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Author: Beth Wold Pedersen	..... (Author's signature)
Supervisor: Sonya Louise Lundblad	
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## ABSTRACT

The proposed thesis seeks to investigate how some of the characters of the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin are limited by different social structures of masculinity, physical prowess, feudal power and chivalric principles. Furthermore, the thesis seeks to investigate how literacy is depicted in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and to understand if Tyrion Lannister, Samwell Tarly, Ser Davos Seaworth, Cersei Lannister, Sansa Stark and Arya Stark are able to use literacy to balance the social discourses of power. Through analysis of all five novels in the series; *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1999), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), and *A Dance with Dragons* (2011) the thesis will discuss both the characters literacy narratives and the medieval-like setting of Martin's world. Several of the characters of *ASOIAF* reads books, and to a certain point, knowledge will aid and sustain them. Martin has created a medieval-like world for his book series, and the thesis tries to reveal the similarities between medieval England and his fictional realm. Elements that are recognizable from this period is the feudal system, the kings, the noble families, and the knights. In addition, the thesis investigates any links between romance elements and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, like the trope of the knight, the damsel in distress and the trope of the wilderness. *ASOIAF* is defined as high fantasy, but the thesis questions this definition, and proposes a new definition, a merge between high fantasy and new historicist fiction. There are elements of both history and contemporary society to be found in the series, and thus the most common proposed definition no longer fits. The thesis argues that even though the setting is very familiar and closely linked to medieval England, the topics and the characters that are presented transcend both history and literature, as they battle reoccurring problems that are recognizable to the 21<sup>st</sup> century reader.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

“My mind is my weapon. My brother has his sword, King Robert has his warhammer, and I have my mind ... and a mind needs books as a sword needs a whetstone, if it is to keep its edge.” Tyrion tapped the leather cover of the book. “That’s why I read so much, Jon Snow.”

(*AGOT* 103)

The book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (henceforth *ASOIAF*) and the TV-show *Game of Thrones* have fast become very popular additions to the world of high fantasy. According to Alison Flood of the Guardian, George R.R. Martin’s books have sold 58 million copies and have been translated into 45 languages (2015). However, the quotation above indicates what seems to go unnoticed about *ASOIAF* namely the role that books and knowledge play for the characters. *ASOIAF* tells the story of several families who fight for the right to sit on the Iron Throne and rule the Known World. The story is set in the imaginary world of Westeros and Essos, Westeros being the continent where most of the action takes place. The continent is surrounded by water, with the exception of the North thus it mirrors English geography. The five families who play the game of thrones are the Lannisters, the Starks, the Baratheons, the Targaryens, and the Boltons. Each have claims to the throne and justifications for these claims. The proposed thesis seeks to investigate how some of the characters of the book series *ASOIAF* are limited by different social structures of masculinity, physical prowess, feudal power and chivalric principles that make up Martin’s medieval-like setting. These structures created by Martin from historical source material and elements of medieval romance can be described as power discourses or as the norms that dictate what is acceptable thinking in this society, governed by the King and the noble families (Fontana and Pasquino 66). Books and knowledge are referenced throughout the series. The thesis reveals the degree to which these elements reverse the power discourses that limit the characters and the ways the medieval-like setting creates a sense of realism.

The thesis will draw upon all five books in the series; *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1999), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), and *A Dance with Dragons* (2011).<sup>1</sup> It will make use of methodologies such as literacy studies and New Historicism. Oral tradition theories also provide a basis for discussing the nature of Martin’s

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis the books will be referenced: *A Game of Thrones* – *AGOT*, *A Clash of Kings* – *ACOK*, *A Storm of Swords* – *ASOS*, *A Feast for Crows* – *AFFC*, *A Dance with Dragons* – *ADWD*

creation of characters within literary tradition to answer the research questions. Inquiry will focus on six characters: Tyrion Lannister, Samwell Tarly (henceforth Sam), Davos Seaworth, Cersei Lannister, Sansa Stark and Arya Stark to demonstrate to what extent books and knowledge matter for these characters who cannot meet what society demands of them. How much do books, literacy and, and other unexpected types of power help them? The study of these characters is important for reflecting on the relationship of knowledge to power and also on the genre of the series. Martin portrays power in the form of physical prowess, strength, but also knowledge, the power of the mind through book transmission of knowledge. To what degree are the power structures linked with recognizable medieval systems such as chivalry, the three estates, and feudal bonds? Do the characters use books to survive and succeed in the specific “medieval” world Martin creates? The thesis will argue that the six characters are part of literacy narratives, where interaction with the existing negative power structures differ. The three male characters self-fashion (Greenblatt 2) through the written word to some benefit, but the female characters have less opportunity to do so. Cersei uses her beauty and her body to achieve power, while Sansa’s reading seems to work counteractively. Arya’s literacy, on the other hand, aids her to a certain degree, and yet, it is her sword skills that makes her powerful.

A brief summary and description of the setting will aid the reader in understanding these claims about the characters. The Lannisters reside in the capital of King’s Landing, and consist of Tywin Lannister, the father of Tyrion, Cersei, and Jaime. Cersei is married to the king, Robert Baratheon. Robert Baratheon is the usurper who stole the throne from the Targaryens, in a rebellion where the king, Aerys Targaryen was killed. His two children, Viserys and Daenerys were exiled, but they now fight to take back the throne. After Robert Baratheon’s death, his two brothers, Stannis and Renly both make a claim for the throne. The Starks are northerners, and have little interest in the throne, but are dragged into the war when the head of their family, Eddard Stark, is killed. For these families, power through masculinity and war is a vital force, but for some of the characters of *ASOIAF*, power works through literacy instead.

Since *ASOIAF* is often defined as fantasy, and more specifically as high fantasy, by popular websites like “Goodreads” (2016), background information has been provided herein on fantasy and high fantasy, along with explained connections of the series to medieval romance and historical fiction. A discussion of the methodologies that guided the thesis in its analysis will also be given. After establishing this background material, an interpretation of Martin’s medieval world will follow paying special attention to the way Martin grounds the series in contemporary, modern life simultaneously with medieval historical situations. This

interpretation of Martin's Medieval world also reveals and establishes for this study the precise power structures of society in *ASOIAF* the characters struggle against. Finally, the thesis will present its findings on character analysis by discussing how the characters must meet the demands of both their noble families and the medieval-like society, and the way literacy aids them in balancing the social structures of physical prowess, masculinity, feudal power and chivalric principles.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been said and written about the TV-show *Game of Thrones*, in newspaper articles and blogs. Discussions range from race issues to commentary on sexualized violence and gender. These elements may be the ones that are most visible in the series or the ones that spark people's interest or provoke them the most. In regards to the book series *ASOIAF*, books and articles have been published on similar topics as for the TV-show. However, the series also deals with the balance between power and literacy, which is worth examining, but it seems as though this is not a subject many scholars, nor the voices of pop culture writers focus on. It has been a challenge to find literature that deals with this exact element of *ASOIAF*, so the thesis has been forced to rely on what has been written about other fantasy novels which deals with this idea in a similar way. Similar studies have been written on some of the characters from the Harry Potter series, and articles by Veronica Scahnoes, Charles Elster, Mary Freier, Megan L. Birch, and Lisa Hopkins will be used comparatively in order to discuss how literacy to some degree aids the characters of *ASOIAF*. This thesis will connect with the preexisting work on literacy in fantasy novels.

*ASOIAF* is written by the American high fantasy writer George R. R. Martin. The series consist of five books, but the intention is to write two more books, ending on a total of seven books. The first book in the series, *A Game of Thrones* was published in 1996, while the most recent one, *A Dance with Dragons*, was released in 2011. *ASOIAF* is not Martin's first books, as he has been writing fiction since the 1970s (Gilmore). His book series has sold more than 60 million copies worldwide, and it is translated into 45 different languages (Flood).

Carolyn Larrington provides the basis for this thesis to perform inquiry about the series' allusions to historical medieval persons and situations, in addition to comparisons with contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century power structures. The thesis will draw upon *Winter is Coming* by

Larrington.<sup>2</sup> Her book investigates the historical inspiration behind *ASOIAF* and comments on the medievalism of the book series. The structures of power and knowledge that Martin depicts are quite similar to structures one can find in medieval society, and more closely, medieval England. Carolyne Larrington explains: “Like Tolkien’s Middle Earth, *Game of Thrones/A Song of Ice and Fire* constructs its fantasy out of familiar building blocks: familiar, that is, to us medieval scholars [...] out of the medieval west, with its recognizable social institutions of chivalry, kingship, its conventions of inheritance and masculinity [...]” (1). Larrington’s book has been very helpful to make comparisons between *ASOIAF*, medieval England and the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A big part of the thesis’ work is to examine the links between medieval England and *ASOIAF*. Elizabeth Wawrzyniak’s article “George R.R. Martin and the Myths of History: Postmodernism and Medievalism in *A Song of Ice and Fire*” explores the possibility of Martin also being affected by and taking inspiration from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The article has helped fuel this discussion, as have Shiloh Carroll’s essay written on a similar topic namely genre. In her essay “*A Song of Ice and Fire* and the Question of Genre Identity”, Carroll argues that: “Tolkien, Attebery, and other critics see fantasy as a direct descendent of myth and romance, while Martin bases his in history instead” (4). This quotation was the one that inspired the thesis to investigate Martin’s level of inspiration from the romance.

Valerie Estelle Frankel is a writer of pop culture, and she has written more than 50 books on the topic, including five on *ASOIAF/Game of Thrones*. Her book *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance* has been used in regards to the female characters of the series. Although the TV-show is featured heavily in this book, Frankel makes comparisons between the show and the book series, and so parts of it has been helpful to the thesis. Finally, Charles Lambert’s article “A Tender Spot in my Heart: Disability in *A Song of Ice and Fire*” has been used to strengthen the claim that some of the characters of the series are outcasts.

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Larrington of St. John’s College, Oxford.

## 3.0 BACKGROUND MATERIAL

### 3.1 "THE BOOKS WILL STILL BE HERE WHEN WE RETURN."

#### – ROMANCE GENRE<sup>3</sup>

George R. R. Martin's books are often discussed in terms of genre. While there is overlap among the genres discussed, this study looks into the confluence of elements at work in *ASOIAF* beginning with those taken from medieval romance. Geraldine Heng defines the romance by its "[...] contexts – featuring women, children, nations, empires, war, races, classes, sexualities, modernity, travel, places science, and geography, along with the conventional knights, ladies, love, and quests of chivalric tales [...]" (14). Martin appropriates some of these elements from the romance, and to understand this link background information on the romance is necessary.

John Finlayson propose to create a definition for the romance, but he argues that only two elements need to be present if the text is to be defined a romance: "[...] these are courtly love and its related *courtouise*, and the spiritual quest" (171). Furthermore, he tries to distinguish between different types of romance, e.g. the courtly romance, the romance of adventure, and the religious romance, and this illustrates the proliferation and popularity of the romance once it was invented. He also states that: "*Romance* is not a monolithic genre, but in its more sophisticated practitioners a mode which we can often characterize by isolation of elements such as the concept of the hero, the treatment of the marvelous, of time, and of place, the nature and function of adventure, and the episodic nature of structure" (170). Based on Finlayson's definitions one can sense the contours of the romance genre.

In the book *Empire of Magic* Heng describes the romance as a genre that was affected by its era, by the topics it presented, such as race, feudalism and knighthood. Perhaps the topics and thoughts of the romance also affected the people of the middle ages: "By intervening, persuading, influencing, judging, innovating, and deciding, romance has a hand in the shaping of the past and the making of the future" (15). This is supported by Laura Ashe, who states that: "As a site of generic transition and creation, *Eneas* must indeed be a response to - and a part of - a cultural and social development, whether it is seen as the rise of fictionality, or the secular, vernacular, appropriation of history, [...]" (128). Moreover, Heng proposes that the different romances of the middle ages were made up by not one author, but several authors, and in addition, the scribes that copied the texts. This resulted in a likeness

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<sup>3</sup> All quotes used in the titles are from *ASOIAF*.

between the romances, and would explain how they communicate the thoughts and notions of a group of people, of society, and not just the voice of a single individual author. One could argue that since romance would have been effected by contemporary society, so is *ASOIAF*.

Heng further argues that the romance is made up of bits and pieces, both historical, cultural and fictional texts, as it appropriates from older tales, legends, texts, folklore and tropes (45). This is supported by Corinne Saunders who writes in the introduction of her book *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England* that: “To view romance as the product of cultural encounter is to recognize that romances find their individual power through engagement with precise historical moments, yet also are rooted in human universals, in conventions that find their force in their sustained relevance and repetition over time” (2). Based on these examples, one can argue that the romance has become part history and part fiction, and that the same could be said about *ASOIAF*, as this study reveals in later sections.

### **3.2 “I MISS BOOKS MOST OF ALL.” – FANTASY AND HIGH FANTASY**

Martin gathers from modern fantasy as well particularly in the juxtaposition of the familiar with the unfamiliar and the use of the supernatural. According to Joyce G. Saricks, a fantasy novel could be set in the present as well as in the past, but what defines the fantasy novel is that in this imaginary world something is out of place (244). This means, that even though the made up world may to a certain degree resemble something familiar, something is not as it is supposed to be. The setting of Martin’s invented world is both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. It is familiar, because traits of medieval England and the 21<sup>st</sup> century are recognizable, through elements such as knights, feudal bonds, and the patriarchal family, in addition to the concepts of self-fashioning through the written word and the concept of the outcast. Martin’s world is strikingly similar to medieval England, and as such is presented as a realistic realm. In addition to naming continents, countries, cities, rivers and towns, the series are accompanied by detailed maps to show that this world is not the same as our contemporary world. In addition, several languages are made up, though just by name, not by tongue, like Myrish and Bravoosi. These examples highlight the use of both familiar and unfamiliar elements in Martin’s series.

