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Emily Parise

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# "You are not on trial for being a dwarf": Monstrosity in Medievalism in *Richard III* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*

Emily Parise  
Seton Hall University

## Abstract

*George R.R. Martin's fantasy series, A Song of Ice and Fire, and William Shakespeare's play Richard III both utilize a fictionalized medieval setting, thus creating an act of medievalism. Both texts utilize the setting of the War of the Roses to recreate a violent medieval past for popular consumption. By using the Middle Ages as a backdrop for these fictions, Shakespeare and Martin are able to utilize a medieval past to explore medieval and modern anxieties surrounding politics, society, and monstrosity. This paper examines the three major monsters present in these texts: Cersei and Tyrion Lannister in A Song of Ice and Fire and Richard III in Richard III. These narratives, however, only condemns the internal monstrosity of Cersei and Richard, while it embraces and uplifts the outward monstrosity of Tyrion. These texts only condemn monstrosity that produces further monstrosity through murder and incest. The narratives condemn this kind of monstrosity because it encapsulates the cultural fears and anxieties surrounding the instability of power at the time they were written. While Tyrion may be condemned by Westeros for his physical deformity, these texts ultimately condemn Cersei and Richard for their constant attempts at destabilizing the monarchies and other social hierarchies in their quests for sole political power. Therefore, these texts reject monstrosity that produces evil and destabilizes social norms, leading to the condemnation of Cersei and Richard, but not Tyrion.*

During an interview with MTV, Peter Dinklage, the actor playing Tyrion Lannister on HBO's *Game of Thrones*, describes the show in forty-five seconds: "Stabby, stabby, stabby, stabby, sexy, sexy, sexy, more stabby, stabby, beautiful language" (Dinklage). Dinklage's explanation of *Game of Thrones* encapsulates George R.R. Martin's desires regarding the medieval world he creates in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the book series the HBO show *Game of Thrones* is based on. The first book in the series is titled *A Game of Thrones*, the book from which the show gets its title. The hyper-violent "stabby, stabby" world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* creates a significantly more violent modern conception of the Middle Ages, rewriting popular understandings of the medieval period in opposition to other fantasy writers like J.R.R. Tolkien. Martin parallels his novels against the historical War of the Roses, allowing him to explore violence, war, monarchy, and blood feuds in his fantasy.

By setting *A Song of Ice and Fire* in a fantasy world meant to mimic the English Middle Ages in terms of civil conflict, social structures, and costuming, Martin creates a piece of medievalism. medievalism can be defined as "the art, literature, scholarship, avocational pastimes and sundry forms of entertainment and culture that turn to the Middle Ages for their subject matter or inspiration, and in doing so, explicitly or implicitly, by comparison or by contrast, comment on the artist's contemporary, sociocultural milieu" (Pugh and Weisl 1). In creating a piece of medieval-

ism, Martin aligns his work with other dramatic recapitulations of the war, most notably, William Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Both texts utilize the setting of the War of the Roses to recreate a violent medieval past for popular consumption. By using the Middle Ages as a backdrop for these fictions, Shakespeare and Martin are able to utilize a medieval past to explore medieval and modern anxieties surrounding politics, society, and monstrosity.

Martin and Shakespeare explore themes of monstrosity in their medievalism, allowing modern and medieval views of monstrosity to exist in conjunction with each other. Concepts and themes of monstrosity are explored by Jeffery Jerome Cohen in his book *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Cohen describes the monstrous body as "pure culture" (4), a body that represents the "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" of the culture in which the monster exists (4). Monster theory explores the values and fear of a culture based on the monsters that certain cultures engender. By setting representations of monstrosity in the Middle Ages, these texts utilize a contradiction between medieval and modern understandings of monsters, contrasting external deformity, and internal monstrosity. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Shakespeare's *Richard III* both engage with ideas of monstrous bodies, specifically Tyrion and Cersei Lannister (*A Song of Ice and Fire*), and *Richard III* (*Richard III*). These "monsters" engage with both physical monstrosity, such as a physical deformity, and internal monstrosity, such as a willingness to commit evil acts like murder and incest. While these three monsters are condemned by their fictional societies for their various unnatural qualities, the circumstances of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Richard III* only seem to condemn the internal monstrosity of Cersei and Richard, while it embraces and uplifts the outward monstrosity of Tyrion. Tyrion is not condemned for his dwarfism by the narrative because his dwarfism does not create or recreate monstrosity through murder and incest, thus it poses no threat to so-

