for men to provide for the family while women tend to the household. While highborn ladies are understandably spared from having to commit to menial tasks, they are nonetheless primary caretakers of children, ensuring boys and girls are both given access to gender-appropriate education. Girls will ultimately be wed to unite and strengthen the loyalties between the various Houses, and must therefore be knowledgeable of court etiquette. Boys, on the other hand, must master the art of waging war. Since highborn men spend most of their time engaging in various political endeavors, young children are primarily fostered by their mothers and servants.

In real life, parenting – and the responsibilities that lie therein – is a matter which we often default to the mother as a primary caregiver. As such, it can be argued that readers generally observe the mother through the child, and make conclusions on her character based on the way said children behave. Since there are a number of unstable young children wielding over-exaggerated amounts of authority in the first three novels of the series, their actions can also directly be seen to reflect on their mothers. Where analysis chapter 3 focused on power-over as a means of mapping out the political power of Martin's mothers, in chapter 4 I will study the scope of their influence on the private sector of their homes, thus power-to.

In 4.1. I will first focus on presenting motherhood as it is viewed by the society and the mothers themselves on a more subjective level, making general assessments of the most recurring themes therein. For this, I will draw on my theory chapters 2.1.1. and 2.1.2., to contrast Martin's mothers with stereotypes of the high fantasy mothers and the monstrous mother. With the aforementioned I aim to illustrate how the most prominent portrayals of motherhood in Martin's novels adhere to two general categories: what I will call the 'fairy tale syndrome', i.e. stereotypes

akin to those found in fairy tales, and the obscene or smothering mother, derived from the tradition of the monstrous mother. Through these examples I will argue that Martin's mother characters have more in common with the nuanced mothers found in children's and young adult fantasy, than the majority of his contemporaries in high fantasy.

For the sake of juxtaposition, I will also briefly discuss some of the more prevalent portrayals of fatherhood as I move onto subchapter 4.2., before proceeding to further expand on the repercussions of the types of mothering presented in 4.1. through themes of obscenity, smothering, and neglect. This will be done mainly by surveying the "unhealthy" behavioural patterns of the children; I will reference studies on the common origins of children's behavioural problems to argue that certain types of mothering increases the risk of disturbance in a child, and illustrate ways in which these disturbances are present in some of the children. I will thus argue that the emergence of these issues among children can be read as a 'failure' to mother, which in turn underlines the detrimental effects of motherhood, already presented through political power in chapter 3.

4.1. "The Mother gives the gift of life, and watches over every wife." The fairy tale syndrome and monstrous mothers

> "Knights die in battle," Catelyn reminded her.
> Brienne looked at her with those blue and beautiful eyes. "As ladies die in childbed. No one sings songs about them."
> "Children are a battle of a different sort." Catelyn started across the yard. "A battle without banners or warhorns, but no less fierce. Carrying a child, bringing it into the world... your mother will have told you of the pain..."
> "I never knew my mother," Brienne said. "My father had ladies... a different lady every year, but..."
> "Those were no ladies," Catelyn said. "As hard as birth can be, Brienne, what comes after is even harder. At times I feel as though I am being torn apart. Would that there were five of me, one for each child, so I might keep them all safe." (*COK*, 589–590)

The conversation between Catelyn Stark and Brienne of Tarth cues us in as readers on another set of societal norms and realities in Westeros. Catelyn, a mother of five, and Brienne, a lady knight who feels herself unsuited to be a mother, may initially seem worlds apart; yet as mirthless as Catelyn's depiction of motherhood appears, it is altogether comparable to the struggles men face on

the battlefield in their stead. Her assessment also makes note of the value placed on the actual experience of motherhood: Catelyn dismisses Brienne's father's female companions as "no ladies," as they have not endured the hardships of labour and its aftermath. Motherhood is evidently viewed as a multi-faceted concept by the characters themselves; in analyzing its recurring manifestations in the novels, I have discovered what I will call "the fairy tale syndrome." What this refers to is a collection of characterizations which appear to fit under certain other generic mother tropes, ones we are more familiar with in the context of fairy tales. These include: the absent mother, the evil stepmother, and the mother of monsters.

Brienne's recollections of her late mother may on one hand appear to represent the subtle erasure which appears prevalent in high fantasy, yet they present an interesting standpoint for the active mothers in the story. Indeed, Martin's mother characters may differ from one another in terms of child rearing techniques, but parallel each other by lacking a maternal figure in their own lives. Most of them come from backgrounds where birth mothers have either died in labour or passed away when the children were very young. This, I suspect, is partly to blame for the valorization of motherhood through the characters' own eyes: they often recall memories of childhood comfort, or lament the loss of guidance. This element is best portrayed in a scene where Catelyn seeks solace in her seven gods, derailed by thoughts of her late mother:

> When she looked up at the Mother again, it was her own mother she saw. Lady Minisa Tully had died in childbed, trying to give Lord Hoster a second son. The baby had perished with her, and afterward some of the life had gone out of Father. *She was always so calm*, Catelyn thought, remembering her mother's soft hands, her warm smile. *If she had lived, how different our lives might have been*. She wondered what Lady Minisa would make of her eldest daughter, kneeling before her. *I have come so many thousands of leagues, and for what? Who have I served? I have lost my daughters, Robb does not want me, and Bran and Rickon must surely think me a cold and unnatural mother. I was not even with Ned when he died...*
> (*COK*, 450, italics original)

Catelyn's introspection clearly coincides with my findings on the traditional high fantasy mother as well. Referring to details such as the mother's soft hands and warm smile depicts the idea of the loving, compassionate guardian, with whom Catelyn compares herself; another important point is

her thought of whether the course of their destinies might have changed path, had her mother not passed away. The echoes of the generic fantasy mother are present in Martin's work as a combination of two recurring themes: the absent mother and the kindhearted, understanding mother blend together in the idealized figure whose purity cannot be tarnished by future actions, forever encased in memories. However, it is also but one of the many instances where Catelyn remarks upon her children with shame and despair, mirroring not only O'Reilly's list of 'acceptable' maternal qualities but also the presupposition to maternal agency in general: although Catelyn regards herself as aberrant, she actually fulfills one of the prerequisite scripts for traditional motherhood through her guilt. Even she, thus, considers death the only 'legitimate' reason for absence.

In addition to the adult characters themselves, the story features several illegitimate children, whose mothers have succumbed to either similar fates or simple anonymity; among the most notable of these is Jon Snow,[17] supposedly the illegitimate son of Eddard Stark. He is among many other 'bastards' with no prior knowledge of their birth mother; while otherwise treated by his father with kindness, the details of Jon's mother have not been disclosed to him. Moreover, Jon finds no true mother figure in Eddard's wife Catelyn either, who in turn becomes an absent mother to a number of her own children: first through the circumstances which separate her from her daughters and youngest sons, and later by necessity, as she is murdered at the end of *SOS*.[18] In an ironic turn of events, her daughter Sansa eventually dons the guise of Alayne Stone, pretending to be the motherless bastard daughter of Petyr Baelish.

The prevalence of this motherlessness has interesting echoes to the fairy tale tradition. In her essay, "Motherless Daughters: The Absent Mothers in Margaret Atwood", Nancy Peled suggests that in fairy tales, the absence of mothers plays as crucial a part as their prevalence, given how it "jumpstarts" the protagonist into action, having "suffered at the hands of a wicked woman, a cruel

[17] Surnames such as Snow, Stone, and Rivers refer to one's illegitimate heritage in the world of Westeros.