The unfamiliar elements are those of supernatural creatures, such as giants, dragons, and the walking dead. These uncanny wights, referred to as White Walkers, are introduced already in the first chapter, but then abandoned, and not revisited again until well into the first book. True, tales of them circulate and are spoken about by the Wildlings, who dwell beyond

the Wall (*AGOT* 338), but these vague whispers are dismissed as myths, folklore and superstition, by most of the central characters. In *ASOIAF*, magic does not exist anymore, at least that is what the characters believe. They know that dragons once existed, and they have heard tales of white walkers, but they believe they are all dead and gone (*AGOT* 106). This creates the framework of something being out of place, identified by Saricks, even though the physical setting may be of some familiarity.

So far the definition of fantasy that is in place fits Martin's series very well. The last point on the list concerns magic, and Saricks states that "magic is integral to the story" in the fantasy genre. Magic is indeed present in Martin's series, through sorcery, flying dragons, and characters that are brought back to life multiple times, in addition to creatures like mammoths and giants. The most important aspect of *ASOIAF* however, is not magic. Saricks explains that: "When magic is integral to the story, it must be fantasy" (244). But the magical elements are not the essential building blocks that make up Martin's books and world, and thus one could argue that the definition of fantasy does not seem to fit *ASOIAF* wholeheartedly.

Authors of fantasy have one thing in common, namely that they create imaginary worlds populated by relatable characters. The characters of *ASOIAF* who inhabit Westeros and Essos, are like us complex and not idealized like romance knights, not like the typical heroes of other fantasy books (Saricks 250). This way Martin's characters would resemble people more than stock characters we know from romance and fantasy books in general. The multifaceted characters and their struggles, their maneuvering through politics and society is what is at the heart of this story. Does this mean that the series does not belong to the fantasy genre? Or is it a testament to how Martin is reinvigorating the genre via characterization technique? One could argue that although *ASOIAF* contain some of the elements of the fantasy genre, not all of them applies, and one could therefore define it as something different than solely fantasy. Would high fantasy be a more precise description?

To be able to answer this question, background in the genre of high fantasy in comparison with *ASOIAF* is necessary. In her book *Interpreting Literature with Children*, Shelby A. Wolf defines high fantasy as: "Stories centered on struggles between good and evil, where entire imaginary worlds are created in rich detail with fully developed characters. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (Rowling), The Lord of the Rings (Tolkien), The Hero and the Crown [sic] (McKinley)" (53). *ASOIAF* is defined as "high fantasy" or "epic fantasy", but Wolf's definition does not strictly apply to all of *ASOIAF*'s aspects.

*ASOIAF* is often compared to *The Lord of the Rings*, and one can understand why. Martin is often referred to as "The American Tolkien" and their two sagas share many of the

same features. In his essay “Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy” [sic] Edward James acknowledges that: “The final contribution made by Tolkien to later twentieth-century fantasy was that the default cultural model for the fantasy world was the Middle Ages. For Tolkien it came naturally, and he must have seen *TLOTR* as in some sense a commentary upon things medieval” (70). In this regard, one can argue that Martin has been inspired heavily by Tolkien, as *ASOIAF* is also making use of historical perspectives and is located in a medieval society with characters much like hobbits, ordinary folks set against the powerful.

Like *TLOTR*, the medieval society that *ASOIAF* is situated in, adds realism to the series. George P. Landow states that: "Realism which emphasizes the importance of the ordinary, the ordinary person and the ordinary situation, tends to reject the heroic and the aristocratic and embrace the pedestrian, the comic, and the middle class" (2003). This seems to be what Martin is doing with his tale, as a lot of the main point of view characters tend to be more ordinary than heroic figures of some fantasy novels. Martin emphasizes the more realistic ordinary character, the outcast instead of the hero and the aristocratic character. Tyrion, Sam and Davos are all misfits who are portrayed as ordinary people, rather than as heroes. This realism seems to be a new feature of the fantasy genre.

Martin’s realism and his affinity towards history affects his characters more than Tolkien’s, and one could argue that *ASOIAF* differs from *TLOTR* that way. Editor Jane Johnson recognizes the realism of the book series as something new as she states that: “I was a huge fan of all sorts of fantasy, but *A Game of Thrones* felt so realistic, the people like modern people” (Flood), and well-known author of fantasy, Joe Abercrombie would argue, that Martin has revitalized both Tolkien’s “recipe” for how to write fantasy, and the genre itself: “[...] it’s really revolutionized how people think about the genre. In the broader consciousness, *Lord of the Rings* was how people saw fantasy. Detailed, focused on the setting, a lot of complexity, a good-versus-evil narrative. *Game of Thrones* has given people an alternative way of looking at epic fantasy” (Flood). In addition, Abercrombie believes that *ASOIAF* represents something new, because it offers a more realistic narrative: “I’d never read anything quite like it. The feel of realism to it, that so eschewed the heroic narrative. I saw in that book a lot of things I felt had been missing in commercial fantasy” (Flood). This means that *ASOIAF* differs from commercial fantasy like *TLOTR* due to the realism and the focus on characters that Martin brings to the series

Martin’s realism affects the characters in addition to the setting, and one could argue that *ASOIAF* differs from *TLOTR* when it comes to characterization. The characters of *TLOTR* harbor attributes one would recognize more from fairy tales than from the real world:

“Folk and fairy tales are well known for their predictability – stories painted in black and white. There is little gray in the world of the folk tale: characters are either good or evil, the setting a dark forest or a shining castle, the hero victorious and the nemesis defeated” (Wolf 52). This is more or less true for the characterization and plot of *TLOTR*. They are closer to stock characters than the characters of *ASOIAF* as they more or less represent either good or evil, and they would qualify more as stereotypical characters. In *ASOIAF* the characters would be defined by their unpredictability, and so would the plot. The hero is not always victorious like Frodo and Sam, sometimes the hero is even killed, like Eddard (*AGOT* 607) or Robb Stark (*ASOS* 583). Saricks explains: “Just as the story line focus on the battle between good and evil, so are the characters usually recognizable as one or the other” (250). In *TLOTR* Sauron and the Orcs represent the evil side, while Frodo and the elves represent the good side. It is easier to separate the good characters from the evil ones in *TLOTR* than in *ASOIAF*, as they represent a stereotype more than a person one would recognize from the modern world.

Martin’s books are different. Unlike *TLOTR* the plot of *ASOIAF* does not center on a struggle between good and evil. True, the fight between the Night’s Watch and the White Walkers could be defined as a fight between good and evil, and could very well be compared to Frodo’s fight against the evil Sauron and his army of Orcs. Still, this clash with the supernatural is not at the center of the story because at the core is the fight for the Iron Throne, and the game all of the characters play to conquer it. In addition, the fight between good and evil usually takes place between man and monster, meaning that the monster is usually something like the evil Sauron, or his army of Orcs, creatures that are more easily compared to animals and beasts, than man. In Martin’s series, the noble man has been created as the real monster, and what is portrayed is how man performs despicable acts when cornered, to gain success or riches, in wartime, or to protect loved ones. This means that in Martin’s tales, monster has been replaced by man, which adds to the realism of the series.

*ASOIAF* does not merely meet the expectations of the genre, but one finds that new elements develop from Martin’s realism. In Martin’s *ASOIAF* the characters transcend the stock characters one could recognize from commercial fantasy books. The round and dynamic characters are neither good nor evil, but harbor traits of both. One of the characters, Cersei, treats her own brother horribly, both in the way she speaks to him and the way she acts towards him. Still, one understands that the reason for her foul behavior is to be able to protect her children, and on some level one is able to relate to that (*ACOK* 240). Another character, Daenerys, is portrayed as a young and scared girl at the beginning of the tale

(*AGOT* 31), but as she evolves and becomes tougher she will not hesitate to give the order to either punish or kill her enemies (*AGOT* 596). In this sense, the characterization of *ASOIAF* represent a multitude of different personalities and portrays human beings in a realistic way. With regards to this, Martin's characters resemble real people, and this may be one of the attractions of the books. The characters in *ASOIAF* are fully developed, and George R.R. Martin has indeed created a richly detailed medieval-like world with languages to accompany it.

At the same time, the society he describes is reminiscent of modern society, and therefore does not feel too far away from one's own, even though Martin has also added fantastical elements to his tale, like dragons and giants, and has placed his characters in a society reminiscent of medieval England. In this way, there is a merge between the familiar setting, and the unfamiliar and uncanny, which is represented by the supernatural and the magical. Matt Grenby in his book *Children's Literature* explains it this way: [...] "is that the supernatural and the normal exist together in fantasy texts, in various proportions and combinations, but that there is no ratio which governs their relationship" (150). The fact that the supernatural and the magical elements work more as a backdrop, means that this tale could very well be placed in another setting, and it may very well be defined as a merge between fantasy and other genres, like historical fiction, or as this study suggests, new historicist fiction.

When it comes to setting, many fantasy books allude to historical events, while some are based on contemporary society. Tolkien adapted both elements and feelings of hopelessness and brutality from World War One in *TLOTR*, and C. S. Lewis wrote his tales of Narnia, inspired by the events of World War Two: "Five years after the end of The Second World War, Lewis's fantasy was celebrating a victory over tyranny and his hopes for reconstruction. [...] Fantasy, we find, is not an escape from reality, but often, a rewriting of it" (Grenby 154). This is true for Martin's world as well. He has stated multiple times that his biggest inspiration for this book series is the historical Wars of the Roses, something that is easily recognizable in his texts. Is he rewriting the reality of The War of the Roses, and medieval England in general? The setting of *ASOIAF* is medieval-like, as a lot of the elements such as problematic chivalric masculinity is recognizable from that part of history as the thesis will illustrate in later chapters.

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 “BOOKS ARE DEAD MEN TALKING” – NEW HISTORICISM AND NEW HISTORICIST FICTION

New Historicism deals with the connection between literary texts and the historical society. Stephen Greenblatt, who is often referenced as the man who coined the term “New Historicism”, would these days be more comfortable himself by applying the phrase “poetics of culture”, maybe because the term was never intended to be turned into something tangible. H. Aram Veenser explains that ‘new historicism’ was never constructed as a “doctrine but as a set of themes, preoccupations, and attitudes” (8). Furthermore, Steven Greenblatt and Cathrine Gallagher admit in their book *Practicing New Historicism* that they did not even realize that their thoughts surrounding this new term had actually been put into practice until they came across an English department looking for “a specialist in new historicism” (1). Somehow this term had stuck, and it became a way for scholars to include and apply other sciences like history, art, and politics to their literary criticism. They could now ask questions about “politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people’s practical lives [...]” (Veenser 4). This means, that according to this new way of interpreting literary texts, the texts should be looked upon as a part *of* history, not as *separate* from history. This is the same definition of new historicism that Frank Lentricchia puts forth in his article “Foucault’s Legacy: A New Historicism?”: “So for a new historicist literature is no cool reflection on a ‘background’ of stable and unified historical fact. It is at once part of the ‘fact’ itself and what gives shape to what we know as the fact” (234). This comments on the link between the texts and the historical society.

New Historicists refuse to see history, culture and literature as three separate entities, and instead they propose that history and culture is intertwined with literature. In addition, new historicists propose to read works of art the same way one would interpret a piece of literature (Gallagher 9). Thus, they believe that one needs to incorporate the study of history into the study of literature, because the two intersect and affect each other, as explained by Robert Dale Parker in his book *How to Interpret Literature – Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies* (261). New historicists look for more detailed readings of literature, because like history, literature should not be read simplistically, and both offer multiple perspectives that one needs to take into account (Parker 260). One should not be satisfied with only one perspective when studying history, the same way one perspective would not suffice when

interpreting a piece of literature. In welcoming multiple perspectives, one gains a more nuanced reading of a text, as one combines history, culture and literature.

Historians know that history never works as a simple backdrop; history is everywhere, all around us, all the time: “[...] New Historicism seeks less limiting means to expose the manifold ways culture and society affect each other. The central difficulty with these terms lies in the way they distinguish literary text and history as foreground and background [...]” (Veese 7). In this way, new historicist scholars wish to create a connection with the past, where they can speak with those that exist no longer, through works of art or literature. In fact, Stephen Greenblatt states that: “I began with the desire to speak with the dead” (1), and both Greenblatt and Gallagher further explains that because they could no longer talk to the people of the past, the next best thing would be to study what they had left behind (30). Through literature, one can detect information about people’s lives, about society and culture, and as such about history. Thus, one finds that history permeates all of these elements.

History is not stable, history is continuously changing and evolving, new information is constantly discovered and researched. Like literature, history is nuanced, it is made up of a multitude of stories, voices and perspectives. Gallagher and Greenblatt make no separation between literary and historical texts in so far as naming them both fictional texts, because both are “made” texts, texts written by people (31). This way, they give as much power to the literary text as to the historical text, while still recognizing that the two differ with the stakes they make. Something that started out as a conversation between scholars, a method of application when studying literary texts, has grown into a new way of incorporating history into the studies of literature: “New Historicist can make a valid claim to have established new ways of studying and a new awareness of how history and culture define each other” (Veese 8). Gallagher and Greenblatt recognizes history as nuanced and everchanging.