ciety. In contrast to Tyrion, *Richard III* and Cersei manifest monstrosity in a way that directly impacts society – these characters are power hungry and unopposed to killing their enemies to achieve that power. The narratives condemn this kind of monstrosity because it encapsulates the cultural fears and anxieties surrounding the instability of power at the time they were written. While Tyrion may be condemned by Westeros for his physical deformity, these texts ultimately condemn Cersei and Richard for their constant attempts at destabilizing the monarchies and other social hierarchies in their quests for sole political power. Therefore, these texts reject monstrosity that produces evil and destabilizes social norms, leading to the condemnation of Cersei and Richard, but not Tyrion.

Both Shakespeare and Martin utilize this backdrop of the War of the Roses as a stage on which they can present their modern monsters. Their monsters are representations of political instability and demonstrate a potential to destabilize further the medieval societies in which these narratives exist. At its most simple, The War of the Roses was a century-long civil conflict between the powerful houses of York and Lancaster for control of the English Throne. Henry IV of house Lancaster took the throne from Richard II of the house York. From there, these two houses engaged in various battles over control of the throne spanning roughly four generations and six kings (Henry IV, V, VI, Edward IV, *Richard III*, and Henry VII respectively). This conflict worked to significantly destabilize traditional ideas about the monarchy and divine right, as they forced people to consider how two houses could wage war over a throne, if monarchical right was supposed to be given to the king by God. The conflict, therefore, came to demonstrate the fallibility of these social constructs surrounding the throne, reducing what had once been an established familial line that passed from father to son, to an object that could be fought over and obtained through battle (Weir). By setting these two conflicts against the historical War of the Roses, Shakespeare and Mar-

tin can similarly use a medieval setting to explore a modern anxiety over the stability of government in their fiction.

Unlike Martin's medievalism fantasies, Shakespeare's historical dramas situate themselves in between genre – they deviate from earlier Romance Histories, seeking to portray a more realistic tale of both history and the human experience; however, these plays dramatize history to a point that they cannot be considered a chronicle history told by a historian (Dean 34-36). The new genre created by Shakespeare's earlier histories, then, utilizes historical moments to explore political themes of monarchy, war, and death. Concerns of political stability and divine right were present and pressing concern to Shakespeare's society. At the end of the sixteenth century, when *Richard III* was first being performed, Queen Elizabeth I was strong, but she was past childbearing age without an heir, and the Catholic Church had put a bounty on her Protestant head. If *Richard III* embodies the anxieties surrounding this instability, then Henry VII, the triumphant hero at the end of the play, serves as a reminder of the end of the Tudor line in "History as Echo: Entertainment Historiography from Shakespeare to HBO's *Game of Thrones*," Amy Rodgers argues that "Shakespeare's histories (and early modern England) were similarly concerned with national and monarchical origins, attempting, as they do, to celebrate a Tudor dynasty that had stabilized England after 30 years of civil war but was coming to a decisive end with the aging Elizabeth" (144). I am not arguing that Elizabeth was not a beloved or effective queen; rather, her childless reign had left her nation anxious about its own fate once her successful reign was over. The instability of the future circumstance of England become embodied in Richard's<sup>1</sup> usurping body, as he destabilizes the monarchy and the nation in pursuit of personal and political gain. Shakespeare uses his stage to recreate the Middle Ages while engaging

<sup>1</sup>All references to Richard refer to Richard III, unless otherwise noted.

in political theory about the role and temporality of the so-called "divine rights" of the monarchy (Finlayson and Frazer 233-335). In "Dictions of Sovereignty: Shakespeare, Theater, and the Representations of Rule," Alan Finlayson and Elizabeth Frazer argue that Shakespeare's political adaptation, "Engag[es] with what we now think of as questions of political theory, he makes them part and parcel of the human dilemmas he is dramatizing, produces something insightful and illuminating" (234). When Richard violently kills his own family members, he embraces these questions by examining the roles of the unnatural and monstrous in these divinely and politically established monarchies and houses.