[18] Only to become reanimated as the undead, vengeance-obsessed Lady Stoneheart in the following novel, *A Feast for Crows*.

or inadequate or simply small-minded mother figure" (2010, 58). In the case of Jon Snow, the connection is clear: ignored and alienated by his father's wife, Jon wishes to prove himself by joining the ranks of a military order called the Night's Watch, knowing there is no place for a non-heir in his father's court. Similarly, when his sister Sansa takes residence in King's Landing, to be wed to the sociopathic now-king Joffrey, she looks upon Queen Cersei as a substitute mother figure: however, the lack of compassion and understanding she receives from Cersei further shatters her illusions of noble life, spurning Sansa into action as she desperately seeks a means of escape. In this manner, both Catelyn Stark and Cersei Lannister take on another fairy tale like role: the evil stepmother.

This role is particularly contradictory in the case of Catelyn, given her introduction as a traditional high fantasy mother. This could be seen as a means of subverting many of the expectations readers may have for a character of her kind: as a stepmother not only figuratively but literally as well, Catelyn's treatment of Jon is thus called into question more often among discussions of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Susan Vaught writes of her that

> [Catelyn] never finds it in her otherwise large heart to show Jon Snow, the bastard child in her care, any form of acceptance and cannot seem to forgive her husband for bringing the boy to live at Winterfell. Through her coldness to Jon, she exacts revenge on him for being in her life and makes an innocent child pay for her unhappiness. (2012, 94–95)

At the beginning of *GOT*, Catelyn is at first introduced as a traditional, idealistic high fantasy mother; her attitude towards Jon may thus initially appear puzzling, yet not altogether inhuman. It also forces readers to question which of the two weighs more: Catelyn's right to reject the child of another woman and condemn her husband of adultery, or the emotional well-being of that child. Although the situation may bring forth interesting arguments over individual liberty of choice and the negation of 'fundamental' maternal instinct, at the root of Catelyn's disdain for the boy also remains an element of bitter jealousy; this is proven by her inner musings during a conversation upon Eddard's choice to become the King's Hand and leave Winterfell:

> Whoever Jon's mother had been, Ned must have loved her fiercely, for nothing

> Catelyn said would persuade him to send the boy away. It was the one thing she could never forgive him. She had come to love her husband with all her heart, but she had never found it in her to love Jon. She might have overlooked a dozen bastards for Ned's sake, so long as they were out of sight. Jon was never out of sight, and as he grew, he looked more like Ned than any of the trueborn sons she bore him. Somehow that made it worse.
> "Jon must go," she said now.
> "He and Robb are close," Ned said. "I had hoped –"
> "He cannot stay here," Catelyn said, cutting him off. "He is your son, not mine. I will not have him." It was hard, she knew, but no less the truth. Ned would do the boy no kindness by leaving him here at Winterfell. (*GOT*, 62)

Catelyn is thus aware of the harshness of her emotions, but rationalizes them. She has no true responsibility over the child, and will use any chance to banish him. Catelyn's jealousy is not directly aimed at Jon, but the woman with whom her husband had an affair with during the war; the fact that she laments Jon's likeness to his father when compared to her own children is a prime example of the inferiority Catelyn feels as a mother, regarding Jon as a threat. Although various clues in the novels have given grounds to speculate that Jon may only be related to, yet not an actual son of Eddard Stark, the reality Catelyn herself lives in the situation is nonetheless the same: Jon's mere existence is a threat to Catelyn's children, as she views their right to inherit Eddard as a direct extension of her role as a mother. This is visited when her son Robb suggests he name Jon as his successor, and how adamantly against it Catelyn is:

> "A bastard cannot inherit."
> "Not unless he's legitimized by a royal decree," said Robb. . . .
> ". . . I know you trust Jon. But can you trust his sons? Or their sons? . . . If you make Jon legitimate, there is no way to turn him bastard again. Should he wed and breed, any sons you may have by Jeyne will never be safe."
> . . .
> "I cannot," she said. "In all else, Robb. In everything. But not in this... this folly. Do not ask it." (*SOS*, 629)

This disdain towards Jon's theoretical succession parallels Cersei's quest to protect her lineage at all costs; their personal identities as mothers are thus inherently bound also to matters of inheritance due to the amount of power involved therein. Again, these themes are reminiscent of the fairy tale tradition, where stepmothers view the protagonist as competition to either herself or her own children (such as the story of *Cinderella*). Upon comparing Cersei Lannister to an evil stepmother

though, perhaps the term 'evil mother-in-law' is more apt. At the beginning of *GOT*, Sansa Stark is only eleven years old, so when she enters the Queen's court, it is more accurate to describe her relationship with Cersei akin to that of a substitute daughter. Initially, Sansa is very fond of Cersei, who embodies her ideal of a noble lady with courteous manners and beauty. While Cersei first treats her kindly in return, after the execution of Sansa's father the Queen begins to show her true colours:

> "Joffrey will show you no such devotion, I fear. You could thank your sister for that, if she weren't dead. He's never been able to forget that day on the Trident when you saw her shame him, so he shames you in turn. You're stronger than you seem, though. I expect you'll survive a bit of humiliation. I did. You may never love the king, but you'll love his children."
> "I love His Grace with all my heart," Sansa said. The queen sighed.
> "You had best learn some new lies, and quickly. Lord Stannis will not like that one, I promise you." (*COK*, 687)

From their interaction, it appears Cersei is both amused and annoyed over Sansa's naïvety; her delusions on the reality of court life are quickly crushed by Cersei's cynicism. However, by far the most disturbing element of their relationship is Cersei's clear indifference towards her son's consistent mental and physical abuse towards Sansa, who is his betrothed. In a manner of speaking, supported by the excerpt above, Cersei not only considers this part of the norm, but perhaps, vengefully wishes to pass the tradition on. This clearly mirrors Nancy Peled's other notion on fairy tales, where the malicious mother figure "is invested in preserving the patriarchal status quo, however detrimental it may be to her personally, to the protagonist, or to women in general" (58).[19] Moreover, Cersei's efforts at stressing Joffrey's lack of affection toward Sansa are, in spite of their authenticity, also a way to establish a hierarchy in regards to his feelings, further cementing jealousy as a cornerstone of Cersei's cruel treatment. When Sansa is taken to the Eyrie under the guise of Petyr Baelish's bastard daughter, she faces similar treatment from her aunt Lysa: this culminates in Lysa accusing Sansa of trying to seduce her beloved in an act of paranoia. In this

[19] Although the malicious mother figure can also be argued to challenge the status quo with their conscious use of agency, the effects are often detrimental to the protagonist and thus deemed undesirable and villainous by the narrative in stories such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, *The Twelve Wild Ducks*, and *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*.

manner, Sansa is repeatedly subjected to fairy tale like situations where an evil stepmother-figure mistreats her out of sheer envy.

The third notable fairy tale element comes in the form of mothers of monsters. While it is also possible to consider the term 'monster' figuratively, given the amount of sociopathic and otherwise unstable children in the books, I will address the consequences of smothering and obscenity in 4.2. For the purposes of expanding the concept of motherhood in Martin's novels, however, I wish to draw light on some of the literal monsters of the story; albeit being creatures of fantasy, they nonetheless have human mothers. In this aspect, Daenerys Targaryen's character is particularly significant: she not only physically gives birth to a deceased, disfigured, monstrous creature that once was a human boy, but also grants life to a trio of dragons. Both instances bear interesting connotations, but the first in particular has much in common with the fairy tale tradition in terms of execution.