If one applies a new historicist way of reading *ASOIAF* one can argue that Martin is not only affected by medieval England, but that he is also affected by the present day and age. Martin’s books draw upon a history that we know, but they transcend that, as he adds elements of his own. His book series may be affected by and draw upon contemporary issues and societies, just as much as what was going on in medieval England. This is in accordance with what Stephen Greenblatt does in his books *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) and *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988) as: “He tries to sort out what he calls ‘the circulation of social energy,’ the way that literature comes not only from individual authors but also from the cultural controversies of an age, with the controversies provoking the literature and the literature interpreting the controversies, in a continuous cycle of

exchange and influence” (Parker 264). Furthermore, he believes that literature, history and culture work together by negotiating with each other and by the exchange of ideas (Veese 9).

*Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* discusses the lives of six Renaissance men and how they self-fashioned themselves, created new personas to aid them in their personal life. One of these men, Thomas More, would self-fashion in order to take part in political life, and to climb the ladder as high as possible. This he achieved, as he became one of Henry VIII’s most trusted advisors. Still, it seems that he struggled to decide if this was the right thing to do: “As he wrote book I of *Utopia*, he was trying to decide the extent of his commitment to the service of Henry VIII, a decision which he knew well would shape the course of his life. And at stakes, as I have suggested, was not simply his career but his whole world as a character he had fashioned for himself and his perception of such role-playing as unreal and insane” (Greenblatt 36). This explains that More’s self-fashioning eventually affected his life outside of politics as well.

Self-fashioning would not only make an impact on his life in politics, it would affect his all-round persona: “[...] More’s sense of his own distinct identity is compounded of a highly social role, fashioned from his participation in a complex set of interlocking corporate bodies – law, parliament, court, city, church, family – and a secret reserve, a sense of a life elsewhere, unrealized in public performance” (Greenblatt 42). Did More’s self-fashioning aid him? Did his new persona bring him success and happiness? Well, it certainly brought him success, as he rose from humble beginnings to sit at the most coveted seat in politics, but his success did not last, and in the end, the self-fashioning led to his downfall:

[...] he made himself into a consummately successful performer: from modest beginnings in the early 1490s as a young page in the household of Lord Chancellor Morton, four decades of law, diplomacy, parliamentary politics, and courtships brought More in 1529, as Wolsey’s successor, to the Lord Chancellorship, the highest office in the realm. Then as if to confirm all of his darkest reflections on power and privilege, his own position quickly deteriorated beneath the pressure of the king’s divorce. In May 1532, attempting to save himself, More resigned the chancellorship on the pretext of ill health, but he was too important and too visible to be granted a silent, unmolested retirement. Refusal to subscribe to the Oath of Supremacy – that is, to acknowledge that the king was Supreme Head of the Church in England – brought him in 1534 to the Tower and, on 6 July 1535, to the scaffold. (Greenblatt 12)

Thus, even though More through self-fashioning managed the position he sought after, it would not only mean the end to his career, but the end to his life.

In his book *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt studies the Shakespearean theatre as a stage where contemporary topics would be a part of the plays that were presented for the audience. Topics such as political authority (40), sexuality, (86) and anxiety (133) would be topics focused on by Shakespeare, as he would have been affected by the topics that were important and talked about in society. Greenblatt investigates Shakespeare's plays, which he believes contain a lot of contemporary history. He argues that his plays do not harbor all of these historical elements by chance, but because Shakespeare actually appropriated from coexisting texts: "It has been recognized since the eighteenth century that Shakespeare was reading Harsnett's book, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, as he was writing *King Lear*" (Greenblatt 94). He further claims that this would have been a most active part of Shakespeare's writing, and he uses this as an example of "[...] the negotiation and exchange of social energy" (Greenblatt 94). From this text Shakespeare borrowed names, adjectives and language. Furthermore, Greenblatt asks this question: "When Shakespeare borrows from Harsnett, who knows if Harsnett has not already, in a deep sense, borrowed from Shakespeare's theater what Shakespeare borrows back?" (95). This could mean that Shakespeare would be an example of an author that made use of contemporary issues in his plays.

To make the connection between Shakespeare and Martin, one could ask if both authors could have been inspired by their own life, or current events. If one believes in Greenblatt's theory of circulated energy, one would answer these questions affirmatively. Applying the same theory to Martin's work, one could claim that he appropriates not only from the romance, medieval England, or The Wars of the Roses, but from contemporary history, culture, society and texts. This would mean that although Martin gathers much of his inspiration from history, his book series would still be affected by contemporary society and today's situation. In what way would *ASOIAF* draw upon the present day and age? What cultural controversies would the book series be provoked by, and in what way has Martin's text interpreted these controversies?

In her article "All Our Old Heroes Are Dead: The Nostalgia of Chivalry and the Myth of the 'Good War' in Game of Thrones", Elizabeth Wawrzyniak argues that *ASOIAF* is both a representation of the past and a presentation of the present. Wawrzyniak states that even though Martin speaks of The War of the Roses as his inspiration for the books, his fans know that what they are reading is not a historically accurate text, but a text that rather borrows from a certain period in history. Still, she continues, there is this medieval feel to the texts, which combined with "Martin's postmodernist approach" (1), adds to a discussion where both

the past and the present are represented. This discussion is carried out by the readers of the book series, as they see links between the political power plays of the books and the many wars being fought, linking them to U.S politics and U.S warfare, especially the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. These are controversial and present topics, that Martin very well could be inspired by, in addition to the inspiration from the past.

“I’m aware of the parallels, but I’m not trying to slap a coat of paint on the Iraq War and call it fantasy” (Wawrzyniak 2). This is how Martin has previously answered questions of any intentional links between his fictional wars and the Iraq War and the war in Afghanistan. Does it matter, that the links that fans find and discuss, have been intentional from the author’s side? Even though Martin may not have been as active in this part of his appropriation, as he vows he has been with *The Wars of the Roses*, what may be important, and what can still contribute to the circulation of energy, are the conversations surrounding these topics, because in that way, Martin is clearly affecting the present, and these conversations may in turn affect his writing. Wawrzyniak argues that the true value of *ASOIAF* is that one can learn about the past while examining the present (2). So even though Martin has not intentionally used modern wars and conflicts as his inspiration, *ASOIAF* still leads to discussions about them.

On the other hand, contemporary topics that Martin may very well be inspired by could be linked to social criticism based on the characters. Tyrion, Samwell and Davos are all portrayed as outcasts who do not fit the mold of society. They are too ugly, too short, too fat, too poor, too craven. They are not part of society’s representation of how one should look or act. This is a reoccurring challenge, and as such it is a recognizable topic for western readers. This may be where Martin has been more intentional in his depiction, as he portrays a theme that is both common and contemporary. This thesis proposes that Martin adds and challenges current topics and issues in his books, like the topic of the outcast who is unable to meet society’s expectations.

Do all aspects of new historicist fiction apply to *ASOIAF*? Some aspects do not, like the fact that the narrator shifts between the past and the present, as explained by Howard Yuen Fung Choy in the book *Remapping the Past: Fictions of History in Deng’s China, 1979-1997*. However, several other aspects proposed by Choy do apply: “[...] that history is an unending dialogue between the present and the past [...] tries not to submerge us into the past but to let us gaze into it from the present perspective, penetrate into it with a modern consciousness [...] the rise and fall of a family permeated with fatalism [...] re-creating an aura of history [...] the individual rather than the integral [...]” (21). The thesis has argued

that the topics and the characters of *ASOIAF* translate very well into contemporary society, participating in a dialogue between the past and the present. It is a mixture of the fiction, history and the present day society, as Wawrzyniak argues that one can learn both about the present and the past by reading the series. It does indeed portray the fall of a family, and not only one, but several; the Starks, the Lannisters, the Targaryens, the Tyrells. There is an aura of history present, as one recognizes historical elements, like those from the Wars of the Roses. And lastly, it plays on the individual character, as the structure of the book series offers the points of view of the individual characters, characters that more than once are left alone and have to fend for themselves.

New historicism offers a new way of interpreting literature; by not separating the historical society from the written text, but by including history, culture and fictional texts, one is able to give a fuller interpretation of the text. Stephen Greenblatt proposes that the circulation of social energy works in a way where literature is affected by society and society is affected by literature. Thus, a written text can affect history, the same way the text is affected by contemporary society, and as such, history. Stephen Greenblatt proves this through his study of some of Shakespeare's texts. The circulation of social energy, of appropriation, is clearly present in Martin's books, whether he is inspired by the past or the present, whether he inspires discussion of the present or enables readers to learn about the past. The thesis argues that in addition to adding new realistic elements to the fantasy genre, like fuller, two-dimensional characters, the book series partakes in appropriation of both contemporary and historical discourses, and it is therefore a part of a circulation of social energy, making it a merge between fantasy and new historicist fiction.

#### **4.2 "A READER LIVES A THOUSAND LIVES BEFORE HE DIES" – LITERACY**

Do Tyrion, Sam, Davos, Cersei, Sansa and Arya benefit from their level of literacy as a means of balancing existing power structures? *The Literacy Myth* is defined as: "the belief, articulated in educational, civic, religious, and other settings, contemporary and historical, that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement and upward social mobility" (Graff 35). In his article "The Literacy Myth at Thirty" Harvey J. Graff further explains this term, a term he coined in 1979. He discusses the role of literacy and its opposite, illiteracy, and argues that literacy does not necessarily equal success, the same way illiteracy does not always indicate disaster (58). Graff does indeed recognize the positive effects of literacy, but in addition he argues against the fact that literacy always works to benefit a person or a

community. An example to be made could be of early civilizations, who relied heavily on an oral culture, but still flourished and thrived. Still, the word “oral” is often boxed together with the word “illiterate” and thus both words connotes a negative feeling (58). Graff advises against looking at the words literacy and illiteracy in binary pairs, as they then turn into pairs of major and minor, and thus uphold the myth of literacy.

Furthermore, in this article, Graff challenges one of several literacy myths, that of social and economic equality. He claims that although literacy “may well follow from, and depend upon such advances”, literacy have been used as a means of suppression or to maintain the status quo of certain social conditions (59). Literacy then, would not always aid a person in climbing the social ladder, as it sometimes would work to oppose the person’s efforts, and ensure that s/he did not become mobile. However, other factors play a part in people’s chance to move upward socially, like “gender, race, ethnicity and class” (60). In turn, it also depends on the historical context. Even though they knew how to read, were you an immigrant, a woman, or an Afro-American, your level of literacy would not help equate the social inequality of the time (61). This means, that one should be careful about drawing the conclusion that literacy always works as a positive, as other factors play a part as well, and as literacy does not always equal success.

The literacy myth is discussed by additional scholars like Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen who propose further study of literary texts. In the article “Reading Literacy Narratives” they propose that literacy studies should be linked to the study of literary texts, not only non-fictional texts. They focus on *literacy narratives*, texts that: “constructs a character’s ongoing, social process of language acquisition” (2). Eldred and Mortensen believe that the reading of literacy narratives can supplement the existing field of literary criticism. The literacy myth may be used to discuss if a character’s improvement really is due to the character’s level of literacy, or if any other factors come into play. One can thus use literacy narratives to discuss the supposition that literacy equals success.

Literacy narratives are also explained as: “stories that foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy. Literacy narratives sometimes include explicit images of schooling and teaching they include texts that both challenge and affirm culturally scripted ideas about literacy” (6). Still, this is not the only definition of a literacy narrative, as texts where the literacy narrative work as a subplot, where it is not the most striking aspect of the text, but where it figures in the background, would fall under the same definition (52). One could then argue, that *A Song of Ice and Fire* consists of several literacy narratives, that works as

subplots. These narratives are not the most prominent feature of the book series, but they are present.

## **5.0 “SOME BATTLES ARE WON WITH SWORDS AND SPEARS, OTHERS WITH QUILLS AND RAVENS” – MEDIEVAL ENGLAND AND *ASOIAF***

George R. R. Martin has created a medieval-like setting for his realm of Westeros. There is a link between medieval England and *ASOIAF*, as Martin draws on a lot of elements from this period, such as kings, the nobility, knights and peasants, and the social codes and relationship between them (Larrington 1-2). The hierarchy found in medieval England; feudalism, is visible in *ASOIAF* as well, as society in Westeros is divided into the same three estates of those who work, those who pray and those who fight. Still, one could question the second estate, as a clergy similar to that of medieval England is not featured very prominently in *ASOIAF*. This means that even though Martin draws on some elements from medieval England, his world is not an actual copy of that era.

Medieval England was a society comprised of peasants, workers, the nobility, the knights, the clergy and the king. The different groups functioned in a hierarchy, where the peasants were ranked lowest, followed by the nobility, the clergy and the king, as explained by Ralph V. Turner (183). These groups were later named; those who pray, those who fight and those who work, as explained by Dr. Debora B. Schwartz:

Feudal society was traditionally divided into three "estates" (roughly equivalent to social classes). The "First Estate" was the Church (clergy = those who prayed). The "Second Estate" was the Nobility (those who fought = knights). It was common for aristocrats to enter the Church and thus shift from the second to the first estate. The "Third Estate" was the Peasantry (everyone else, at least under feudalism: those who produced the food which supported those who prayed and those who fought, the members of the First and Second Estates). (2009)

The social system referred to as feudalism was the reason for the hierarchical system of medieval England, as land equaled power, and land was owned and distributed by the king: “Social and political theorists in the middle ages envisioned society as three divinely ordained and hierarchically ranked orders or estates, each of which had special duties towards the whole community: clergy, warriors or nobility, and peasantry” (Turner 181). In *ASOIAF*, all of these groups are represented.