While Martin's medievalism also explore monstrosity through a retelling of the War of the Roses, Martin's story utilizes the twenty-first century fantasy genre, which stems from Tolkien's publication of *The Hobbit* in the early twentieth century. Tolkien's fantasy was rooted in a fantastical reimagining of the Middle Ages, where magic and the medieval function together to tell a modern story with a seemingly older past. Martin's novels operate under a similar pretense, allowing him to tell a modern story by utilizing themes, elements, and images of the medieval, which define his novels as acts of medievalism. Martin attempts to recreate the Middle Ages through what he describes as a "more realistic" lens. Shiloh Carroll, in "Rewriting the Fantasy Archetype," argues that by creating a hyper-violent anti-Disneyland medievalism that still embraces fantastical elements like dragons "Martin has found a middle ground that allows him to align himself with Tolkien yet separate himself from Tolkien's imitators" (61). This split allows Martin's novels to do more than have both grotesque violence and magic in one narrative; recreates a new way for audiences to perceive the middle ages, by providing a more violent perception of the Middle Ages than the traditional Tolkien medievalism. Rodgers argues that "This sense of instability, of not knowing what's about to happen, speaks to the moment ... it's

hard to dramatize economic uncertainty, so why not convey this feeling through a made-up version of the Wars of the Roses” (qtd. in Rodgers). Martin creates a sense of not knowing by creating a new and shocking perception of the Middle Ages, coupled with the instability of the War of the Roses. By combining these medieval elements with a modern audience, Martin creates a space in which he explores representations of monstrosity across both periods, utilizing Tyrion and Cersei Lannister’s characters to redefine medieval and modern monstrosity.

By placing monsters in the monarchy, these monsters become keenly linked with cultural concerns and political concerns. Both monarchies are presented as the pinnacle of a society that has been brought low by problems within the royal hierarchy, rather than from external sources. The civil conflict represented in both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Richard III* allows the audience to see the monarchy as a penetrable, fallible structure that is capable of breeding monstrosity and imperfection. Both of these monarchies are presented to audiences of common people; for Shakespeare, this audience is the urban populace in the theaters on the outskirts of London, and for Martin his audiences are the readers of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the viewers of HBO’s *Game of the Thrones*. Finlayson and Frazier argue that

In setting English Kings before an audience of commoners, the theater nourished the cultural conditions that eventually permitted the nation to bring its King to trial, not because the theater approvingly represented the subversive acts, but rather because representation became itself subversive. Whatever their overt ideologically content, history plays inevitably if unconsciously, weakened the structure of authority: on stage the king became a subject—the subject of the author’s imagining and the subject of the attention and judgement of an audience of subjects (234).

By subjecting the monarchy to the judgement of the people they rule, the roles of subject and monarch are conflated. The King is subject to his people’s judgement as much as they are subject to the judgement of the monarch. This conflation eliminates a sense of social hierarchies in theater and popular fiction, allowing the powers of the king and the people to be effectively the same; when this happens, the absolute rule of the monarchy becomes open to social opinion, leaving the royal family vulnerable and penetrable; thus, this vulnerability creates the possibility of monstrosity not only within the culture being ruled, but within the ruling family itself.

When the monarchies are exposed to monstrosity, and thus exposed to cultural fears and anxieties, the very roots that have established the monarchy’s absolute rule are threatened. The monsters that inhabit a space in royalty have the most potential to destroy that monarchy. *Richard III* begins his play with a soliloquy surrounding his own deformity and his role as the villain in *Richard III*. He describes himself as a person who has been “Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature” (1.1.19), describing Nature’s personified role in his deformity. By establishing his deformity, and therefore his external monstrosity, as something brought on by Nature, Richard is able to conflate his internal monstrosity with his external deformities, essentially establishing them as one and the same. He further conflates his disabled nature and villainous personality later in the soliloquy, when he says, “I cannot prove a lover / ... I am determined to prove a villain” (1.1.28-30). Richard conflates his inability to be the romantic lover because of his outward deformity with the internal choice to play the role of the evil villain, a role determined by a person’s internal desires. By establishing earlier that his physical form is the result of Nature, his use of the word “determined” could take on two meanings. First, that his external form, the result of Nature, determines his place as a villain in his own narrative. Second, it could also reflect a personal choice to es-

establish himself as the villain, allowing his external form to reflect his internal monstrosity. Richard's nature has made him both physically and internally monstrous, and Richard reinforces that idea in these two lines. Richard effectively establishes a binary for himself with lover on one side and villain on the other. If villainy is marked by outward deformities such as his own, then his outward appearance as not-lover marks him as villain, placing him on the side of the binary that surrounds ideas of monstrosity.