According to Linda J. Lee, many stories[20] feature women whose primary function is the wish for a child, through any means possible. What often becomes a catalyst for the plot is the women's failure to comply with the magical instructions given to them by characters such as witches, which results in disaster. Likewise, the woman is often forced to turn to various donor characters, to whom she must then surrender her firstborn in exchange for aid. (2008, 638–639) This parallels the beginning of Daenerys's journey: she not only requests a witch as her midwife, but also pleads her to use forbidden magic when Daenerys's husband dies of a festering wound. The chaotic events prompt Daenerys into labour, only to awaken to a terrible reality: the witch, Mirri Maz Duur, has sacrificed her son, grotesque and stillborn, to help bring her husband back to life in a vegetative state:

> He turned his face away. His eyes were haunted. "They say the child was –"
> She waited, but Ser Jorah could not say it. His face grew dark with shame. He looked half a corpse himself.
> "Monstrous," Mirri Maz Duur finished for him. The knight was a powerful man, yet

[20] Similar themes are featured in stories such as *The Twelve Wild Ducks*, *The Myrtle*, and *Rapunzel*.

> Dany understood in that moment that the maegi was stronger, and crueler, and infinitely more dangerous. "Twisted. I drew him forth myself. He was scaled like a lizard, blind, with the stub of a tail and small leather wings like the wings of a bat. When I touched him, the flesh sloughed off the bone, and inside he was full of graveworms and the stink of corruption. He had been dead for years." (*GOT*, 731)

Mirri Maz Duur claims that the tragedy is but the result of Daenerys's failure to understand the potential costs of the spell, but we soon learn of her actual grudge: in addition to the loss of her firstborn, the witch proclaims Daenerys barren for the rest of her life. The despair that has driven Daenerys to employ forbidden magic thus leads her to lose her entire family, which the fairy tale stereotype suggests is at its core her personal responsibility instead of mere misfortune. Moreover, the supposed scaly and winged appearance of her unborn son may be an omen for what soon follows: the birth of three dragons, whom Daenerys subsequently considers her true children in the absence of a biological heir. As it is Daenerys who triggers their eggs to hatch in a funeral pyre, it is the second time she 'gives birth' to monsters. Their eventual restlessness and Daenerys's inability to control her growing dragons will likewise later be contrasted with the figurative unharnessed monstrosity of some of the other child characters in 4.2.

However, Daenerys is not the only character to literally give life to monstrous creatures; Melisandre, the high priestess of R'hllor and right hand to Stannis Baratheon, employs a specific kind of magic to birth 'shadow assassins' which are used to assassinate possible enemies. Although Melisandre is rarely considered a mother in her own right, her mode of creating such creatures bizarrely parallels that of child labour. We learn this through Davos Seaworth, as he bears witness to the scene in full:

> Melisandre had thrown back her cowl and shrugged out the smothering robe. Beneath, she was naked, and huge with child. Swollen breasts hung heavy against her chest, and her belly bulged as if near to bursting. . . . Her eyes were hot coals, and the sweat that dappled her skin seemed to glow with a light of its own. Melisandre shone.
>
> Panting, she squatted and spread her legs. Blood ran down her thighs, black as ink. Her cry might have been agony or ecstasy or both. And Davos saw the crown of the child's head push its way out of her. Two arms wriggled free, grasping, black fingers coiling around Melisandre's straining thighs, pushing, until the whole of the shadow slid out into the world and rose taller than Davos, tall as the tunnel, towering above the boat. He had only an instant to look at it before it was gone, twisting between the

> bars of the portcullis and racing across the surface of the water, but that instant was long enough.
> He knew that shadow. As he knew the man who'd cast it. (*COK*, 563)

Davos's final line suggests that the shadows are created through copulation, and that they are, quite effectively, monster offsprings of Melisandre and Stannis Baratheon. The manner in which the birth of this monstrous being is portrayed in full detail is dauntingly specific, even grotesque; Melisandre's bursting belly and blood-soaked thighs is reminiscent of Barbara Creed's images of femininity in horror films, where images of bodily functions also serves to "point[s] back to a time when a 'fusion between mother and nature' existed; when bodily wastes, while set apart from the body, were not seen as objects of embarrassment and shame" (13). Davos's observation of Melisandre crying out "in agony or ecstasy or both" likewise parallels Creed's idea that "the representation of bodily wastes may invoke pleasure in breaking the taboo on filth – sometimes described as pleasure in perversity" (13). As birthing and bodily wastes are invariably linked in real life, the inclusion of such explicit imagery in a scene where Melisandre literally gives birth to monsters curiously adheres to what Creed describes as "all horror texts represent[ing] the monstrous-feminine in relation to Kristeva's notion of maternal authority and the mapping of the self's clean and proper body" (13). The scene thus works simultaneously on the level of fantasy and reality, and onwards to the literary tradition of monstrous motherhood (see 2.2.2.). Indeed, the narrative provides enough examples for me to argue that as we proceed past fairy tale stereotypes, some of the active mothers of the story have far more in common with the trope of the monstrous mother in general – most notably the obscene, smothering mother.

The most notable incidents regarding such behaviour in the novels are in direct connection to first born sons, with both Lysa Arryn and Cersei Lannister exhibiting manners of child-rearing which border on the obscene. Of the two, Lysa's portrayal is more straightforward; her own sister Catelyn is disturbed to witness the sight of the woman breastfeeding her six-year-old son in front of her:

> "Don't be afraid, my sweet baby," Lysa whispered. "Mother's here, nothing will hurt

> you."
> She opened her robe and drew out a pale, heavy breast, tipped with red. The boy grabbed for it eagerly, buried his face against her chest, and began to suck. Lysa stroked his hair. (*GOT*, 365)

Even Catelyn is of the opinion that Lysa's treatment of the boy errs on the inappropriate; the strangeness of this relationship is further stressed when the narration refers to Lysa's son as "the Lord of the Eyrie . . . his mother's breast popping from his mouth, the nipple wet and red" (*GOT*, 365). By juxtaposing his lordly status with such infantile imagery rouses an almost grotesque image of a man-child symbiotically bound to his mother. Besides the physical attachment, Lysa's repeated attempts to shield her son from having to face disappointment or fear result in the enabling already discussed in 3.2. Although other characters are shown to find this relationship puzzling, it is Catelyn's reaction which truly underlines the troublesome quality of Lysa's parenting: upon the merest suggestion that the child should fare better amidst some of Catelyn's own, Lysa responds with rage: "'Sister or no,' she had replied, 'if you try to steal my son, you will leave by the Moon Door'" (*GOT*, 579). Thus, if we compare Lysa's portrayal with Kristeva's theories on the struggle for autonomous self, her son functions as the "token of her own authentication" (1982, 13), which in turn results in the very thing abjection attempts to resist: the child's identity being devoured by the mother (64).

Similar to Lysa, Cersei Lannister is protective of her son Joffrey almost to an excess, viewing him as her extension. Not only has she appointed a bodyguard to his side at all times, but any slights that Joffrey faces are treated with utmost seriousness. When a pet direwolf attacks him in an act of defense, not only does Cersei demand for its death, but Joffrey's bodyguard also slays a young butcher's boy for having taken part in the accident. These are reasonable acts as far as Cersei is concerned; after all, they pose a threat to the future King of Westeros. When Joffrey is appointed King, Cersei latches herself to his side and acts as his advisor; this is, in part, for the sake of being able to constantly watch over him. As pointed out with Cersei's habit of enabling, her inability to deny her son of anything ultimately results in Joffrey not only being entirely dependent on his

mother, but also at liberty to completely disregard her opinions. When Joffrey is poisoned during *SOS*, Cersei is understandably overwrought with despair; she even issues a trial against her brother Tyrion, whose only crime has been to remain the child's most vocal critic.