The King of Westeros, Robert Baratheon, would represent the first estate. He is not known as a bad ruler *per se*, but is still depicted as a king who takes more pleasure from drinking and eating than signing laws and listening to his people (*AGOT* 36). According to Geoffroi de Charny, knights (and therefore also kings, one suspects), should not eat or drink too much, like Robert does (2013:61). Eddard Stark comments on the fact that the king has become fat in his time as regent (*AGOT* 33). Moreover, Robert finds his royal tasks tedious and is described as a king who does exactly what he wants: “Robert would do what he pleased, as he always had, and nothing Ned could say or do would change that” (*AGOT* 98). Turner argues that: “Thoughtful people could observe that the interests of the King (*rex*) and the kingdom (*regnum*) were not always identical and that the people’s common good could conflict with royal dynastic or personal desires” (184). This way, Robert is reminiscent of some medieval English kings, as kings who first and foremost cared about themselves and then about the kingdom second.

Robert Baratheon needs to surround himself with men he can trust and who can serve him well (*AGOT* 37). In medieval England many of the noble families stayed out on the countryside in their strongholds, though some favored a place at the king’s castle (Turner 187). The nobility in *ASOIAF* is both present at court, with their handmaidens and servants, but they also occupy great strongholds and castles throughout the kingdom, much like in medieval England. Eddard is asked by the King to come to court and serve as his Hand, a great honor, as the Hand of the King wields a lot of power: “The Hand of the King was the second-most powerful man in the Seven Kingdoms. He spoke with the king’s voice, commanded the king’s armies, drafted the king’s laws” (*AGOT* 38-39). Similarly, medieval kings were in need of capable men at court, men they could keep close and who would offer their loyalty and skills in exchange for a seat at the king’s hand:

The monarch’s power, coupled with his demand for capable lieutenants regardless of origin, meant that politics in England was largely court politics, as scions of aristocratic families competed for royal patronage with newcomers to court. In one historian’s words, ‘The royal patronage machine was the single most important instrument for making or breaking individual fortunes in the medieval period’. (Turner 187)

So far, the king portrayed in *ASOIAF* mirror those of medieval England.

The king looked to his noble families to be by his side in the time of war, to raise armies on his behalf, and to support him as king in the case of rebellions. Such rebellions were frequent in medieval England, because some noble families might support a different

candidate for the crown than the present king (Turner 189). Some of these rebellions even turned into full-scale civil wars, like the one between King Stephen and Empress Matilda. Geoffroi de Charny explains that it is very honorable to fight a war for your king or your lord (49). In *ASOIAF* this is exemplified by Robb calling his bannermen to fight alongside him in a war against the Lannisters (*AGOT* 500).

The medieval English kings asked for loyalty and armed service in return for land. Bruce M. S. Campbell writes in his article “England: Land and Power”, that: “Culturally, socially, politically, and above all, economically, medieval England was rooted in the land” (3). Land of course generated income, but in addition landowners enjoyed power and social status through their holdings. Lord Eddard Stark resides in Winterfell, a castle in the North, and here he acts as King Robert’s trusted man, as Warden of the North. Lord Stark is one example of a lord in Westeros who exchanges his loyalty for land. It seems that King Robert functions as both legislator and judiciary himself: “The Seven Kingdoms are in this respect much like late medieval England, ruled from Westminster. Nevertheless, justice seems to be dispensed by direct petition to the king, or his deputy the Hand, rather than making law through parliamentary procedure or administering it through independent law courts” (Larrington 102). Even though Robert is surrounded by landowning men he can trust with some royal tasks, on this point he deviates from the medieval English kings and performs the duties himself.

Several examples of the medieval English feudal system can be found in *ASOIAF*. The historical relationship between barons and their vassals is exemplified through passages like this one: “My father once told me that some men are not worth having, Jon finished. A bannerman who is brutal or unjust dishonors his liege lord as well as himself” (*ACOK* 282). The lord in this example would be the equivalent to the baron and the bannerman resembles the vassal. In addition to this, other examples of feudal society would be the swearing of loyalty through oaths, as it is portrayed through the Night’s Watch. Larrington links the Night’s Watch to men in medieval England who: “[...] would enter into sworn-brotherhood agreements, replacing or augmenting their own family ties with a freely chosen friend or companion” (24). The men who joins the Night’s Watch does not always do so freely, but this group of men now becomes their new family. These examples identify the link between the medieval English feudal system and society in *ASOIAF*.

The noble families of *ASOIAF* mirror the structure of the nobility of medieval England. The aristocracy of *ASOIAF* mainly belong to seven houses; House Arryn, House Tyrell, House Lannister, House Greyjoy, House Frey, House Martell and House Stark. For the

noble families of Westeros, it is imperative that you are able to prove your noble lineage, that you know which family and thus which House you belong to. To be born a bastard, even though your father is of high birth, would mean that you have no chance of inheritance of neither title nor land: “Legitimacy is crucial, knowing who’s one family is essential and thus bastards and those whose ancestry is hidden or obscured are the ones to be watched. [...] He cannot hope to inherit a holdfast nor to find any role within the castle that is commensurate with those of his brothers” (Larrington 16). The last part of this quotation reminds one of the noble families of medieval England, where the name and titles were passed on to the next son in line, keeping them in the family.

Carrolyne Larrington proposes that for the characters of *ASOIAF*: “[...] nobility is tightly bound up with the concept of chivalry, conceived in near-identical terms to the medieval understanding of knightliness” (18), while Turner in his article explains that the knights did not start out as one group of a certain social class, but changed into that group over the course of time, initiated by the concept of nobility, thus elevating their social status. Larrington further explains: “To be noble, then, is to be a better person than the commoners. The aristocracy, or so they like to believe, behave better, keep their promises, are courageous, unflinching and generous when they can. For men, military skills are crucial, whether as knights or as straightforward warriors like Ned and Robb Stark” (17-18). This way, even though both Tyrion and Sam are born into noble families, and Davos has been knighted, it could still be argued that they are outcasts of society, as they do not fulfill this notion.

Knights are one of the elements of *ASOIAF* that connect the books and medieval England. Knighthood went hand in hand with the feudal system, but the knights as a group evolved during time. The knight’s chivalric tradition turned them into a very distinct group, and indeed they looked upon themselves as one, as it helped elevate their status among the noble families. The knights went by a “knightly code of conduct” (Turner 191), which set them apart from barons and nobles. *A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry* was written by the French knight Geoffroi de Charny (c.1306-1356) who lived during the Hundred Years War. In this book he presents the code of conduct that knights of the time lived by, but the book can also be seen as Geoffroi de Charny’s advice to knights, a testament to how he believed they should act and live. The book is unique because it offers the point of view of somebody who actually lived by the ideas and ideals of the knight, during the middle ages. Some of the knights presented in the series would very much fit the description of a true knight set forth by Geoffroi de Charny, like Ser Loras Tyrell, while others like Joffrey Baratheon and Ser

Gregor Clegane would not adhere to his chivalric code of conduct, as the thesis will further explain.

A portrayal of a true knight from *ASOIAF* must be that of Ser Loras Tyrell. He is described as beautiful and tall; he wears a silver armor as he excels at jousting tournaments:

Ser Loras was the youngest son of Mace Tyrell, the Lord of Highgarden and Warden of the South. At sixteen, he was the youngest rider on the field, yet he had unhorsed three knights of the Kingsguard that morning in his first three jousts. Sansa had never seen anyone so beautiful. His plate was intricately fashioned and enameled as a bouquet of a thousand different flowers, and his snow-white stallion was draped in a blanket of red and white roses. (*AGOT* 249)

He is polite and sweet towards Sansa, who seems to be very smitten by him (*AGOT* 249). Ser Loras Tyrell is nicknamed “The Knight of Flowers”, a name he has earned as it is his habit to offer roses to the ladies watching him in tourneys: “After each victory, Ser Loras would remove his helm and ride slowly round the fence, and finally pluck a single white rose from the blanket and toss it to some fair maiden in the crowd” (*AGOT* 249). Ser Loras Tyrell would thus be described as a true knight.

In his book, Geoffroi de Charny creates a form of hierarchy to describe different men-at-arms (47). He differentiates between those who joust and those who fight wars. He states that every one of these men are honorable, but some are more honorable. The ones who joust in tournaments are honorable enough, so Ser Loras Tyrell would classify as an honorable knight. Still, he and other knights who only joust cannot compete with those who “do more”, such as those who put their life on the line fighting as a soldier of war (48). Ser Gregor Clegane fights both tourneys and wars, and is a very skilled rider and soldier: “Ser Gregor the Mountain, seemed unstoppable as well, riding down one foe after the next in ferocious style” (*AGOT* 248). According to Geoffroi de Charney a knight who jousts in tournaments is honorable enough, but a knight who does more and fights wars is even more honorable (48). Ser Gregor Clegane fights in the war on behalf of Tyrion Lannister (*AGOT* 574). As such Ser Gregor Clegane would be defined as a very honorable knight. Is this a true depiction of The Mountain That Rides?

Through Geoffroi de Charny’s system, one learns how he expects knights, both young and old, seasoned and newcomers, to behave towards other knights and other people: “These are the ones who are physically strong and skillful (agile), and who conduct themselves properly and pleasantly, as is appropriate for young men, gentle, courteous and well mannered towards others [...]” (47). True, Clegane is mentioned several times as a very strong and

skillful soldier and knight. But is he a pleasant man, who is kind to others? In the tournament presented in *A Game of Thrones*, Clegane joust many other men. He wins a lot of his rounds, but maybe the way he overpowers them would not be characterized as very pleasant: “That gorget wasn't fastened proper. You think Gregor didn't notice that? You think Ser Gregor's lance rode up by chance, do you? [...] Gregor's lance goes where Gregor wants it to go” (*AGOT* 253). One could argue that as this was a tournament, to kill another knight would be common, and as such one could still argue that Clegane would be a true knight.

Joffrey Lannister appears to be the gallant and courteous knight presented by Geoffroi de Charny: “Instead Joffrey smiled and kissed her hand, handsome and gallant as any prince in the song [...]” (*AGOT* 250). He is very polite towards the noble ladies at court: “‘Joffrey, perhaps you would be so kind as to entertain our guest today.’ ‘It would be my pleasure, Mother’, Joffrey said very formally” (*AGOT* 123). It appears that he knows how to speak to and treat ladies of other noble families: “And Joffrey was the soul of courtesy. He talked to Sansa all night, showering her with compliments [...]” (*AGOT* 251). This is the side of Joffrey that most people of Westeros see and know. Is Joffrey a true knight based on Geoffroi de Charny's standards?

Geoffroi de Charny continues his descriptions of men-at-arms, by commenting on how the knight should behave towards women: “Hence all good men-at-arms are rightly bound to protect and defend the honor of all ladies against all those who would threaten it by word or deed” (53). Joffrey seems to be a true knight based on how he treats Sansa when he first meets her, but his behavior changes. The most visible example of Joffrey not being a true knight is when he orders his knights to beat Sansa Stark (*AGOT* 366). It would seem that most of Joffrey's gallant acts is just a role he performs. Sansa states that: “So the king had decided to play the gallant today” (*ACOK* 31). At the beginning he only shows hints of the person he truly is, by how fast his anger flares (*AGOT* 122), or how he treats certain people badly (*AGOT* 125). In addition, he appears to be a brave boy who talks a lot about his physical prowess, but one understands that this too is just a front (*AGOT* 126). Thus, Joffrey would not fit Geoffroi de Charny's description of a true knight.

Geoffroi de Charny explains how it is very honorable to participate in wars that one fights for one's own sake, even more so to fight a war to protect the honor of your companion or your lord, thus demonstrating your loyalty (49). This reflects the feudal system of medieval England, where the nobility, also consisting of knights, fought wars for their lords and kings. Ser Gregor Clegane fights the war on behalf of his lord Tywin Lannister. During this war he tortures and kills common prisoners (*ACOK* 311) and kills noble hostages instead of

ransoming them (*AFFC* 247). He kills a lot of people, but Geoffroi de Charny refers to the act of war as: “a very noble activity” (49), and how one: “[...] should praise and value those men-at-arms who are able to make war on, inflict damage on, and win profit from their enemies, for they cannot do it without strenuous effort and great courage” (56). Would the act of war excuse Clegane’s actions, and still deem him a true knight?

Clegane does not only kill men during battle, he in addition kills women and children (*ACOK* 311-312). His despicable ways are depicted several times in the series: “She had made the mistake of speaking when Ser Gregor wanted quiet, so the Mountain had smashed her teeth to splinters with a mailed fist and broken her pretty little nose as well” (*AFFC* 405). To make matters worse, Clegane does not only kill women, he rapes them as well (*ACOK* 350). Geoffroi de Charny states that: “[...] all good men-at-arms are rightly bound to protect and defend the honor of all ladies against all those who would threaten it by word or deed” (53). Gregor Clegane does neither protect or defend the honor of women, and by this example he would not be defined as a knight.

Through Geoffroi de Charny’s descriptions, it becomes clear that some knights are more honorable than others, meaning that not all knights act the same. This may in addition mean that some knights may act less honorable at times, maybe not always adhering to their chivalric code of conduct, like Joffrey Baratheon and Ser Gregor Clegane. Those who are found on the other side of the spectrum grow to be the most honorable of knights, one who is permeated by the chivalric code of conduct: “Then they reflect on, inform themselves, and inquire how to behave themselves most honorably in all circumstances” (Geoffroi de Charny 56). Joffrey does not act honorably all the time, as is shown through the execution of Eddard Stark. He pardoned Stark, but reveals in front of court and Stark’s daughter what his intention had been all along: “My mother bids me let Lord Eddard take the black, and Lady Sansa has begged mercy for her father.’ [...] ‘But they have the soft hearts of women. So long as I am your king, treason shall never go unpunished. Ser Ilyn, bring me his head!’” (*AGOT* 607). Geoffroi de Charny argued that a knight’s honor was his most important trait. In this example Joffrey shows no honor. In addition, Joffrey shows his lack of honor when he kills innocent people coming to him asking for food (*ACOK* 365). Geoffroi de Charny shows that the knight’s level of honor differs. In addition, he believes that the knight needs to strive at all times to keep his reputation, as it is very important for him to do so. It becomes very clear that Geoffroi de Charny and his fellow knights look upon honor as a grand virtue, maybe the most important of them all, and that it is obtained and maintained first and foremost through physical strength.