Richard III is a prime example of an uprooting monster; not only has the house of York taken the throne (taken the throne back, depending which family is being supported) from the house of Lancaster, but Richard now seeks power for himself within his own family line. The War of the Roses conflict itself has uprooted stable conceptions about the monarchy, but Richard now is uprooting his own family tree in pursuit of power. In *Richard III*, Margaret of Anjou describes Richard as a "rooting hog" (1.3.127) establishing his nature as animalistic and destructive. The use of the word "rooting" in conjunction with the image of Richard as an animal allows the metaphor to do more than simply comment on Richard's physical deformity; "rooting" adds a present action to the animalistic quality, an action that implies Richard's desires to uproot his own family tree. Richard's monstrosity manifests itself in his unnatural desires to usurp his own family line, and seem to be made physical by his deformity. His outward deformity merely marks him as different and provides a visual monstrosity to accompany his character on the renaissance stage. When his outward deformity and internal unnatural desires to murder his way to the throne are combined, Richard becomes marked as monstrous. Richard's monstrosity is about more than simple desire to kill both his enemies and family; his desires truly center on his desire to uproot the monarchy, the ideas of divine right, and lawful succession. If "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (Cohen 4) of the

culture that they exist in, then Richard's monstrosity embodies both medieval and Renaissance anxieties surrounding the stability (or instability) of the British throne.

Richard's role as uprooter at the end of the conflict is the capstone to this destabilization. The instability of monarchy within and outside of the royal family is the anxiety that has manifested itself on the British stage at the end of the sixteenth century. Cohen references *Richard III* in his fourth of seven theses, writing "at its most active, culture gives birth to a monster before our eyes, painting over the normally proportioned Richard who once lived, raising his right shoulder to deform his simultaneously person, cultural response, and the possibility of objectivity" (9). Cohen argues that Richard's body becomes deformed by the culture that reflects on him – Shakespeare's audience. The representation of Richard on the stage depends on the way that culture desires to shape the anxieties it sees reflected in his internal desires. Richard's internal monstrosity, then, becomes represented by the physically monstrous qualities of a raised shoulder, crippled hand, and limp walk for the benefits of live drama. By constructing the monstrous body of Richard for the stage, Shakespeare alters history to create a referential history of monsters and instability by utilizing a monstrous Richard to reflect the current religious and political anxieties surrounding the English throne. The text can only resolve this conflict when Henry VII defeats Richard in battle, ascending the English throne and marrying Elizabeth of York, thus blending the houses of Lancaster and York. *Richard III* ends with Henry VII uniting the red rose and the white, and ending the civil conflict; Shakespeare writes, "All this divided York and Lancaster, / ... By God's fair ordinance conjoined together / ... Now civil wounds are stopp'd and peace lives again" (5.5.27-40). Henry VII's speech and subsequent ascension re-stabilize England by putting a permanent end to the conflict. This merge re-stabilizes England in the aftermath of the War of the Roses by allowing Henry VII to

become the hero figure once he defeats the monster.

If *Richard III* surrounds anxieties regarding the instability of monarchy, *A Song of Ice and Fire* embraces those anxieties full force. The title *A Game of Thrones*<sup>2</sup> embraces the destabilized nature of the monarchy in Westeros by acknowledging how ideas of lawful ascension have been reduced to nothing but a competition for the Iron Throne. The ideas of uprooting the monarchy apply in similar ways as they had in *Richard III*. Rather than a single character seeking to uproot his entire familial line through murder, Queen Cersei becomes a monstrous uprooter by rejecting her role as heir-producer for King Robert Baratheon. She uproots his line of heirs simply by refusing to produce children for him, because of her hatred for him and her love for her brother, Jamie. She cuckolds her husband with her own twin brother, giving birth to three children who have been produced solely through the Lannister line. Her desire to be with her brother evident throughout the series, as well as her fierce rejection of the idea of having her husband's children. When Ned Stark confronts her about her children's illegitimacy, she admits that she went so far as to have an abortion to avoid giving birth to one of Robert's legitimate children, telling Ned "[Robert] never knew. If truth be told, I can scarcely bear for him to touch me, and I have not let him inside me for years" (*Game of Thrones* 407). Cersei physically uproots Robert's natural line of succession when she aborts his legitimate child, and she further ensures that Robert will not plant that line by refusing to have sex with him. She single handedly puts an end to the royal Baratheon line by producing bastard children who are exclusively Lannister set to inherit the throne. Cersei becomes monstrous by both avoiding a traditional feminine role and by achieving power for herself through her Lannister children, creating instability by eliminating all true heirs from the line