However, Cersei's obsession with Joffrey is only truly evident when contrasted with her other children. After several stillbirths, miscarriages and an abortion she was forced into, Lysa Arryn clings to her one and only, sickly frail son, yet Cersei has two other children: daughter Myrcella and son Tommen. Cersei admits to having personally aborted any pregnancies not sired by Jaime, which also suggests that her smothering nature has very different origins compared to Lysa's. While Cersei's love unarguably extends to her other children (as seen in the quote in 3.1. regarding Tyrion's plans to send her other two children away), both are clearly second to Joffrey, the heir, in importance. For example, Cersei may initially protest the plan of sending her nine-year-old Myrcella to marry the prince of Dorne; yet as the news of Myrcella grow infrequent following her re-deployment, Cersei is rarely shown to pay much thought to her daughter afterwards. During *COK*, Cersei takes measures to secure Tommen's safety as King's Landing grows restless, but again grudgingly relents when Tyrion takes him 'hostage'. While responsible parties are punished and Tommen later retrieved, it is only after Tommen is crowned King in the aftermath of Joffrey's death that she must actively concern herself with his life. Tyrion even suggests this has been for the boy's benefit, as he schemes with the eunuch Varys to separate Tommen from Cersei:

> "Prince Tommen is a good boy."
> "If I pry him away from Cersei and Joffrey while he's still young, he may even grow to be a good man." (*COK*, 253)

After the death of her firstborn, Cersei's attitude towards her children nonetheless remains only mildly engaged compared to Joffrey. What this suggests is a mild form of neglect, which is another recurring trait throughout the novels. Again, Catelyn Stark mirrors Cersei in more ways than one, sharing a tendency of overlooking some of her children while focusing on others. For example, after Bran's assassination attempt, Catelyn is unable to move from his side for over a week; during this time, she ignores not only the affairs of her court, but those of the two sons still remaining with her

in Winterfell. The elder, Robb, is roughly fourteen years of age, and quickly appoints himself Lord while his father is away; yet the youngest, Rickon, is but a three-year-old child, to whom Catelyn spares no thought while lamenting over Bran's fate. It is not until Robb points this out that Catelyn realizes her neglect:

> Robb's voice softened. "He's not going to die, Mother. Maester Luwin says the time of greatest danger has passed."
> "And what if Maester Luwin is wrong? What if Bran needs me and I'm not here?"
> "Rickon needs you," Robb said sharply. . . . He paused for a moment, chewing on his lower lip the way he'd done when he was little. "Mother, I need you too. I'm trying but I can't... I can't do it all by myself." His voice broke with sudden emotion, and Catelyn remembered that he was only fourteen. She wanted to get up and go to him, but Bran was still holding her hand and she could not move. (*GOT*, 124)

While Catelyn's behaviour may not cross the line to the obscene, it certainly borders close to unhealthy. The situation is further complicated when she embarks on her individual quest of vengeance, believing her children to be safe in Winterfell with their servants. Once Eddard Stark is taken captive and their son Robb rides his men into war, Catelyn joins his cause; Rickon and the now-crippled Bran remain in Winterfell, but Rickon is revealed to have been left largely unsupervised until a former ward burns down the castle and stages the deaths of both children. Out of all the mothers, Catelyn's situation is therefore unarguably the most unforgiving: with her sons and daughters in various states of danger, it later becomes virtually impossible for her to tend to each and every one. Nonetheless, when observing her treatment of Robb and Rickon during Bran's incident, Catelyn fares only slightly better than Lysa and Cersei when it comes to avoiding outright obscenity. This makes her character more nuanced than is at first glance expected from a traditional high fantasy mother.

Thus, although there are similarities with pre-established high fantasy tradition with the prevalence of absent mothers even in Martin's work, for the most part his active mothers themselves subvert this particular trope. In turn, they often substitute the stereotype with other pre-existing ones, such as those found in fairy tales. It could be argued that Cersei Lannister and Lysa Arryn fit the role of villains and are therefore cast as evil stepmothers and smotherers, yet the characters of

Catelyn and Daenerys challenge this idea by being 'flawed' in a number ways in spite of otherwise displaying features generally regarded as 'good' (kindness, compassion). This brands the characters more multifaceted than is common among high fantasy; as such, Martin's mothers appear to have more in common with the ambiguity and moral complexity exhibited by mothers in children's and young adult fantasy (as discussed in 2.2.1.). The elements pertaining to the stereotype of the monstrous mother would also seem to place Martin's mothers in a direct continuum with other literary works which have employed the same methods in portraying negative motherhood.

Moreover, though Martin's inclusion of matters such as gender politics and Foucaultian views on power[21] may directly mirror the contemporary period in regards to social and literary awareness, the novels do not explicitly challenge former images of motherhood. Despite offering readers access into the minds of many mothers, even their internal experience largely reflects the expectations society has for women as self-sacrificing and loyal. When they fail to acknowledge these qualities, the society on the other hand brands them monstrous. The character of Catelyn Stark in particular fulfills both sides of this script: in continuously lamenting her children, she embodies the "mother's guilt" discussed by T. S. Eliot in relation to *Hamlet*'s Gertrude; in rejecting Jon Snow, she becomes the evil stepmother of fairy tales instead. While these depictions of motherhood range from unaware to self-deprecating, what nonetheless connects each is a lack of positive reinforcement through motherhood: Daenerys Targaryen is the one character to experience even remote delight from her role as the symbolic mother for both her dragons and subjects, but as I will argue in 4.2., even this ultimately results in negative consequences.

4.2. "It would not trouble me if the boy was wild, Ned. You don't know him as I do." The failure to mother

> "I knew that boy Joffrey. He used to call my Robert cruel names, and once he slapped him with a wooden sword. A man will tell you poison is dishonorable, but a

[21] I base this argument on Martin's narrative not only working against the black and white moral tradition of the generic high fantasy genre, but also his preoccupation with describing the ever-changing, impermanent nature of power.

> woman's honor is different. The Mother shaped us to protect our children, and our only dishonor is in failure. You'll know that, when you have a child."
> (Lysa Arryn in *SOS*, 944)

Martin's novels may be unusual for high fantasy for featuring a number of primary mother characters, but they differ from tradition by also presenting some of the most important narrative through the eyes of children. Child perspective is often a staple of children's fantasy, even young adult fantasy, but Martin's story is likewise told in part by girls and boys of different ages. Most of these children are Catelyn and Eddard Stark's: Bran, Arya, Sansa, and Eddard's illegitimate son Jon all receive viewpoint chapters which document their thoughts and reactions to the war that is waged around them. Additionally, there are several children who are only discussed through secondary sources, in the direct and secondhand experiences of other characters. As with the mothers I have studied, in my opinion this creates a balance of both firsthand account and unreliability, although when focalizing a story through a child we must always remind ourselves with the challenges of unreliable narrators.[22]

The children of nobility understandably face expectations and demands different to their peasant counterparts, which introduces them to a world full of political liaisons. However, what connects each of them, regardless of origin, is the constant element of danger in a realm spiraling into war: no-one is spared from the harshness of reality, which in itself is a potential breeding ground for unhealthy influence. When analyzing the effects of mothering on children, we must always take into account the surroundings in which the mothering primarily takes place; according to research, in the study of child disturbance, the likelihood of being exposed to another risk factor increases with each additional risk introduced into the child's life. In other words, the detrimental effect is multiplied by the risks which ultimately potentiate one another. These risks often include factors such as the mental well-being of the parent, but can also become potentiated by

---

[22] An unrealiable narrator refers to "a *narrator whose account of events appears to be faulty, misleadingly biased, or otherwise distorted, so that it departs from the 'true' understanding of events shared between the reader and the *implied author. ... The term does not necessarily mean that such a narrator is morally untrustworthy or a habitual liar ... since the category also includes harmlessly naïve, 'fallible', or ill-informed narrators" (Baldick, 347).

circumstances such as a dangerous neighbourhood. (Hobcraft, quoted in Bisceglia et al, 2010, 40) In terms of Martin's Westeros, this would refer to the idea that issues among children can in part be attributed to turbulent societal conditions; for example, young Arya's transformation from a nine-year-old tomboy to an impassive killer follows her separation from her parents, as the war forces her to adapt nearly sociopathic tendencies to survive. While hers is possibly the most drastic fate of all children in the novels, even those who less directly involved with the war (or not involved with it at all) are forced to cope with these issues using the limited abilities gained from caregivers. Among these children, the concept of mothering thus takes precedence. By employing studies conducted on children's behavioural issues, I aim to argue that where the mothers' use of political power yields generally negative consequences, the repercussions of their mothering in the novels often imply similarly detrimental effects.