The knight should aspire to be brave in the face of one's enemy, to detest them and harm them (71). The honor of death through battle is upheld, and it is better to lose one's life than to show cowardice on the battlefield. The way a knight should behave, through the chivalric code of conduct is summed up like this: "[...] by being men of worth, wise, loyal, without ignorance, joyful, generous, courteous, expert, bold, and active, and of good conduct toward all others, without indulging in self praise or speaking ill of others" (104). If one uses this as the guide line for Ser Gregor Clegane, he would fall short on most of the descriptions. He would be characterized as loyal, seeing as he has stayed with the same lord since he was 17. He would also be characterized as bold and active. Still, he would not be defined as a true knight due to his manners towards men and women, even though his actions take place during wartime: "Your Mountain stole my harvest and burned everything he could not carry off. He put my castle to the torch and raped one of my daughters" (*ADWD* 637). It would appear that neither Joffrey nor Gregor would adhere to Geoffroi de Charny's chivalric code of conduct.

Most of the peasants of medieval England were not rich, and they did not own land. There were of course exceptions to the rule, but most peasants rented land from wealthy barons, and enjoyed few rights. The peasants enjoyed less power than the nobility, as they were not directly involved in the politics of society, and as such had less power over their own life. However, Jane Whittle and S. H. Rigby argue that although peasants on the whole owned no land and did not partake in the political life, they still had the opportunity to exercise power: "[...] by virtue of their crucial role in the economy, and their sheer numbers, they made their interests known through a range of legal and illegal means" (65). Peasants raised their opinions on matters such as taxes and rents, and sometimes these disagreements turned into revolts on a larger scale, but most times these uprisings were struck down by the nobility or the king. One could argue that peasants lived at the mercy of the nobles and the king's decisions: "Thoughtful people could observe that the interests of the King (*rex*) and the kingdom (*regnum*) were not always identical and that the people's common good could conflict with royal dynastic or personal desires" (Turner 184). Of course, different rulers ruled in different ways, and the lives of the peasants would naturally differ geographically and historically, but most of the time the peasant's wellbeing were maybe not in the highest interest of the king.

The peasants of *ASOIAF* are portrayed very much the same as in the article by Turner, as people who have no dealings with kings unless they are affected by the king's rule somehow (184). An example of this would be when Tyrion has to meet with: "A lordling down from the Trident, says your father's men burned his keep, raped his wife, and killed all

his peasants" (*ACOK* 200). One understands that the killing of these peasants is just a side-effect of the war and thus the king's rule. In *A Clash of Kings* the role of the king is discussed by Catelyn and Brienne, and Brienne states that: "The gods don't care about men, no more than kings care about peasants" (421). This may explain why peasants are grouped together with criminals and sent to serve on the Wall: "Sullen peasants, debtors, poachers, rapers, thieves, and bastards like you all wind up on the Wall [...]" (*AGOT* 104). All in all, Martins depiction of the peasants mirror that of the information found in Turner's article.

The same way *ASOIAF* resembles the hierarchical society of medieval England, likeness can be drawn between how society in *ASOIAF* and medieval England views men and women. Larrington explains that: "These blocks are chiseled out of the historical and imaginary medieval past, [...] out of the medieval west with its recognizable social institutions of chivalry, kingship, its conventions of inheritance and masculinity [...]" (1). The feudal society was a patriarchal society, which affected both men and women. Late medieval society, as described by Judith M. Bennet, is a society where: "[...] full manhood came with marriage, status as a householder, and authority over dependants; it required an active, penetrating role in sexual encounters; it involved skills – such as fighting from horseback or manoeuvring a plough [...]" (88). In *ASOIAF* there is a clear understanding of how men and women should look and act, based on the patriarchal system of medieval England.

Bennet argues that: "In both theory and practice, women came after men in late medieval England. [...] Women had to cope with the hard realities of patriarchal privilege [...]" (99). Does this mean that all women of medieval England lived under the rule of men, and that none of them enjoyed any rights or privileges? True, men were the landowners of medieval England and it therefore did not affect them economically if they lost their spouse, as it would a woman who lost her husband. However, some widows found that they on the death of their husband became more independent, and were now free to hold land and enter guilds (Bennet 91). A woman's status would always differ and factors such as marital status, religion, legal status, ethnicity and where she lived would affect her freedom and privileges. Still, Bennet further suggests that even though some women, whether peasant or noble, could from time to time enjoy higher status, the patriarchal system still was the ruling system of medieval England, and many men found it hard to accept the rule of queens and countesses (92). In addition, the political arena mostly belonged to the men, as they drew up and passed the laws that governed women, and in addition they for the most part ruled the family as well: "[...] women were assumed to be inherently inferior to men and properly guided by men"

(Bennet 95). The same set of rules seems to be established in Westeros as well, but some of the characters differ from this system.

Brienne of Tarth is an example of a character who deviates from this system, as she neither looks nor acts the part of a woman. Brienne is described as tall and broad-shouldered, with short hair. She wears armor and she is excellent at swordfighting and one-to-one combat. She does not pretend to be a man, but more than once people mistake her for one. In addition, Brienne participates in tournaments, as she is of noble birth, thus resembling a knight. Geoffroi de Charny comments on what women cannot do, like travelling, jousting, and fight wars, further reinforcing masculinity and strength (104). In this respect Martin deviates from medieval society, or at least from how Geoffroi de Charny depicts medieval society to be (104). Still, there are examples of females taking up arms and fighting wars, the most famous perhaps that of Joan d'Arc, which reveals the discrepancy between how Geoffroi de Charny pictured an ideal society, and how society really functioned. Maybe the difference is not between medieval England and Martin's depiction, but between Geoffroi de Charny and Martin.

The same way some of the female characters harbor male traits, some of the male characters harbor female traits. Samwell Tarly does not know how to fight, and becomes scared and queasy at the sight of blood. He harbors more feminine traits than masculine, and would as such be an example of the exceptions to the rule to how men should behave. Judith M. Bennet presents society in medieval England as a society where men were supposed to either work the land or fight (88), and society in *ASOIAF* is presented the same way. Samwell does not know how to do either of these things, but the latter becomes the gravest problem for him, as he is sent to join the Night's Watch, a group of men that protects the borders of the known world, and therefore must arm themselves from time to time. Sam is thus an example of a character who harbor more female traits than male traits.

Bennet explains that female rule in medieval England was sometimes opposed (92) and that some men did not want women to enter the political arena. In *ASOIAF* however, Cersei is given a seat at the Small Council, and as such she does partake in the politics of the realm (*AFFC* 239). Still, as Bennet describes, Cersei is more than once the victim of male superiority, as her voice is surpassed or silenced. Cersei is the only female member of the Small Council, which has a clear bond and direct line to the king, and as such mirrors the rule of medieval English kings and their councils. Other female characters that participate in semi-political landscapes are Melissandre, who is the religious advisor of lord Stannis, and Daenerys Targaryen, who rules a vast army by herself. Her council consist of both males and

females. One could argue that since *ASOIAF* gives some examples of female rulers, this could be in accordance with medieval England.

Lord Tywin Lannister represents the patriarchal head of the Lannister family, a trait of medieval England, as the men ruled as both landowners and the head of family, according to Bennet (99). Lord Tywin rules his family with a firm hand, he decides among other things who his children, Cersei and Tyrion are going to marry, and he does not care if they are willing or not: “You are my daughter and you will do as I command” (*ASOS* 218). He does this to secure an alliance and the family name, and that seems to be what is most important to him. Another example is that of Robert Baratheon, who is married to Cersei Lannister. Their marriage would not be described as a happy marriage, but a necessary pact to uphold an alliance between two families. He is both unfaithful to and violent towards his wife: “Purple with rage, the king lashed out, a vicious backhand blow to the side of the head. She stumbled against the table and fell hard, yet Cersei Lannister did not cry out. Her slender fingers brushed her cheek, where the pale smooth skin was already reddening. On the morrow the bruise would cover half her face” (*AGOT* 358). Furthermore, Robert decides what to do, and he decides when she is allowed to speak and when she should keep quiet: “How many times must I tell you to hold your tongue, woman?” (*AGOT* 358). Both Tywin and Robert could be seen as the embodiment of the male patriarch, according to Bennet’s article (88).

As an antithetical to these two patriarchal males, Eddard Stark represents the opposite. Although he may appear strict, he is a man of honor (*AGOT* 529), and this seems to be what guides him, not necessarily society’s rules of how a man or a father should be. At times Eddard addresses his wife Catelyn as “my lady” (*AGOT* 166). He respects her and listens to her advice, and at times she has to convince him to do things that neither of them wants, like becoming the Hand of the King and thus moving away from Winterfell: “I will refuse him,” Ned said as he turned back to her. His eyes were haunted, his voice thick with doubt. Catelyn sat up in the bed. “You cannot. You *must* not” (*AGOT* 50). Neither Tywin nor Robert would have accepted their wives to speak to them like that, but it seems that Eddard listens a great deal to his wife, and as such he becomes an exception to the male patriarchal rule of *ASOIAF*.

At one point Eddard does adhere to the traditions of society, when he betroths his eldest daughter to prince Joffrey. King Robert is the one to propose this, and he seems to have no problems with the situation, though Eddard feels like his daughter is too young, and therefore acts hesitant towards the king (*AGOT* 39). Again, it is his wife Catelyn who convinces him that this is the right thing to do: “Gods, Catelyn, Sansa is only *eleven*,” Ned said. “And Joffrey . . . Joffrey is . . .” She finished for him. . . “crown prince, and heir to the

Iron Throne” (*AGOT* 50). Like in some of their other discussion, Catelyn has the last word, and it seems that she is the one who makes Eddard adhere to the traditions of society. Where Tywin and Robert would resemble the intended patriarchal male of medieval England, Eddard deviates from this role. One could argue that the characterization of *ASOIAF* resembles the roles of the men and women of medieval England, because in medieval England as in *ASOIAF* there would have been exceptions to the rules of how to behave.

Several religions are presented in *ASOIAF*, not only one, so in regards to this element Martin deviates from medieval England, where the church was a highly important institution of power and authority. In Lepine’s article about the church, he suggests that: “Medieval life would have been unimaginable without it” (259). So why did not Martin imagine and add only one religion and church to *ASOIAF* more like medieval England? Martin portrays several religions in his book series, worshipped by different characters, heavily dependent on geographical areas; the Drowned God, the Old Gods, R’hollor Lord of the Light, the Many-Faced God. One understands that these religions are characterized as both older and newer religions, because the characters often use the saying: “the old gods and new” (*AGOT* 319). These religions remind one more of pagan religions than Christianity, as some of the characters believe that their gods reside in trees (*AGOT* 18). Still, The Faith of the Seven is on the other hand seen as a new form of religion, and this is the closest one to that of the medieval church, which shows that even though it is not as prominent featured, there is still a link between the church of medieval England and religion in *ASOIAF*.

The Faith of the Seven may be the closest one to mirror the church of medieval England with its institutional structure. Its High Septon likens the arch bishop of the English church, and its septons and septas resembling monks and nuns. The medieval church’ clergy consisted of monks and village priests, as well as bishops and abbots. The higher clergy were often to be found at court and they were given land from the king, on equal terms as the barons (Turner 188). This turned many clergy and the church as an institution into rich landowners, thus belonging to the upper tier of society’s social class. In his article, “England: Church and Clergy”, David Lepine writes: “The church was one of the most important, wealthy and influential institutions of medieval England.” In addition to being landowners, the church was responsible for learning and literacy. They educated young boys, novices, in the monasteries and in addition offered further theological studies for their monks, at universities (Lepine 369). As the clergy often worked as scribes, they would need to master the art of reading and writing. Though the priests and priestesses of The Faith of the Seven are

portrayed as literate, there is another group in *ASOIAF* who holds more power over the written word, namely the maesters. Here Martin deviates from history, as the church would be responsible for learning in medieval England. Martin has thus separated religion from literacy. The maesters keep written records and uphold a system of messages carried by ravens, they are the librarians of the vast library of the Citadel, thus holding the key to all the wisdom in the known world. Throughout the book series, the High Septons and his group of clergy come to resemble the way the medieval church handled heretics, with their acts of turning doubters and sinners onto the right path – Christianity – and by persuading the heretics to confess to their sins, by punishment, isolation and torture. In this respect The Faith of the Seven does resemble the medieval church, as they too punish, isolate, torture and overturn some of the characters (*ADWD* 717).

Medieval English society was a feudal, hierarchical society, where the king, the nobility and the church ruled and the peasants worked for them. The knights' code of conduct has been commented on by the contemporary knight, Geoffroi de Charny. He upholds honor obtained by strength as the most important virtue for the men-at-arm. George R.R. Martin portrays a society very reminiscent of that of medieval England. It resembles both the hierarchical and the patriarchal elements, but as in medieval England, exceptions to these components are to be found in *ASOIAF* as well. There are knights that do not uphold their chivalric conduct of honor, women who dress and fight like men, and husbands who deviate from the patriarchal standard. The fact that Martin does not generalize but instead deviates from the norm, adds to the realism of the series. The one major deflection from medieval England must be the element of religion, which differs highly, because in *ASOIAF* a multitude of religions are present, and some of them mirror pagan religions. In addition, there is not just one powerful institution like the medieval church present, as the maesters of *ASOIAF* represent the literate part of the church, as they are in control of letters and books, through the library of the Citadel.