<sup>2</sup>Referring to both the first book in the series and the TV show.

of succession, leaving the nation without a true king after Robert Baratheon dies.

Cersei revisits the image of herself as an uprooter in *A Feast for Crows*, while she is in bed with her best friend, Taena Merryweather. In this moment, Cersei thinks back to her marriage with her now dead husband; Martin writes, "*Ten thousand of your children perished in my palm, Your Grace ... Whilst you snored, I would lick your sons off my face and fingers one by one, all those pale sticky princes. You claimed your rights, my lord, but in the darkness I would eat your heirs*" (*A Feast for Crows* 692-93). Like Richard, Cersei has been made monstrous by her unnatural desires to prevent and tear down the succession of the family line in place of achieving her own power. Cersei's thought "*I would eat your heirs*" (*A Feast for Crows* 193) mimics Richard's command: "Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead" (4.2.19), willing the death of children in return for her own political advancement. Valerie Frankel unpacks these moments of cuckolding and child eating in her book *Women in Game of Thrones—Power, Conformity and Resistance*. In her chapter "Exploring Archetypes and Tropes" she writes, "[Cersei] takes her secret revenge by having children with her brother instead of her husband, denying Robert progeny and placing full Lannister's on the throne. ... her adultery brings down the kingdom" (90). Her adultery comes directly from her unnatural sexual attraction to her twin brother, as well as her disdain for her husband. Her desire for her brother and to spite her husband create Cersei's monstrosity, and allow her to reproduce her monstrosity by bearing her brother's children in place of her husband's children. Frankel writes, "Cersei's falseness and its consequences are a symptom of patriarchal culture. ... 'When woman becomes man's property, he wants a virgin, and he demands total fidelity at the risk of severe penalty ... conjugal infidelity on the part of the woman is considered a crime of high treason'" (de Beauvoir 91 qtd. in Frankel 90). Frankel identifies Cersei's actions as stemming directly from the culture

that these actions reject and prohibit. By denying Cersei the sexual freedom that she desires, the culture of Westeros has produced a monstrous, cuckolding queen, who puts a stop to the natural line of kings she should have produced in her time as queen. Through this action, "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" (Frankel 90). If, as Cohen argues, "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (4) of the cultures that create them, then Cersei, like Richard, embodies the fear of political uncertainty, and a single person's ability to completely uproot the monarchy. Cersei's body becomes, like Richard's, the physical representation of her unnatural desires when her womb bears bastard children, introducing instability into the nation.

Cersei's ability to produce heirs is directly connected her attitudes regarding her various sexual relationships. The moment in bed with Taena Merryweather allows her to achieve masculine power by dominating the other woman. Cersei imagines herself both as the man in this moment, comparing herself to her now-dead husband; Martin writes "I am the queen. I mean to claim my rights.' ... but it was no good. She could not feel it, whatever Robert felt on the nights he took her. There was no pleasure in it, not for her" (692). In this moment, Cersei fails to achieve full masculine power, equating herself still with her female sex and role as queen, rather than king. She compares herself to her late husband in an attempt to feel the power and sexual aggression he felt towards her, but fails in that moment to assume the kingly husband role, remaining emotionless in the act. Cersei attempts to imagine herself as a beast in an attempt to achieve the masculine power she desires; Martin writes that Cersei "imagine[s] that her fingers were a boar's tusks, ripping the Myrish woman apart from groin to throat" (*A Feast for Crows* 693). However, this attempt fails, and she admits to herself, "it had never been any good with anyone but Jamie" (*A Feast for Crows* 693), which

suggests that she can only find sexual relief in relationships and situations in which she can produce children. Her refusal to have vaginal sex with her husband and the same-sex nature of this moment with her best friend do not allow for conception. She only finds pleasure in the incestuous relationship that she engages in with her twin. Cersei cannot, then, escape her own monstrosity. Her role as a "normal" queen depends on her producing heirs for the King, which she fails to do before his death. She can only further feel sexual gratification in moments that do not only cuckold her dead husband (like the moment with Taena) but also provide her with the possibility of more monstrous Lannister children, something she can only achieve through her relationship with her brother.