I have chosen to specifically ignore instances that point towards "regular" insolence in a parent-child dynamic, such as Catelyn's teenage son Robb defying orders, or unfortunate byproducts of child-rearing only aimed to uphold the status quo, such as her daughter Sansa's naivety and idealism rendering her a prime target of abuse. It is worth noting that in child psychology, terms such as "normal" and "abnormal" should be used with caution when discussing one's behavior; one type of development is only labeled as aberrant from another through various pre-existing guidelines, and these are continuously reviewed and re-evaluated. The standards of what constitutes as healthy behavior are therefore arbitrary at best. (Mash and Wolfe, 11) This is why most of my analysis on the children will be based on the approaches of the narrative: I will thus rely on the conceptions of what is constituted as normal by the other characters in the story, as well as other similar evidence found therein.

However, in order to discuss maternal parenting and its consequences, one must not overlook the presence of fathers. For this reason I have chosen to briefly preface my study by engaging the general paternal influence found in the story. In broad terms, themes of fatherhood are far more subtle in the novels: the Westerosi society treats the act of siring a son with mild lack of

regard. In a world where illegitimate children are common enough to warrant uniform surnames, the general consensus considers the child a mother's responsibility. On one hand, it would be misleading to call women inherently more family-oriented than men, as the latter will go to great lengths to safeguard the family unit; on the other, this is done mainly for the purposes of inheritance and succession, which in turn relates directly to political power. 'Emotional' parenting thus largely only concerns women. Nonetheless, it is possible to discover some recurring themes on the perception of fatherhood, not only by the fathers themselves but their children as well. In circumstances where sheer absence does not negate their presence altogether, the most notable of these themes are indifference, disapproval, and compassion.

Indifference and disapproval are negative traits, and characterize a number of father-child relationships in the novels. Although more amicable towards the lives of his younger children, King Robert for example shows a vehement dislike towards his eldest son Joffrey. This is curiously juxtaposed with a mild interest in the illegitimate children he has fathered. While the reader will be aware that Joffrey, Myrcella and Tommen are not truly Robert's, the character himself does not, which provides an interesting scenario for his disregard towards his heir. To call his aversion simply a lack of paternal instinct would be misleading, since we also learn that Jaime, the true father of the Queen's children, exhibits an equal indifference towards them. Both Robert and Jaime are shown to disapprove of Joffrey, and consider his unpredictable and vicious nature to originate from his mother.

Varying degrees of paternal disapproval loom in the background specifically for characters who defy the expectations of the society. Brienne, the lady knight, and Samwell Tarly, Jon Snow's friend in the Night's Watch, are both unsuited for whichever future their fathers have chosen: Brienne, ineligible for marriage, and Samwell, unfit for a swordsman. Both are understood to have caused disappointment and frustration for their fathers, who generally prioritize the succession of their noble name. Although Samwell in particular is among those most bullied by their fathers, the combination of indifference and disapproval can result in disaster when it comes to daughters as

well: where Catelyn Stark regards her father, Hoster Tully, a kind but distant figure,[23] we learn that he was also capable of orchestrating a forced abortion for her sister, Lysa, when she became pregnant at an early age.

Only a number of men in the high court of Westeros would, then, appear to treat their children with explicit love and respect. There are exceptions, though: from the beginning of the story, Eddard Stark is portrayed as not only a man of honour, but also a compassionate father. In addition to being engaged in his children's lives, he will also treat his illegitimate son, Jon Snow, and his ward, Theon Greyjoy, with respect. Although Eddard's daughter Arya causes grief for many by resisting traditional female upbringing, instead of disapproval, he encourages her aspirations to the point of rewarding her with a private swords fighting tutor. We see a similar instance over at the Iron Isles, where Balon Greyjoy names his daughter Asha as his heir, and allows her to live among the men unwed as she sees fit; this is possibly because the Greyjoys are not as bound by the societal norms of the inland, and because he has dismissed his male heir Theon as unfit for succession due to being fostered among the Starks.

Yet, how many fathers are directly shown to deal with paternal concern, similar to Catelyn's quote at the beginning of 4.1.? From the specific viewpoint chapters we can use for the basis of a definite argument, Eddard is among the most notable to frequently think of his children's well-being. Although he values honor and honesty more than his own life, he is willing to falsely admit to treason to save his children. Additionally, the character of Davos Seaworth systematically worries for his sons in a manner very similar to the mothers in the novels, regardless of them being grown men. What separates Davos from the rest, however, is his background as a peasant man; this is often highlighted in his desire to escape the political conflict and return to his wife and remaining sons in peace.

---

[23] "Catelyn could not say if Lord Hoster knew that she was there, or if her presence brought him any comfort, but it gave her solace to be with him. *What would you say if you knew my crime, Father?* she wondered. *Would you have done as I did, if it were Lysa and me in the hands of our enemies? Or would you condemn me too, and call it mother's madness?*" (*SOS*, 35, italics original)

As the rest of the novels primarily deal with highborn men and women, it is difficult to say whether the pressures of nobility therefore ultimately shape the preconceptions of fatherhood in Westeros. Nonetheless, it is obvious that there is a greater number of fathers disengaged from their children's lives outside their immediate purpose as heirs, as opposed to those who take part in their emotional upbringing. On a surface level, the responsibility and consequences of child-rearing are thus delegated to women. Yet, as pointed out in 4.1., many of the adult characters in the story share a background of an absent mother and an indifferent father, making it difficult to gauge the results of the loss of maternal impact in regards to grown men and women. Therefore, as 4.1. also presents us with a variety of mothers employing motherhood in negative ways within the on-going narrative itself, it is worth studying some of the immediate results therein.

As previously stated, the theme which stands out the most is that of children's mental health, which manifests itself mostly in behavioral problems, as well as reclusion and depression. In 4.1., I argued that both Lysa Arryn and Cersei Lannister in specific are prone to displaying qualities associated with the obscene mother: their firstborns, Robert and Joffrey, are repeatedly characterized with equally problematic traits, ranging from behavioral issues to mild cases of mental retardation. In the case of the former, the mother seems more oblivious to Robert's halted development, preferring him to remain a baby indefinitely; while Lysa herself excuses this away due to the child's sickly nature, it is implied that even her sister cannot help but partially hold her responsible:

> Catelyn was at loss for words, *Jon Arryn's son*, she thought incredulously. She remembered her own baby, three-year-old Rickon, half the age of this boy and five times as fierce. Small wonder the lords of the Vale were restive. For the first time she understood why the king had tried to take the child away from his mother to foster with the Lannisters. (*GOT*, 365)

According to studies, cognitive development and experience share at least a general link to one another in terms of explaining the processes of how children reach, maintain, or diverge from normative behavior (Baroff and Olley, 202–203). Yet it is also possible to overcome these experiences even in later childhood with the appropriate caregiving techniques. (209) From

Catelyn's perspective, Robert seems behind his age by years: his infant-like temper whenever his whims are not met further underlines the dissonance, made all the more grotesque when he becomes enraged at being deprived of the pleasure of watching Tyrion Lannister fall to his death: "'You promised I could make him fly," the Lord of the Eyrie screamed at his mother. He began to shake" (*GOT*, 428). His mother and servants refer to this rage as 'shaking sickness'; his cousin Sansa witnesses it first hand in Eyrie, when she accidentally rips young Robert's doll in two:

> Lord Robert's mouth trembled. "You *killlllllled* him," he wailed. Then he began to shake. It started with no more than a little shivering, but within a few short heartbeats he had collapsed across the castle, his limbs flailing about violently. . . . Guards and serving girls arrived within instants to help restrain the boy, Maester Colemon a short time later. Robert Arryn's shaking sickness was nothing new to the people of the Eyrie, and Lady Lysa had trained them all to come rushing at the boy's first cry.
> . . .
> "My lord, your blood needs thinning," said Maester Colemon. "It is the bad blood that makes you angry, and the rage that brings on the shaking. Come now."
> (*SOS*, 1105–1106)

The quote above reveals Robert's mother's standard approach to her son's ailing behaviour: the servants are "trained" to "come rushing" at any sign of distress, and his health is aided by various concoctions and thinning of the blood. Regardless of whether Robert's behavior is caused by a neurological disease (such as epilepsy, which can also be triggered by emotional turmoil), the result of stunted development, or simply behavioral issues, it is obvious that Lysa views the issue as merely physical. Although Lysa frequently warns against upsetting her son, little effort is made to construct a link between the child's mental stability and the frequency of his seizures; by smothering Robert, Lysa inherently hampers his ability to develop mechanisms of coping with his emotions. His character is thus easily regarded as disturbing by both adults and children, something Lysa refuses to acknowledge.

As I have previously referred to several instances where her own sanity is called into question by family and acquaintances alike, it is likewise possible to draw parallels with Hobcraft's notions of the parent's mental well-being potentiating further risks to a child being exposed to disturbances (Bisceglia et al, 40). Moreover, if earlier I discussed Lysa's portrayal as the mother

who merges her child's identity with herself, the behavior of her son can subsequently be viewed as direct implication of the society's failure to ensure abjection. As Creed writes, "partly consumed by the desire to remain locked in a blissful relationship with the mother and partly terrified of separation, the child finds it easy to succumb to the comforting pleasure of the dyadic relationship" (12).

Similarly, Cersei's son Joffrey frequently struggles to win the trust of adults or to connect with children his own age. When we are first introduced to the thirteen-year-old Joffrey, he is portrayed as a charming, kind prince through the eyes of a besotted Sansa Stark; upon closer examination, however, this view quickly deteriorates into the portrayal of a deeply disturbed child with issues of anger, self-worth and lack of empathy. It would be easy to assume these issues to stem from his origin: born of incest, Joffrey represents a definite taboo by the standards of most real life societies. However, as his siblings – sister Myrcella, brother Tommen – are repeatedly described as normal, healthy children regardless of parentage, the explicit source of Joffrey's disturbances must lie elsewhere.

Joffrey's character is as multifaceted as the various roles he employs during the three novels: a boy worshipped by his mother and ignored by his father(s), he has internalized much of the cynical attitudes of Cersei regarding life, and takes out the frustration of his own limitations out on other people in a similar manner. Although he is hopelessly dependent on his mother, Joffrey is shown to belittle and ridicule her on numerous occasions in a desperate attempt to gain autonomy of her; interestingly enough, if we refer back to Kristeva, this would link Cersei's obscene/monstrous qualities as a mother inherently to Joffrey's internal abjection, his attempt to disengage and reject her immediate influence:

> Joffrey gave a petulant shrug. "Your brother defeated my uncle Jaime. My mother says it was treachery and deceit. She wept when she heard. Women are all weak, even her, though she pretends she isn't." (*GOT*, 724)

As Joffrey remains in a state of both desiring and rejecting his mother's influence, he is likewise reminiscent of Goux's description of Oedipus, whose failure to commit successful matricide by

slaying the Sphinx resulted in a skewed perspective on the feminine. Joffrey gradually changes from a sheltered, proud boy with self-confidence issues to an outright monstrous teenager with little remorse; to augment his wounded pride, he executes the father of his fiancée, and repeatedly orders his guards to physically abuse her while boasting of his own physical prowess. His father(s) disassociate themselves from his behavior, and by refusing to intervene, they contribute to his deteriorating development in a manner very similar to his mother. Cersei, given her own harsh experiences, sees little wrong with Joffrey's attitude. According to Susan Campbell, author of *Behavior Problems in Preschool Children: Clinical and Developmental Issues* (2002), children "learn through observation and imitation," which further means that the actions and emotional expressions of parents are a definite model for the behavioral elements and internalized values of children amidst their own social networks (115). An example of this shows itself in a story of Joffrey's youth, recounted by two different people, his mother and Stannis Baratheon. When Cersei recites the tale to her father, it becomes but an anecdote in an attempt to defend Joffrey's temper after he makes empty threats at council:

> "Father, I am sorry," Cersei said, when the door was shut. "Joff has always been willful, I did warn you..."
> "There is a long league's worth of difference between willful and stupid. 'A strong king acts boldly?' Who told him that?"
> "Not me, I promise you," said Cersei. "Most like it was something he heard Robert say..."
> . . .
> "And what were you telling him, pray? I did not fight a war to seat Robert the Second on the Iron Throne. You gave me to understand the boy cared nothing for his father."
> "Why would he? Robert ignored him. He would have beat him if I'd allowed it. That brute you made me marry once hit the boy so hard he knocked out two of his baby teeth, over some mischief with a cat. . . ." (*SOS*, 716)

Meanwhile, according to Stannis,

> "Joffrey... I remember once, this kitchen cat... the cooks were wont to feed her scraps and fish heads. One told the boy that she had kittens in her belly, thinking he might want one. Joffrey opened up the poor thing with a dagger to see if it were true. When he found the kittens, he brought them to show to his father. Robert hit the boy so hard I thought he'd killed him." (*SOS*, 864)

The above examples illustrate two important points of the circumstances of Joffrey's development:

firstly, Cersei's attitude towards the idea of her son dissecting live animals is rather telling. In reality, such actions would imply at least the possibility of an emerging conduct disorder, the symptoms of which include aggressive, harmful behaviors towards animals (Veeraraghavan, 58); yet Cersei shrugs this incident off as 'some mischief', which can be understood to bear influence on Joffrey's own set of values, as per Campbell's assessment of children learning through imitation. Secondly, it also summarizes Joffrey's interaction with his supposed father, who has remained disengaged from Joffrey's life in part due to Cersei's insistence. As Joffrey's tendencies are thus largely left unattended, the narrative implies that his unstable nature combined with his mother's lack of parental intervention is what eventually enables his gradual mental deterioration.

While Campbell also points out that fathers who "curtail or ignore their childrearing responsibilities" are just as likely to cause ramifications for both the child and the mother, she acknowledges that the role of the mother-child interaction and maternal behavior is usually stressed in research (113). Therefore, an increasing amount of evidence has been conducted on the link between early mother-infant relationships as well as later competence in social and cognitive situations: she notes parental responsiveness, availability, warmth and sensitivity among key factors underscored in such studies (114). This also points us in the direction of the mothers in the novels who, for one reason or another, fail to provide such attention to their children completely. Although Catelyn Stark's children are generally considered among the healthiest of the noble families, her wavering on the boundaries of the obscene (as discussed in 4.1.) comes at a price: some of her children are subjected to elements of neglect and alienation.