### **5.1 “BOOKS WILL RUIN YOUR SWORDEYE, BOY” – POWER STRUCTURES IN *ASOIAF***

Society in *ASOIAF* is made up of certain dominant discourses of power, structures that dictate how the characters should look and act. The king, the knights, the nobility, the patriarch of the family and the males are those who are portrayed as most powerful. In *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek recognize that power and

authority are central tenets to medieval England, and that the king, the nobility and the church are often among those people and institutions who are linked to authority and power by historians. So far, this is in accordance with how Martin portrays society in *ASOIAF*, with the exception of the church.

Bolton and Meek define authority as: “[...] the generally accepted justification for action and power as the practical ability to induce others to obey or follow a lead” (1), and they define power as: “[...] the effective exercise of influence over others” (1). Scholars have found that power and authority could be exercised not only through kingship and force, but through: “[...] diplomacy, the formation of groups of supporters by grants and gifts, and persuasion through sermons or literature and works of art” (Bolton and Meek 2). Power and authority were closely linked and had to function together, as the one was useless without the other. If one ruled over a large army one harbored power, but this would be of little use if one did not also command authority, because then people would rise against one. If one harbored authority but did not have the power to follow through, one would not be able to hold on to that power for long (Bolton and Meek 2).

Bolton and Meek acknowledge other groups who also enjoyed some power. In addition to the authoritative powers of the king, the nobles and the church, their collection of essays also offer a closer look at certain other groups, who did enjoy some power, maybe to a smaller degree than the king and the nobility, but power still:

They also look at the exercise of power by nontraditional groups [...] above all women, who might rarely be able to claim authority as rulers, but who could often exercise a degree of influence that may fairly be called power through their family connections, the wealth and property at their disposal, their claim to holiness of life, or their political or cultural patronage. (2)

Thus one understands that even though kings, the nobility and the church were seen as the most powerful and authoritative, they were not always the sole group of people who enjoyed power and authority over others.

In *ASOIAF*, masculinity equals power, the same way femininity does not. Some of the female characters are portrayed as powerful, as they exercise power either by fighting as knights, posing as male, or commanding vast armies. Lady Brienne of Tarth is described like this:

Had Brienne been a man, she would have been called big; for a woman, she was huge. Freakish was the word she had heard all her life. She was broad in the shoulder and broader in the hips. Her legs were long,

her arms thick. Her chest was more muscle than bosom. Her hands were big, her feet enormous. And she was ugly besides, with a freckled, horsey face and teeth that seemed almost too big for her mouth.  
(*AFFC* 58-59)

She dresses like a man, and fights like a knight, which means that she holds some power, but that does not mean she is accepted by society, and thus she holds little authority. Jaime states that: “You can trick out a milk cow in crupper, crinet, and chamfron, and bard her all in silk, but that doesn't mean you can ride her into battle” (*ASOS* 18). So even though Brienne fights as hard as any other knight, and as such holds some power, she is unable to gain the authority she needs to become truly powerful. Like proposed by Bolton and Meek, power and authority were connected, and as Brienne experiences, it was hard to succeed with just one of the two in place.

Women in medieval England seemed to have been one of the groups that enjoyed little power and authority, if it was not through the rule of their husbands as queens: “While women might in theory inherit and transmit royal authority in Portugal as in Castile, no woman in the Middle Ages succeeded in doing so” (Bolton and Meek 8). The queen might be able to use her royal influence and thus exercise some power through her husband, but was sometimes challenged if she herself attempted to sit the throne. In *ASOIAF*, some female rulers are depicted. Daenerys Targaryen commands a vast army, and means to take back the Iron Throne which she holds a claim to (*ACOK* 435). She is living in exile, and finds most of her support not in the inhabitants of Westeros, but in slaves and the army referred to as “the Unsullied”. She freed the slaves from the Slavers Bay cities of Astapor, Meereen and Yunkai, and she purchased the Unsullied from a slaver. One can thus not use Westeros’ own definition of queen to describe her, as one does not know if the powerful families of Westeros would accept her as regent (*ASOS* 95).

The closest to a female regent in *ASOIAF* is Cersei Lannister. She was married to the king, and therefore she was able to exercise some power, finding allies more loyal to her than the king (Larrington 109). When her husband died, she was able to influence her son, King Joffrey, even though he was extremely hard to control (Larrington 108). As Joffrey too passed, and her youngest son King Tommen inherited the throne, she was able to enjoy more and more power, as King Tommen was easier to manipulate than his brother, and as she ruled as queen regent (Larrington 108). Furthermore, Larrington argues that: “[...] it’s clear that Cersei wields a great deal of authority” (110). Bolton and Meek argues that the women who tried to rule by their own authority and power were forced to give up the throne by male

leaders, even by members of their own family, and even those females who tried to rule in the stead of their sons were often not allowed to do so. It seems like both among royalty and the nobility, there existed a strong prejudice towards female leaders and rulers. This mirrors Cersei's situation, because as long as her father Lord Tywin was alive, it was he who more or less ruled the kingdom, as head of the family. In this example, the patriarchal male trumped the queen mother.

The same way most females are not powerful, there is no room for characters that are craven, that cannot fight, and as such do not fit the mold of society, a mold that accentuates the masculine and strong over the feminine and weak. Masculinity is a major part of society in *ASOIAF*. Those who are brave and skilled in battle, the knights in their shining armor, the patriarch of the family, the king who rules the Seven Kingdoms, all glow with masculinity, and hold some sort of power. The knights are powerful due to their position in society, but in addition because they are able to fight, and because they are fearless. Their alliance with the king as his sworn men also aid their power. The king who sits the Iron Throne is the most powerful man of all the Seven Kingdoms, and thus holds more power than any other man. He gives the orders that the rest of his people have to follow. He delegates a lot of his tasks to the Small Council, and the King's Hand acts as his closest advisor, and is able to rule in the king's place, if necessary. Thus, the Hand of the King holds power as well (Larrington 101). The male patriarch is the one who rules the family, he holds power over and is in control of the family members and makes decisions that affect their lives, e.g. who they should marry (*ASOS* 218).

Kings who claimed the throne by force, or who suffered from a foul reputation, may have used image-making to try to change the view common people held of them (Bolton and Meek 2). The examples Bolton and Meek give are those of conquering kings like Cnut, William the Conqueror and Charles of Anjou (3). These three kings held great power through their armies, but their authority may not have been as high as they wanted it to be, as they had taken the throne by force. Thus, they had to somehow justify their rule to be able to enjoy authority in addition to power: "[...] they sought to legitimize their position by other claims, associating themselves with pre-existing royal traditions and above all through conspicuous acts of generosity toward the Church" (Bolton and Meek 3). The rule of these kings could be compared to the rule of Joffrey Baratheon, who is the son of Robert, who did not inherit the throne, but who usurped it (*AGOT* 95). In addition to the fact that Robert usurped the throne, rumors that Joffrey may not be rightful heir to the throne, as Robert may not be his father, complicates the matter and does little to reinforce Joffrey's authority (*AGOT* 406). When he is

attacked by the common people in the streets of King's Landing, he reacts with anger, as he simply fails to understand the accusations directed at him (Larrington 100).

While power and authority more often seemed to be installed upon kings and institutions like the church, Bolton and Meek argue that words could also hold some power: "Words themselves could exercise a powerful influence on particular occasions such as those invoked in the heat of the battle and, when written down could have a more lasting significance" (13). This is true for society in *ASOIAF* as well, as there are examples and instances of words holding power (*ACOK* 121). Bolton and Meek give an example of such a text, a poem recreating a battle, which serves to uphold the bravery and the power of the men participating.

In addition to the example of a fictional text, Bolton and Meek explain that: "Literary texts were not the only written forms that could reflect the realities of power and in turn exercise an authority in their own right" (14). Here they point to charters and documents. Anne J. Duggan proposes that through these documents the written word in itself had authority over the spoken, as it was trusted to last during the centuries (252). This is in accordance with what the thesis has previously stated about the written word in *ASOIAF*. Moreover, the documents were powerful due to the same reason, they would endure through time. The trust put in these documents had to do with the authentication of them, which were upheld through: "[...] the attachment of seals; the naming of witnesses; the making of multiple exempla, so that each party could have an authentic copy of the deed [...]" (Duggan 253). Still, documents could be falsified, and their legitimacy and authenticity could thus be disputed, the same way Cersei disputes a letter sent from Stannis (*ACOK* 173).

As in medieval England, attested to by Bolton and Meek, words are not always portrayed or noticed as powerful, and there is a strong sense that the conventional powerful and authoritative ideas trump words and knowledge: "We will see, Jon thought, remembering the things that Sam had told him, the things he'd found in his old books. [...] But words in a book were one thing. The true test came in battle" (*ADWD* 779). Another example is by Lord Tywin, Tyrion's father, who states that: "Some battles are won with swords and spears, others with quills and ravens" (*ASOS* 50). This suggests that even though lord Tywin is a masculine man, who commands a great army, he recognize the power of words.

The way medieval England is described to us by Bolton and Meek is reminiscent of society in *ASOIAF*. Both Bolton and Meek and Martin portray the king and the nobility as the most powerful groups. Bolton and Meek add the church to that group, while Martin focuses on the patriarchal leader of the family. Bolton and Meek argue that other groups enjoyed

power as well, like the women, and this too is mirrored by Martin, as some of the female characters enjoy some power. Moreover, Bolton and Meek propose that words could be seen as powerful, and this is reflected in *ASOIAF*. But even though credence is given to words, one finds that the conventional ideas of power and authority are those that in the end are upheld the most.

## **6.0 “A HUNDRED TALES OF KNIGHTLY VALOR” – ROMANCE ELEMENTS IN *ASOIAF***

George R. R. Martin’s series, *ASOIAF*, his five novels, can be seen as a continuation of the romance, explained by Laura Ashe in her book *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* as: “The romance became the most influential genre of all, throughout the Middle Ages and beyond; it was the forerunner of the novel” (125). As discussed earlier in this study, romance is a part of an oral tradition of storytelling, stories that have changed during the centuries to become for us part history, part fiction. The romance had certain fixed elements to them related to history Ashe explains: “The connection forged between love and chivalry is already in place here as an idea expressed by both Eneas and Lavine, and this does become ‘a true “constitutive model” for most medieval romances” (144). In other words, the contemporary ideas of the times make their way into the stories. While Martin downplays the connection of chivalry to courtly love, he highlights the brutality of the nobles. In his depiction of male and female characters, he is continuing the storytelling by incorporating romantic elements of beauty, chivalric masculinity and physical prowess. The study will discuss these connections further on in this chapter.

Martin’s choices could have been based on the target audience of the medieval English romance? Heng presents the medieval English romance as a fictional text that would be enjoyed by several groups of society: “Scholarship believes, in the main, that medieval romances in English were read or listened to by a wide social spectrum ranging from lower nobility and gentry (a designation including knights, squires, *valetti*, yeomen and free landowners in country and city alike) to mercers and burgesses (principally in cities) [...]” (2012:96). Finlayson states that romance authors: “[...] had the rhetorical skill to create it in the courtly mode” (173). Because the nobility would be the target audience, it would include elements recognizable to them: “[...] the courtliness of the hero is established at length (st. 3), there are elaborate descriptions of hunts, castles, dress, heraldic devices and social rituals, and

love and prowess are explicitly associated by the author [...]” (Finlayson 173). One thus understands that the romance would be written by the nobility, for the nobility.

In the interest of various historical perspectives and for the purpose of foiling the ordinary or outcast characters, Martin draws upon the romance genre’s physical depiction of the knight. In romance, many knights are portrayed as very handsome and beautiful. This is applicable for the knights in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and in *King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*. King Arthur’s men are not just described as fierce and tough knights, they are in addition: “The knights of highest renown under Christ Himself [...] All in that hall were beautiful [...]” (Harrison 46). Another knight who comes to visit King Arthur’s castle unexpectedly, is presented as: “The heaviest horseman in the world, the tallest as well [...] Anyway, I can say he was the mightiest of men And astride his horse, a handsome knight as well” (Harrison 50). These knights are not just fierce, capable in battle, strong and tall, but also beautiful, and it seems as if there is room for both beauty and prowess in the romances.

As in these romances, physical prowess and outer beauty seem to exist side by side in Westeros: “You were so handsome all in white, and everyone said what a brave knight you were” (*ASOS* 502). This description is given of Jaime, and he is more than once described as an extremely beautiful man, but also as a strong and capable man. Martin applies the physical traits of the romance to several of his knights: “Ser Balman had been a noted jousting knight once, and one of the handsomest knights in the Seven Kingdoms” (*AFFC* 358). Joffrey Lannister’s outer traits mirror those of the knights from the medieval English romance: “The tall, handsome one” (*AGOT* 58). Like Ser Gawain and Ser Launcelot, Joffrey is not just tall and handsome, but: “He was all she ever dreamt her prince should be, tall and handsome and strong, with hair like gold” (*AGOT* 117). Still, the most beautiful of all the knights in Westeros must be Ser Loras, as he is described as: “Seventeen, and beautiful, and already a legend. Half the girls in the Seven Kingdoms want to bed him, and all the boys want to be him” (*ASOS* 137). Several of the given examples here mirror the romances because beauty does not seem to exclude physical prowess, instead they complement each other.