By these definitions of uprooters, Tyrion Lannister should also be considered a monstrous uprooter; however, neither the text nor the audience condemns his uprooting action of killing his father. Although his physically deformed body places him as logical comparison to Richard, Martin constructs Tyrion's character as everything but a power hungry murderer. In contrast to Shakespeare's morally deformed and thus physically monstrous Richard, Tyrion's outward deformity juxtaposes his internal goodness. Tyrion does not work for the advancement of himself, nor is he war mongering – he presents himself as a logical diplomat working for the advancement of his realm. Westerosi society has always considered Tyrion monstrous because of his dwarfism, and his own family views him with the same ideas of monstrosity. Tyrion's father, Tywin Lannister, hates him, refuses to acknowledge Tyrion's claim to their home estate (Casterly Rock), and often remarks that Tyrion is a lecherous beast. Tywin's rejection of Tyrion's lawful right to Casterly Rock stems directly from Tyrion's role in society and a dwarf – a monstrous curse to someone as powerful as Tywin. The text presents the rejection of the child by the father as truly monstrous, rather than presenting the deformity as inherently monstrous. Furthermore, the rejection of Tyrion's birthright

connects to an observation that Tyrion makes in *A Game of Thrones*. While Tyrion is talking to Jon Snow, Ned Stark's bastard son, Tyrion remarks, "All dwarfs are bastards in their father's eyes" (47). It is the acknowledgement of his own inherently abject state, paired with the reader's knowledge of Tyrion's character in contrast to the way he is perceived by society that creates sympathy for his character. Tywin goes so far as to sentence Tyrion to death when Tyrion is found guilty of regicide, despite seeming to know that Tyrion had nothing to do with the crime of which his family had been accused. Therefore, when Tyrion finds his father on the privy, as Tyrion is escaping prison before being beheaded, Tyrion takes this moment as an opportunity to kill his father. His father's last words to him are "You ... you are no ... no son of mine" (*A Storm of Swords* 1073). This moment confirms what Tyrion and the audience already know – Tyrion was nothing more than a bastard in the eyes of his father.

Tywin quickly becomes known throughout the narrative as one of the primary villains in Westeros, and Joseph Young explores the text's treatment of Tywin in "Enough about whores": Sexual Characterization in *A Song of Ice and Fire*," arguing that "[Martin] uses sex as a way of encouraging readers to consider the way his characters interact with the world" (47). Young's argument carries into a discussion of Tywin's sexual practices and his roles in the narrative, Young writes, "By the time Tywin actually appears ... he is ... already cemented in the reader's minds as a villain. His subsequent follies ... demonstrate the brittleness of the persona he hides behind. His tryst with Shae [a whore and Tyrion's lover] settles the issue. Lannister's sexual imagination moves Martin's critique of the man up a gear, depicting him ... as an actively hypocritical villain" (50). The text establishes Tywin as a villain, especially in opposition to Tyrion—his power and cruelty mimic and exceed Cersei's to such an extent that he becomes the one the narrative considers the monster, rather than Tyrion. When Tyrion kills his father,

he is not engaging in the cruel action of murder, he enacts heroic justice on the monster who harmed him. He brings Tywin low in his final moments, getting revenge on the man who tormented him for his entire life. The story of the bastard getting revenge on the cruel father resonates with the audiences for *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*, because, unlike Cersei or Richard's methods for uprooting their family, the audience is able to view Tyrion as an intelligent and well-meaning underdog/hero figure, in contrast to his abusive and cruel father. Unlike Richard's child killing or Cersei's incest, the text does not suggest that this is a moment of monstrosity, cruelty, or uprooting, rather, the otherwise monstrous act is defined as an act of justice.