The most notable of these is her youngest, Rickon. Earlier, I discussed the scene where Robb attempts to stir their mother from Bran's bedside to recognize her detrimental influence on the family; in doing so, he describes Rickon's behaviour as follows:

> "He's only three, he doesn't understand what's happening. He thinks everyone has deserted him, so he follows me around all day, clutching my left leg and crying. I don't know what to do with him." (*GOT*, 124)

At only three years old at the beginning of the story, Rickon is still undeniably dependent on his

mother, who first neglects him during Bran's injury, then travels South in pursuit of vengeance. In the absence of his parents, Rickon copes by developing a violent temper and mostly isolates himself in the company of his pet direwolf. He is repeatedly shown to ask for his mother; it is even remarked that he "had refused to let anyone cut [his hair] since their mother had gone. The last girl to try had been bitten for her efforts" (*COK*, 294). While Catelyn does lament on Bran – an eight-year-old – and Rickon from time to time, she soon insists her place is at the bedside of her dying father, then with Robb.[24] As pointed out in 4.1., the reality of her circumstances renders the situation unfair to judge as good or bad parenting per se, yet the consequences of Catelyn's choices are nonetheless displayed in a negative light.

Catelyn's more vengeful side has an equal impact on her step-son Jon Snow, who at fourteen years of age deals with his experience of alienation differently. In circumstances where a child repeatedly encounters cold and rejecting attitudes from a parental figure, it is possible for them to contend the feelings of frustration and grief with anger that remains unexpressed, lest the parent reject them further (Veeraraghavan, 69); Jon behaves in this manner by channeling his feelings of inadequacy towards defensive arrogance and the wish to prove his worth in the eyes of everyone. This subsequently and repeatedly lands him in fights amongst the other members of the Night's Watch before he is able to construct a stable sense of self-worth.

An additional, yet less literal example of how detrimental mothering comes in the form of Daenerys Targaryen's dragons. For all purposes of the story, they are treated similarly to any biological child she might have, and their gradual lack of regard at her commands mirrors the situation with Cersei and Joffrey in many ways. The dragons, while ferocious beasts, are nonetheless highly intelligent animals capable of forming emotional bonds with their caregivers; Daenerys is able to communicate with them in simple orders, which by the end of the third novel

[24] "*Fate drives me south and south again*, Catelyn thought as she sipped the astringent tea, *when it is north I should be going, north to home*. She had written to Bran and Rickon, that last night at Riverrun. *I do not forget you, my sweet ones, you must believe that. It is only that your brother needs me more*" (*COK*, 305, italics original).

would loosely render them slightly above the level of human infants. Named after her late husband and brothers, she is first protective of the dragons and enjoys engaging them in her affairs. Their initial small size and relative calmness belies their true monstrous nature, which even Daenerys overlooks for a long time. As the dragons begin to grow in size, they not only spread concern and suspicion among outsiders, but also begin to exhibit tendencies which forebode conflict in the future: one of the dragons learns to obliterate grown men with fire. While the three novels do not explicitly provide examples of outright misbehaviour, they preface the setting for the eventual conflict that takes place in later novels, suggesting that Daenerys's inability to foresee the repercussions of her pride extends to her children. Her neglect to pay heed to their needs early on renders later intervention impossible, which interestingly parallels her relationship with her subjects, as discussed in 3.2.

The nature of mostly gender-divided parenting in Westeros thus shoulders much of the pressure of children's well-being on the mother. This mirrors studied conducted in real life, which primarily focus on mother-child dyads; images of parenting and mothering thus appear largely conventional, perhaps reflecting the medieval conditions the story is modeled after. While some instances of engaged fatherhood do exist within the novels, and another study altogether could be completed on the possible influences of paternal absence, the actual examples in the narrative force us to focus on the 'repercussions' of motherhood instead: the negative elements of the 'fairy tale syndrome' and the monstrous mother are shown to yield a higher likelihood of mental issues among the children exposed to such child-rearing techniques. I have attempted to highlight only the most glaring instances of children's mental health mirroring the portrayal of the mother; what I have therefore concluded is that the novels exhibit behavioural issues as the most common result of obscene or neglectful mother-child combinations. More often than not, these issues are also largely unacknowledged by the mothers themselves; this resembles Creed's ideas of the mother obstructing the child's development of the self through abjection. Another important distinction to make is that it is only seldom that these mothers are portrayed as monstrous through the eyes of actual children

(such as their own); even with a diverse cast of child protagonists in the novels, the behavior of mothers such as Lysa and Cersei is deemed aberrant mainly by other adults.

At the beginning of the chapter I quoted Lysa Arryn calling a woman's only dishonour the failure to protect her children; the failure to mother 'properly' could thus be read as another defect, another negative consequence of motherhood. This ties the concept back to "commonplace maternal failure," (see 2.2.2.) the idea of which has persisted since the 18th century, and thus directly links Martin's narrative with a wider literary and social background.

5. Conclusion

In the first three novels of his *A Song of Ice and Fire*, George R. R. Martin broadens the concept of mothers in high fantasy literature: as opposed to static or completely absent characters, he includes a number of active mothers with agency in his story. These portrayals have more in common with mothers generally found in children's and young adult fantasy, where motherhood has long since been presented as a more multi-faceted concept in the eyes of child narrators. In *A Game of Thrones, A Clash of Kings* and *A Storm of Swords*, we perceive motherhood not only through children but also the society and the mothers themselves. This provides us with mother characters who can be both loving and cruel, well-intending and misinformed, self-sacrificing and selfish. The character of Catelyn Stark in particular serves to subvert expectations of "good" motherhood, by being introduced not only as a loving caregiver, but also as a vengeful and bitter stepmother. Diverse portrayals of this sort are uncommon in high fantasy, where motherhood is often either valorized or simply not present at all.

In depicting mothers, Martin borrows from two other traditions in literature: fairy tale tropes and the history of the monstrous mother. The negative aspects of motherhood take after absence, evil stepmothers, and mothers of literal monsters, as well as more general concepts of 'bad' mothering such as obscenity and smothering. By challenging high fantasy tropes, Martin's characters inevitably feed into stereotypes of a different kind; this is reminiscent of Swift and Defoe's attempts to transgress images of maternity in novels like *Moll Flanders*, wherein the transgressive qualities nonetheless enforce other pre-existing attitudes of detrimental consequences. These consequences are presented in Martin's novels as inherently tied to power, both in terms of political authority and influence over children; for this reason, theories on the effects of feminine power also apply.

The world of Westeros is undeniably harsh on everyone, with most personal and political endeavours resulting in failure. However, the manner in which the characters of my study face

resistance, rejection, and even punishment for their institutional failures is shown inherently tied to their motherhood: their actions are viewed through maternal motivations, which in turn is supported by the characters' internal monologue. In comparison, few fathers either regard or are regarded by the society as acting in a manner that is profoundly linked to their fatherhood; the Westerosi society supports disengaged fatherhood, with the occasional display of fatherhood as justification for action. Although it is suggested that implicit female influence may yield changes in political liaisons waged by men, direct female rule is met with opposition: both Cersei Lannister as Queen Regent and Daenerys Targaryen as the Mother of Dragons fail to have a lasting impact on their realms. As smaller-scale attempts to wield political power result in either the removal of this authority or it becoming disputed. These attitudes adhere to feminist theory regarding power, where female authority is often considered illegitimate and harmful by societies rooted in patriarchy. Likewise, the narrative supports similar concerns over the corruptive nature of power, which manifests itself as the loss of compassion in the cases of characters like Catelyn and Daenerys.

The first three novels also show more evidence of mothers being held responsible for the "failure to mother" as opposed to fathers condemned for their lack of parenting. Due to the strict gender division in Westeros, children are generally considered the mother's responsibility; in the case of Joffrey Baratheon and Robert Arryn, the children's disturbed nature is widely regarded as an extension of their mothers' instability and smothering, although real life studies have shown the absence of fathers to equally contribute to a child's stunted development. Likewise, we are shown glimpses to issues of neglect, where the resulting child behaviour suggests a lack of primary caregiver figures. As these instances are linked with traditionally 'selfish' motivations (bitterness, jealousy, pride) on behalf of mothers, they further feed into the trope of such flaws implying 'bad' mothering, and the dangers of active motherhood.