Descriptions of such knights can be found in the romances *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, King Arthur’s knights are victorious in battle. Sir Gawain is described as: “[...] known As the hardiest on horseback, in armour the most Formidable, the fiercest at melees and tournaments, the bravest and best in the wide world [...]” (Harrison 54). Sir Launcelot of *King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table* is depicted fighting two giants:

“with two horrible clubs in their hands. Sir Launcelot put his shield afore him, and put the stroke away of the one giant, and with his sword he clave his head asunder” (1868). Launcelot must be physically strong to be able to kill the giants, and this also proves that he is victorious in battle. In addition, he is described as a “man of great might” (1868). The typical knight of the romance shows his physical prowess through how and what he fights. For example Sir Gawain: “Sometimes he wars with dragons, or with wolves; With wodwos, who watched him from woodland crags; With bulls and bears; sometimes with savage boars, And giants from the high fells, who followed him. Had he not been brave and sturdy, not served God, He would have died, been destroyed many times” (Harrison 71). This is the description of a typical knight, who fights anyone and anything that stands in his way: “He battled, and fought off viscious attacks in the valley” (Harrison 136). Sir Launcelot is several times portrayed fighting both three and four men at a time, so it seems as although he is outnumbered he is not afraid to fight.

In addition to physical characteristics, Martin borrows the idea of honor. A true knight is honorable and never shows any fear. This is made clear in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when Sir Gawain, the main character rides out in the forest to find the Green Chapel and meet the Green Knight for a duel. When his companion proposes that he run away instead of showing up at the Green Chapel, Gawain seems almost offended by the other man’s proposal. To uphold his honor means everything to him, and as a true knight, he cannot show fear or run away from danger: “[...] should I fail here And scuttle off, fleeing in fright, as you suggest, I’d be a fraud and coward, and could not be forgiven” (Harrison 122). Sir Launcelot acts in the same way, as he helps a man who is attacked by three others. This is presented in the book *The Globe Edition: Morte Darthur Sir Thomas Malory’s Book of King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*: “Truly, said Sir Launcelot, yonder one knight shall I help, for it were shame for me to see three knights on one, and if he be slain I am partner of his death” (2). Martin incorporates this same conviction in his characters when he allows them to feel shame for not meeting expectations of the chivalric code.

Martin’s portrayal of knights borrows the romantic trope of the knight, but he tweaks it. His knights harbor the correct outer features; the tall, handsome, gallant man, clad in armor, rescuing damsels in distress. (AFFC 481). In the earliest pages of *A Game of Thrones*, Jaime Lannister is introduced: “Ser Jaime Lannister was twin to queen Cersei; tall and golden, with flashing green eyes and a smile that cut like a knife” (AGOT 42). Jaime is both a knight and a member of the Kingsguard: “The smell reminded Jaime Lannister of the pass below the Golden Tooth, where he had won a glorious victory in the first days of the war” (AFFC 123).

By this quote one understands that Jaime is usually victorious in battle and in addition a capable knight, as he states that he won his fight on one of the first days. So far it would seem that Jaime is a true knight who resembles the traits of the romance knight. But there is a dark side to Jaime; he killed the king he had sworn an oath to protect (*ASOS* 16) and in addition, he throws Bran Stark from a tower (*AGOT* 71), certain that the fall will kill him. A true knight of the romance would not kill his king or kill an innocent child. Martin has thus borrowed the trope of the knight, but made the characters more realistic by not portraying them as a one-dimensional trope. Another example is in the characterization of Robert, the king. Cersei states that: “Robert had been handsome enough when they first married, tall and strong and powerful [...]” (*AFFC* 481). The king is now less handsome, fat and slow, and as such would not represent the ideal knight anymore.

Like the knights, the ladies of the medieval English romance are also described as idyllic and beautiful. In *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Guinevere is only mentioned a couple of times, and then in relation to her outer looks: “Queen Guinevere, the gayest of all the gathering [...] No Woman lovelier, Her grey eyes glancing about; In beauty she had no peer, Of that there was no doubt” (Harrison 47). Is Guinevere given any other traits, in addition to her physical ones? Apparently, she is given another trait only when the whole point of Gaiwain’s test is revealed. It was to: “[...] cause Guinevere grief, kill her with fear [...]” (Harrison 135). Guinevere is thus beautiful and afraid. She is not an active character, but someone who is more likened to the stereotypical damsel in distress, the female character who is in need of being rescued, who does not act herself, but rather is acted upon.

One example of a romance where the knight is sent out to rescue the maiden, is described by Heng (24). The romance *Historia Regum Britannie*, by Geoffrey of Monmouth, is a tale where King Arthur is on a mission to rescue the fair Helena, who is held captive by a barbaric, man-eating giant. In this particular story, the hero is unable to rescue the girl, as she has died of terror, but Arthur nonetheless kills the giant, and decapitates him (Heng 24). Similarly, in *The Globe Edition: Morte Darthur Sir Thomas Malory’s Book of King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*, Sir Launcelot is portrayed rescuing damsels in distress:

“For, sir, said they, the most part of us have been here this seven year their prisoners, and we have worked all manner of silk works for our meat, and we are all great gentlewomen born, and blessed be the time, knight, that ever thou wert born; for thou hast done the most worship that ever did knight in

the world, that will we bear record, and we all pray you to tell us your name, that we may tell our friends who delivered us out of prison” (1).

Some of the women on the other hand, ladies like the ones speaking in the above quotation are also portrayed as beautiful to look at, but as passive characters. They are not agents who act, they have to depend on Launcelot to rescue them. The pattern forming from explication of these two romances is that noble males, knights, may well be portrayed as beautiful to look at, but they harbor other traits as well. They are strong and victorious, meaning they act, they fight.

Some of the ladies of the romance are more active characters. Lady Bertilak is also described by her outer features: “She came from her pew, accompanied by peerless women, But she, in looks and complexion, the loveliest of all: Well-groomed, graceful, perfectly poised [...]” (Harrison 79), but in addition she is also seen as a more active character than Guinevere. She is a part of Morgana’s plan of testing Sir Gawain, and she plays a very active part in this ruse. Lady Bertilak pursues Gawain, and sneaks into his bedroom and into his bed one morning. She flatters Gawain and tells him that he is the knight everybody knows and wants. She goes even further, and offers herself to him: “Both my mind and body Are only for your pleasure. I’m here perforce, and ready To serve you at your leisure” (Harrison 89). This is not the act of a passive lady, this is the act of a lady who sees something she wants and pursues it. Although she offers him her body, she talks about love as well, and to be “free at last from sorrow” (89), so it seems that she is she is looking for a lasting relationship and a husband, and that this may be a proposal for marriage. The lady comes to visit Gawain several times in his bedroom, and she displays no sign of timidity or meekness. She is portrayed as a very active agent, and a very outspoken lady: “Or do you think – shame on you! I’m too slow to follow? Not so! I’ve come alone to sit And learn new ways. Please show The treasures of your wit. My lord, being gone, won’t know” (Harrison 100). The ladies of the romance are diverse in their characterization. They take on different roles; the beautiful lady who is very passive and seem to exist only as a beautiful object, the beautiful damsel in distress who is also passive and needs to be rescued, and the active lady, who in addition to being beautiful does not linger on when she sees something she wants, but acts on her feelings. The damsel in distress is a well-known trope of the romance, and one that Martin also appropriates. There are at least two instances in *ASOIAF* where females are rescued by knights, but once again, Martin’s portrayal of both the knights and the ladies in these examples, includes less idealism and more realism.

The first example of a damsel in distress is Sansa Stark. She accompanies her betrothed, the king, on a stroll across King's Landing, when they are attacked by the people of the city (*ACOK* 446). King Joffrey thinks nothing of saving his lady, he instead saves himself as he is brought in safety behind the castle walls by his King's Guard. King Joffrey, who was supposed to be her knight in shining armor, scurries away with his tail between his legs, as she is attacked by the mob, poor workers and peasants crying for bread, furious at the royal family for their display of wealth. In this example, Martin shows us that the trope of the brave and bold knight, recognizable in the medieval English romance, is not always present in his stories. The man that does come to Sansa's rescue, Sandor Clegane, is not a knight, as he has refused knighthood even though it has been offered to him. He does not believe in knighthood, and he harbors a very realistic view of most knights, as he recognizes that not all of them are good and honest men (*AGOT* 253). Still he is the only one of the group of men there, knights included, that has the decency to help Sansa in her time of need, when even her supposed knight Joffrey fails her.

The second example is that of Lady Brienne of Tarth. Even though she is titled "lady", she looks and acts more like a "sir". Short haired and clad in full armor, she is often mistaken for a man, and as such, a knight (*AFFC* 58). Brienne fights as well and as bravely as any knight one would read about in any romance, and she puts her honor first, as she always keeps her word. Valerie Frankel in her book *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance* states that: "Brienne is the only true knight of the series, determined to protect the innocent and champion the helpless" (54). Brienne is maybe the one character that is closest to the trope of the knight, save for one little detail; she is not a man. At one point, Brienne is even turned into the damsel in distress, as she is captured by a group of men that forces her to fight a bear for their entertainment (*ASOS* 510). The knight that comes to her rescue is Jaime Lannister, the Kingslayer, a tarnished knight of sorts. Jaime lacks some of the attributes one would think a true knight should harbor, attributes that one would dedicate to Brienne instead. So once again, the expectations of the ladies and the knights of *ASOIAF* are crushed by Martin, as the tropes he borrows from the romance are not kept in their form, but molded into different forms by Martin.

Finlayson argues that at the center of the romance one finds the "trial by adventure" (176). The trial by adventure is a quest that the hero of the tale, often the knight, needs to endure and overcome, in order to achieve self-knowledge or reach a level of personal bliss. Through prowess and by answering to the chivalric code, while also solving a test of some kind, the hero will learn something about himself, and maybe find the truth he is seeking. In

*ASOIAF*, Sam travels into the wilderness both literally and metaphorically. He accompanies his brothers in the Night's Watch on a quest to find their missing brothers, and to examine if there is true evil beyond their borders. In doing this, Sam and his companions are forced to leave the confines of Castle Black, and travel out into the actual wilderness, beyond the borders of the wall, which separates Westeros from the realm of the Wildlings. For Sam this means that he needs to depart the safety of Castle Black, he has to leave everybody and everything that is both familiar and safe to him, arm himself and prepare to fight whatever awaits at the other side of the Wall. For Sam, the wilderness represents everything that he has always feared; the unknown, exhaustion, sleeping outside, being cold, the darkness, and fighting.

Sam is not a typical knight, as he is not handsome, but ugly, not tall, but fat, not brave, but a coward. He neither wants to fight, nor does he harbor the skill. He is highborn, and he is courteous, but that is the only knightly trait of the romance one can identify in him. Martin chooses the most unlikely of heroes in Sam, once again the trope of the romance is not mirrored. As Sam travels out into the unknown, he is forced to face his fears, and he escapes the dangers of the wilderness, but not because of his skills, more because of sheer luck. Still, in some sense, one could argue that Sam does learn something from his ordeal, as he has matured, and he himself states that he is no longer scared. Thus, one finds that Martin appropriates the trope of the wilderness as well, but the knight that travels into that wilderness is not similar to one that would be found in the romance.

In the article "The King Over the Water: Exile-and-Return Revisited" Rosalind Field explains about a reoccurring tale of the romance, that of the boy who is sent into exile:

It opens with the male protagonist as a young boy. The initial stasis broken by a violent crisis in which the father is killed. The boy, now heir to his father's lands, is exiled across water by the usurper, often after cruel treatment. In exile, disguised or otherwise deprived of his identity, he is often in danger as he reaches maturity. Aided by friends and/or love, he may become a leader in his new land. He returns – across water – often with an army. (43)

This pattern is found and partly copied in at least seven medieval English romances; *Havelok*, *Romance of Horn*, *Boeve*, *Protheselaus*, *Waldef*, *Gui*, and *Fouke Fitzwarin*. In *ASOIAF*, the king of Westeros, Aerys Targaryen is murdered, the throne usurped by Robert Baratheon, and Aerys' two children, Viserys and Daenerys has to flee the country. While in exile, Viserys tries to gain a powerful ally in the Dothraki horse lord Khal Drogo. Drogo turns on him and kills him, after having married Daenerys. Daenerys is now the heir to the throne of Westeros,

which puts her in danger, as Robert tries to have her murdered. She goes on to assemble an army, as her goal is to cross the sea, to revenge her father and take back the throne.

Field writes that: “Furthermore, exile-and-return is inherently patriarchal, with a masculine protagonist and a narrative of inheritance, both personal and dynastic” (47). Of the seven romances she mentions, only one of them encompasses a female heir, namely *Havelok*. Argentille, an orphaned girl and heir to the throne is married off by her uncle, most likely to keep her out of the way. Argentille is presented as an active part in the story, as “she makes things happen” (Field 51), but she is nevertheless rescued by Havelok, the male protagonist, and married off. Instead of fighting for her rights, like a male heir would do, she has to use her skills of negotiation, to achieve what is rightfully hers. In comparison, Daenerys is also married off, but as the story continues and she grows older and wiser, she acts on her own account, and makes her own decisions. She does not fight on the battlefield herself, but makes some tough decisions, and is able to stand by them. Although she does not swing the sword herself, she condemns men to death, and as such uses more than negotiation to get what she wants.