Despite the text and the audience supporting Tyrion, the overarching culture of Westeros despises him because of his outward deformity. Descriptions of Tyrion and other dwarfs as lusty and sinful animals are persistent throughout the text, and seem to reflect genuine medieval attitudes towards little people. Consider the description of the dwarf of Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Lancelot: the Knight of the Cart*: "the dwarf, low-born and disgusting" (352-53), meant to cart around criminals, and more than anything else, stands in the way of the knightly heroes completing their quest to save the queen. Although the dwarf is not a major player in Chrétien's romance, he serves to represent the negative ideas of impishness in medieval literature and culture. These negative attitudes towards dwarfs have been maintained in Martin's Westeros, and are not unfamiliar to Tyrion despite, in contrast to Chrétien's dwarf, his noble birth. The text utilizes this medieval perspective in conjunction with Tyrion's point of view, allowing him to become a more sympathetic underdog character that modern audiences root for opposed to the medieval monster that the Westerosi society has deemed Tyrion to be. Tyrion tells Jon Snow to "...never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armor your-

self in it, and it will never be used to hurt you" (*A Game of Thrones* 47). Tyrion's recognition of society's treatment of him allows him to "armor [himself] in it," and resist Westeros's simplistic labeling of him as monster. Other than his physical deformity and some indulgence in wine and whores, Tyrion does not embody medieval or modern anxieties over rule and power. Instead, Tyrion represents a desire to reject the "lover-villain" binary established by *Richard III*, allowing his deformity to armor and protect him, allowing Tyrion to be recognized as a hero character in the series to the modern audience.

*A Song of Ice and Fire*, in direct contrast to its medieval society, ultimately comes to uplift Tyrion as the closest thing to a medieval knight in the text. The narrative often challenges the idea of medieval knights by painting the knights of Westeros as cruel and abusive. In the article "Tyrion's Gallantry," Jamie Hovey describes the ways in which the narrative consistently rejects chivalry by putting forth knights who are cruel, violent, and misogynistic (86). Hovey writes, "Martin teaches us to read chivalry with a critical eye while never entirely losing sight of its ideals, and his best characters also learn to see through the reified illusions of romantic chivalry" (88). His discussion of Martin's portrayal of courtesy complements the ways in which the narrative challenges ideas of monstrosity through Tyrion. The moments where knights are contrasted with Tyrion tend to revolve around Sansa Stark, a young girl who is abused by Westerosi society nearly as much as Tyrion is. Sansa holds onto romantic ideas of knighthood, chivalry, and courtesy, thinking, "Knights are sworn to defend the weak, protect women, and fight for the right" (*A Clash of Kings* 490). However, it is often Tyrion who comes to her aid, fulfilling her romantic fantasy of knighthood in every aspect except stature. When Sansa is beaten and stripped of her clothing, Tyrion calls an end to the abuse and escorts Sansa back to her chambers (*A Clash of Kings* 486-494). Tyrion saves Sansa, but she struggles to see past his deformity, and refuses

to acknowledge him as a hero to her. Tyrion's chivalry contrasts with his physical deformity, preventing him from being seen as the hero to the society that he resides in, but allowing the readers and viewers to understand him as one of the primary protagonists of the series. His dwarfism prevents him from being the perfect medieval hero, but modern audiences do not necessarily seek the same romantic stories that Sansa does. Modern audiences, rather, appreciate and root for a character who has the odds stacked against him, and still manages to embody the best parts of chivalry, often with a glass of wine in his hand and whore in his bed. Tyrion, then, becomes both the modern hero and the anti-monster. In this way, the series utilizes its modern context and medieval setting to redefine ideas of monstrosity and chivalry, making the monstrous body of Tyrion the ideal knight, and the beautiful queen the monster.