The question is not so much whether Martin's mothers should or should not exhibit negative traits; one of his trademark qualities is, after all, the subversion of high fantasy genre tropes, and by making his characters flawed regardless of age, race, and gender, he certainly deconstructs the saint

stereotype so often attached to mothers in high fantasy. This succeeds in portraying feasible, human characters instead of two-dimensional archetypes, but amidst the negative consequences of both individual and institutional displays of mothering, there are rarely instances to counter the detrimental element of motherhood with something empowering, something positive. All around Westeros, people pray to the Mother of the Seven Gods and valorize the idea of motherhood as something inherently good and merciful; yet the main narrative rarely touches upon instances where those qualities yield genuinely positive repercussions. This, in turn, is in direct opposition with the general views of feminist mothering, such as Nancy Chodorow's insistence of motherhood not only being a source of gratification but an undeniable success regardless of adversity.

The issue my thesis will hopefully have succeeded in pointing out is thus the complexity of portraying mothers in not only high fantasy, but fiction across genre boundaries. Fantasy, as discussed, theoretically provides means to subvert traditional complications of life, such as parenthood as an obstacle for narrative. As Martin's fictional world parallels our own, it is understandable that his characters are similarly limited, but also inevitably make a commentary on reality; instead of disguising his mothers as static placeholders, like the numerous high fantasy queens succeeding Tolkien, he has therefore provided them with individual agency. Characters like Catelyn Stark, Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, and even Lysa Ar ryn do challenge our perception of motherhood and mothers as wielders of institutional power, yet this perception ultimately remains more or less one-sided. Given that fatherhood is only occasionally touched upon in the novels, it would be unfair to directly contrast the two with one another and claim that fathers are less 'condemned' for their actions and influence; the examples I have provided nonetheless provide enough basis to question whether Martin's mothers nonetheless only paint a very limited image of motherhood in spite of their otherwise transgressive traits. This image, based on the first three novels of his saga, may adhere to the general cynical atmosphere of the series, but as an example of motherhood it carries other historical stigma already discussed by Marilyn Francus in 2.2.2.: that agency, desire and will ultimately do violate the very definition of motherhood.

Works Cited

Primary bibliography

Martin, George R. R. 1996. *A Game of Thrones*. Harper Voyager.
Martin, George R. R. 1998. *A Clash of Kings*. Harper Voyager.
Martin, George R. R. 2000. *A Storm of Swords*. Bantam Books.

Secondary bibliography

Agger, Michael. 2009. "Abracadabra Angst." [Internet] *The New York Times*. Available from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/books/review/Agger-t.html?_r=0. [Accessed 9.4.2013]

Allen, Amy. 2011. "Feminist Perspectives on Power." [Internet] *The Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Available from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/. [Accessed 4.3.2013]

Armitt, Lucie. 2005. *Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction*. New York: Continuum Ltd.

Baldick, Chris. 2008. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Baroff, George S., Olley, John Gregory. 1999. *Mental Retardation: Nature, Cause, and Management.* Taylor & Francis.

Beahm, George W. 2004. *The Essential J. R. R. Tolkien Sourcebook: A Fan's Guide to Middle-Earth and Beyond.* The Career Press.

Benford, Joanne. 2008. *Postmodern Feminist Fantasy*. Moog Enterprises.

Bisceglia, Rossana, Cheung, Connie, Swinkin, Emily, Jenkins, Jennifer. 2010. "Family Structure and Children's Mental Health in Western Countries." *Increasing Awareness of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, ed. Maria Elena Garralda and Jean-Philippe Raynaud. Jason Aronson.

Bruhm, Steven. 2002. "The Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, Susan B. 2002. *Behavioral Problems in Preschool Children: Clinical and Developmental Issues*. New York: The Guildford Press.

Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Cranny-Francis, Anne. 1990. *Feminist Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Creed, Barbara. 1993. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis.* New York: Routledge.

Eagleton, Mary. 1996. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Eliot, T. S. 1920. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Methune.

Empire Online. 2012. "George R. R. Martin Webchat Transcript". [Internet] Bauer Consumer Media. Available from http://www.empireonline.com/interviews/interview.asp?IID=1496. [Accessed on 25.3.2013]

Felden, Liz. 2005. "Mothers." *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, vol. 2*, ed. Gary Westfahl. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power." [Internet] Foucault.info. Available from http://foucault.info/documents/foucault.power.en.html. [Accessed on 25.5.2013]

Francus, Marilyn. 2003. ""A-Killing Their Children With Safety," Maternal Identity and Transgression in Swift and Defoe." *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Katharine Kittredge. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.

Goux, Jean-Joseph. 1993. *Oedipus, Philosopher*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hansen, Lene. 2010. "Ontologies, Epistemologies, Methodologies." *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A Feminist Introduction to International Relations*, ed. Laura J. Shepherd. New York: Routledge.

Hartinger, Brent. 2012. "A Different Kind of Other: The Role of Freaks and Outcasts in *A Song of Ice and Fire." Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, ed. James Lowder. BenBella Books.

Helford, Elyce Rae. 2005. "Feminism." *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, vol. 1*, ed. Gary Westfahl. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Kail, Robert V., Cavanaugh, John C. 2010. *Human Development: A Life-span View*. 5h ed. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Kaplan, Deborah. 2009. "Girls and the Fantastic." *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Overviews*, ed. Robin Anne Reid. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. "Powers of Horror, an Essay on Abjection." New York: Columbia University Press.

Lee, Linda J. 2008. "Mothers." *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, ed. Donald Haase. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Mains, Christine. 2009. "Fantasy, 1900–1959: Novels and Short Fiction." *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Overviews*, ed. Robin Anne Reid. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Mains, Christine. 2009. "Fantasy, 1960–2005: Novels and Short Fiction." *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy: Overviews*, ed. Robin Anne Reid. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Mash, Eric J., Wolfe, David Allen. 2010. *Abnormal Child Psychology*. Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

O'Reilly, Andrea. 2008. *Feminist Mothering*. New York: Suny Press.

Owens, Craig N. 2009. "Of Mamothers and Behemothers-in-Law: Toward a Twenty-First-Century Bestiary." *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture*, ed. Mardia J. Bishop and Ann C. Hall. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

Partridge, L., Langland, E. 1990. *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*. Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Peled, Nancy. 2010. "Motherless Daughters: The Absent Mothers in Margaret Atwood." *Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*, ed. Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Rosenberg, Alyssa. 2012. "Men and Monsters: Rape, Myth-Making, and the Rise and Fall of Nations in *A Song of Ice and Fire*." *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, ed. James Lowder. Dallas: BenBella Books.

Roscigno, Vincent J. 2007. *The Face of Discrimination: How Race and Gender Impact Work and Home Lives*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sinclair, Frances, ed. 2008. *Fantasy Fiction*. Swindon: School Library Association.

Spector, Caroline. 2012. "Power and Feminism in Westeros." *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, ed. James Lowder. Dallas: BenBella Books.

Vaught, Susan. 2012. "The Brutal Cost of Redemption in Westeros." *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, ed. James Lowder. Dallas: BenBella Books.

Veeraraghavan, Vimala. 2006. *Behaviour Problems in Children and Adolescents*. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre.

Westfahl, Gary. 2005. "Fathers." *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume One.* Ed. Gary Westfahl. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Worell, Judith, ed. 2002. *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex Similarities and Differences and the Impact of Society on Gender*. A-P, Volume One. San Diego: Academic Press.