Tyrion's character starts to break down, however, when the social perception of him as monstrous leaves him accused of killing King Joffrey. Tyrion, prior to being accused, is the victim of jokes and mild cruelty, but now his deformity allows the people in Westeros to quickly turn against him, and stand up willing to condemn him. In this moment, his ability to use his dwarfism as his armor fails him, as it cannot stand against the actual legal system of Westeros. In season four episode six, "The Laws of Gods and Men," at the end of his trial, Tyrion says:

I saved you, I save this city, and all your worthless lives ... I'm guilty. Guilty, is that what you want to hear? ... I'm guilty of a far more monstrous crime. I'm guilty of being a dwarf ... I've been on trial for that my entire life. ... I did not do it. I did not kill Joffrey, but I wish that I had. Watching your vicious bastard die gave me more relief than a thousand lying whores. I wish I was the monster you think I am. I wish I had enough poison for the whole pack of you. I would gladly give my life to

watch you all swallow it. I will not give my life for Joffrey's murder, and I know I'll get not justice here. So I will let the gods decide my fate. I demand a trial by combat.

Here, chivalry fails him, as he has no one to defend but himself; he is aware of his treatment by society, and cannot maintain chivalry and survive, because the society of Westeros will not see past his dwarfism to accept him as a knightly hero. He establishes a difference between their perception of him and his actual character; he articulates that he is only being held for trial because of his physical form not because of evidence against him. When his father protests that "you are not on trial for being a dwarf" (S4, E6), Tyrion retorts with the knowledge of his social status as scapegoat – a social standing that only exists because of his external form, and has nothing to do with his internal strengths. When chivalry fails him in this moment, there is nothing left for Tyrion to do but to fall back on the monstrous perception of him, demanding death for the people who seek to condemn him. This desire likely stems from the realization that, no matter how much he embodies chivalric idealism, he will always fall short of social expectations, and remain a monster in the eyes of society.

Following Tyrion's trial, the show extends a scene from the books, where Oberyn Martell, the prince of Dorne, agrees to be Tyrion's champion in his trial by combat. Oberyn tells Tyrion the story of the first time they met, when Tyrion had just been born: "All anyone talked about was the monster that had been born to Tywin Lannister" (S4, E7). The people of Westeros had come to define Tyrion as monstrous because of his physical deformity from his first days alive. Oberyn continues to describe the list of deformities people had ascribed to Tyrion, including claws and a tail. Like Richard's deformity in Shakespeare's play, the culture of Westeros adds deformities to Tyrion, making him more monstrous than he is, allowing the show to explore the ways

in which Tyrion's treatment has become a "cultural response" (Cohen 9) to deformity. Oberyn, however, sees through this cultural response to so-called monstrosity: "[Cersei] unveiled the freak. Your head was a bit large, your arms a bit small, but no claw, no red eye, no tail between your legs, just a tiny pink cock. We didn't try to hide our disappointment. 'That's not a monster,' I told Cersei, 'that's just a baby.'" (S4, E7). Oberyn, here, makes an important distinction between outward and inward monstrosity. He recognizes the humanity of Tyrion in this moment, and, despite his poorly proportioned body, marks the body as distinctly *not* monstrous, just simply a little different, but still human. Oberyn acknowledges something that the audience of the show has been conscious of the entire series – Tyrion is not the monster to be feared, even if, like *Richard III*, he stands in front of the audience physically deformed.

Monsters reflect the fears and anxieties of the cultures that create them; for Shakespeare these are early modern fears, and for Martin they are modern fears. However, both authors graft their fears onto the medieval setting of the War of the Roses. The fears of instability and the unknown in the political sphere can easily be explored through this medieval war because the period itself is open to monstrosity. As the War of the Roses destabilized monarchy in the Middle Ages, it became an unstable period that can breed projections of monstrosity and fear in the medieval, early modern, or modern era. The society has become perceived as so unstable in its century of war that stories like *Richard III* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* grow almost naturally out of the conflict. When the War of the Roses uprooted one king after another, the integrity of the monarch became suspect. Once the king was suspect and civil war broke out, the period became an opportunity for modern ideas of instability and the unknown to be explored. The War of the Roses established ideas about uncertainty in politics, the problems with monarchy, as well as providing an image of the Middle Ages as a period immense violence. The conjunction of

the instability of England during the War of the Roses with ideas of monstrosity and violence in the Middle Ages allowed Martin and Shakespeare to develop a "stabby" Middle Ages in their recreations. These writers use the fictionalized Middle Ages as a place to set their violent monsters and conceptions of instability. Monstrosity, to these authors, is defined not by a physical form, but by an ability and desire to maintain instability, rather than a development towards peace found at the end of the war or the end of the game.

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