Shiloh Carroll argues that: “Tolkien, Attebery, and other critics see fantasy as a direct descendent of myth and romance, while Martin bases his in history instead” (4). The thesis has previously examined the links between Tolkien and Martin, and looked at how parts of their writing both differ and coincide. It is true that Martin is inspired by historical events and people, like the aforementioned Wars of the Roses. Still, Martin does seem to be inspired by the romance as well, on the contrary to what Carroll believes. Furthermore, if one applies Heng’s definition of the romance to *ASOIAF*, a lot of the elements from the romance can be identified in *ASOIAF* as well. Thus, this thesis differs from Carroll’s explanation, and further argues that Martin does indeed appropriate some tropes from the romance, like that of the knight and the damsel in distress. Indeed, some of Martin’s depictions of the knight are closer to that of the knight from the romance, than that of the knight from medieval England, at least at first glance. When the portrayal of the different characters is examined closer, one finds that they mirror realism more than romance, and thus one can argue that Martin appropriates the trope of the knight, but he turns the notion of that trope upside down, and he makes the knight resemble a real human being, instead of the romantic ideal of the knight, or just a character in a book. The knight from the romance, the one that is known as a thoroughly good character, is not the only depiction of knights that are found in Martin’s books. The knights in *ASOIAF* are not merely good or bad, they are multifaceted, and thus may resemble the knight of medieval England more than the knight of the romance. This is in accordance with how

Martin portrays all of his characters, as two-dimensional characters one would recognize more from real life, than as characters of a fantasy book, because they are simply not one-sided and stereotypical.

Martin's book series *ASOIAF* is continuing the oral storytelling, as the romance is seen as the forerunner of the novel. Though the romance and the fantasy genre harbors many of the same traits, Martin's series could not be deemed a romance. Shiloh Carroll argues that his work is more based in history than in romance, but one does find elements of the romance in *ASOIAF*. It is true that Martin includes some of the well-known tropes of the romance, like the knight, the damsel in distress and the wilderness, however, all of these tropes are reimagined and recreated, made more realistic, so that the portrayal is not one-dimensional, but instead offers a multitudes of characters that all behave differently, and realistically. The ideal of the knight is thrown away, as some of the knights in the series are portrayed as mean and violent, instead of gallant. The damsel in distress turns out to be capable of swinging the sword herself, or she is not rescued by her true knight, but by a tarnished one. The knight riding into the wilderness is an unlikely hero, who triumphs not due to his skills, but due to luck.

## **7.0 “WORDS ARE WIND” – LITERACY IN *ASOIAF***

It may be easy to imagine the people of medieval England as illiterate, as one often applies a modern version of literacy to the middle ages, and therefore one does not connect farmers and poor workers to the art of being able to read and write. Ralph Hanna argues that: “Much of the social practice of literacy remains quite antithetical to any modern notions of what constitutes ‘literate behavior,’ most particularly our sense that to be literate requires a command of multiple skills primarily ocular in nature” (2011:173). So how can one best approach the notion of literacy in medieval England? Laura Kendrick suggests that: “Seeing with medieval eyes is impossible for us. Yet we can try to use medieval descriptions of images – ekphrastic passages – as ‘medieval spectacles’ to correct the distortion of our modern vision” (149). Even though Kendrick here describes a very specific example, the notion of using ‘medieval spectacles’ when studying medieval literacy is worth applying, so one is able to study the era without a preconceived image of the time.

In her article “England: Education and Society” Jo Ann Cruz describes a quite different society than the one imagined, where “[...] the educational accomplishments of medieval England were considerable, and the expansion of literacy remarkable” (466). She

simultaneously proposes that people from almost every social class, at one time or another, were involved in literacy somewhere, somehow. She uses a very broad definition of literacy, and includes acts such as signing your name on a document, knowing a Latin prayer by heart, reading for pleasure or being read to. The same broad definition is offered by Charles F. Briggs through the essay “Literacy, reading and writing in the medieval West”: “Moreover, in any given society, the kinds of literacy acquired by different individuals vary greatly, from the non-reading peasant who witnesses a charter, to the merchant who keeps his account books and the noblewoman who reads for edification and pleasure, to the university theology master” (398). Thus, one understands that the definition of literacy is a very broad one, and at the same time that it cannot be compared to a more modern definition of the word. In addition, one should be careful to draw a parallel between the word “peasant” and the word “illiteracy”, as explained by Mark Amodio: “Even the most unlettered peasant was aware of the textuality of the culture around him [...]” (18). As the level of literacy would vary from peasant to peasant, it would equally vary from the peasants to the nobility.

Even though the comprehensive view is that books and the power they bring come in second to masculinity and physical prowess, books seem to be held in high regard by some of the characters of *ASOIAF*. Sam Tarly and Maester Aemon seem to agree that: “Before he had lost his sight, the maester had loved books as much as Samwell Tarly did. He understood the way that you could sometimes fall right into them, as if each page was a whole into another world” (*AFFC* 72). Books are given away as prized wedding gifts: “They were histories and songs of the Seven Kingdoms, she saw, written in the Common Tongue. She thanked him with all her heart” (*AGOT* 86). Daenerys, the receiver of the books, seem to appreciate the books as a great present, which could speak to the value of printed texts in this society.

King Joffrey is also given a book at his wedding feast, it is described as a rare volume, but he, in stark contrast to Daenerys, thinks little of his gift, and chops it up with his sword (*ASOS* 664). Does this mean that printed texts are of no worth to the society as a whole, or is it Joffrey as a person who sees no value in books? It seems that the latter is more correct, as his act of destroying the book is frowned upon by several of the guests, and as one of the guests even speaks out against the King: “‘Your Grace’, Ser Garlan Tyrell said: ‘Perhaps you did not know. In all of Westeros there were but four copies of that book illuminated in Kaeth’s own hand’” (*ASOS* 664). In addition, some of the characters recognize that books contain powerful knowledge that may serve the characters well: “Knowledge is a weapon, Jon. Arm yourself well before you ride forth to battle” (*AFFC* 85). The different examples of books as rare, and priced items, would justify the belief that printed texts are valued by most

of the characters of *ASOIAF*, even though masculinity and physical prowess hold more power. In addition, it seems that the highborn may be more accustomed to books and are portrayed more frequently reading them, than the lower classes are.

In medieval England boys from noble families were taught to read and write from an early age. Often the mother would initiate the son's education by teaching him the alphabet, before he would move on to be taught by male teachers, often in a monastery: "Upper-class boys, however, usually moved from the care of a female-headed household to a male-ruled environment, about ages six to seven, after which they might be in the care of a monastery or a master who taught reading and Latin grammar" (Cruz 461). From there, the boys could pursue higher education through further studies in the monastery or university. The noble families often copied the royal families, and therefore the nobility tried to offer the same spectrum of subjects to their children: "The royal household, in particular, was a training ground for youths who might learn song in the royal chapel, legal procedures, management of household departments, grammar, manners, languages, military skills and courtly accomplishments; aristocratic households sought to imitate the offerings of the royal court" (Cruz 461). This way a boy from a noble family would be well-taught in many different areas and subjects. This seems to be the rule for the highborn characters of *ASOIAF* as well, at least for the noble boys, as they are taught history, languages and math (*ADWD* 187).

Boys who were not of noble ancestry could still participate in low level education. This schooling could be performed by hiring a priest or a scribe who would teach writing, with the aim: "[...] to develop an ability to write for pragmatic purposes, composing letters and learning formularies for various legal and financial documents" (Cruz 462). Amodio argues that medieval English society "relied upon writing to transmit knowledge" (15), and thus one understands that reading and writing would not have been reserved exclusively for the noble families. The boys of the lower classes' level of literacy may not have been as high as the boys from the nobility, and it may have been acquired for different purposes, but it is safe to say that a lot of laymen in medieval England knew how to read, albeit at a low level.

In *ASOIAF* there are three examples of lowborn individuals who in some way or another come into contact with books, or who is seen as an example of illiteracy. The first is a prostitute named Alayaya, which one can assume, due to her profession, is not of noble birth: "And Marei is teaching us to read, perhaps soon I will be able to pass the time with a book" (*ACOK* 339). This example is interesting, as Marei, the girl who is teaching her to read, is also a prostitute, and one wonders who then taught her to read. Was she taught by her parents? If so, she could be an example of a lowborn being literate. Another suggestion could

be that she taught herself to read, or maybe the brothel owner or a customer helped her. Another interesting aspect of this example is the fact that it says that Marei is teaching *us* to read, meaning the other girls working at the brothel. So even though Marei maybe knew how to read before she started working with the other girls, this example shows that a great number of these lowborn girls are illiterate.

Another example of a lowborn, illiterate individual is that of Chett. Chett works as a steward for Maester Aemon at the Night's Watch, until Samwell Tarly comes along. Samwell replaces Chett as steward, because he, among other things, knows how to read and write: "Thinks he can just walk in and shove me out, on account of being highborn and knowing how to read" (*ASOS* 7). This quote tells us two things, that Chett is lowborn and does not know how to read, which adds to the other examples that most lowborn are illiterate, and it gives us some information about Samwell, stating that he is highborn and literate. A steward that is literate is preferable for the maester of the Night's Watch, as he himself is blind, and would be in need of someone to read and write messages for him. As the steward tends to all other needs of the maester, it is only natural that this should be among his tasks. Chett seems unwilling to understand, or at least accept this, as he is unhappy about losing his job. One senses that he is maybe a bit jealous of Samwell, and his ability to read and write. Either way, this is another example of an illiterate lowborn and a literate highborn character.

A comment is made about the unlikeliness that a man who is paid to fight for a living is able to read: "He watched the sellsword read. That he *could* read said something all by itself. How many sellswords could boast of that? *He hardly moves his lips at all*, Tyrion reflected" (*ADWD* 120). Tyrion is amazed by the fact that this man knows how to read, as he states that this is something out of the ordinary. Again, one assumes that sellswords, on the contrary to knights, are of a lower birth, as one would need to be of noble birth to be a knight, but the sellsword could be trusted to perform the same duties as a knight. Tyrion is at the same time astounded by how the sellsword reads, by hardly moving his lips, something that could reflect his level of reading. Tyrion is clearly impressed by this, and one could interpret this as a comment stating that the sellsword knows to read very well. This may be used to argue that although lowborn may be able to read, their level of literacy may normally not be as high as the level of highborn's literacy, making this sellsword the exception of the rule.

Based on these examples, one could assume that most highborn characters are literate, and that most of the lowborn characters are not. This assumption is shared by one of the characters of *ASOIAF* as well, a man named Weese. Arya, disguised as a poor boy named Arry, works as a servant for him, performing all sorts of duties like cleaning, tending to his

fire, fetching him food and so on (*ACOK* 342). Working this close to Weese, she also comes into contact with his written messages, but since Weese sees her as a lowborn boy, instead of the highborn girl she is, it does not occur to him that she knows how to read, and he does not bother to hide his messages: “Weese never imagined she could read, though, so he never bothered to seal the messages he gave her” (*ACOK* 412). According to Cruz though, some lowborn boys would still have the chance to learn how to read, although they maybe did not reach the same level of literacy as boys of noble ancestry (2009:462). One could therefore argue that the notion that most lowborn characters of *ASOIAF* are illiterates, would not mirror medieval England correctly. However, once again, Martin offers exceptions to the rule.

The same way some of the lowborn characters are literate, not all highborn characters are able to read. One example of this is a knight that Arya encounters at Harrenhall: “One was a demand for payment on a gambling debt, but the knight she gave it to couldn't read” (*ACOK* 412). This would mean that although being of noble birth, he may not have had the chance or opportunity to learn how to read. The two brothers Osney and Osfred Kettleblack are another pair of illiterate knights: “Ser Osfryd shuffled through the warrants, as wary of the words as if they had been roaches crawling across the parchment. None of the Kettleblacks could read” (*AFFC* 646). These examples show that Martin offers a variety of characters, where some lowborn characters can read, and some of the highborn are illiterates.

In addition to these instances that describe the spectrum from illiteracy to literacy, some examples of visual literacy are given in *ASOIAF*, in accordance with the examples set forth by Katherine Lowe. She argues that the lay population of the Anglo-Saxon society, relied heavily on recognition and the visual grammar, of e.g. certain elements of charters and diplomas, to make sense of them (161). Furthermore, she proposes that since: “The order of the elements in the diploma is largely fixed from the tenth century. Such features coalesce into an essentially standardised form from the mid tenth century, at which points its layout permits ready navigation of its contents” (175). This way, even though they were semi-literate, or not literate at all, they could still make some sense of a written document. This is in accordance with the broad definition of literacy presented previously by Cruz and Briggs, and should be applicable to medieval England as well, as it is seen as the beginning of an awareness and growth of literacy, that one assumes would continue throughout the centuries: “[...] done much to advance the growth of the literate mentality in the late Anglo-Saxon period” (Lowe 178). Michael Clanchy in his book *Hearing and Seeing – England 1066-1307* support this suggestion when he explains that: “Because illuminated manuscripts appealed

primarily to the eye, like pictures, they could be understood almost as well by the non-literate as by the literate” (279).

Carolyn Larrington points out that some of the characters of *ASOIAF* rely on signs and sigils that are recognizable to them: “The sigils are also vital for recognition in a largely preliterate society, fulfilling the same function as medieval heraldry: the Tudor rose, the different lions of England and Scotland, the French fleur-de-lis” (22). Like the knights and kings of medieval England, the noble houses of Westeros sport symbols on their clothes, shields and banners, to signal which house they belong to: “His tunic was a dark green, embroidered with the likeness of a black bear standing on two legs” (*AGOT* 30). These symbols replace the written word for the characters that are either illiterate or semi-literate. One of these characters is: “[...] the River-man who brings his grievance to Ned as Hand doesn’t understand the word ‘sigil’, but he can confidently interpret the symbols left as a signature” (Larrington 22). This man cannot read, but he understands the different symbols that belong to the different houses of the noble families, and thus is able to interpret the message left behind. Amodio states that: “Because reading and writing were skills possessed by only a few, the majority of the population had to rely on what they could take in aurally” (19). Lowe would maybe have used these examples to explain the notion of “the visual grammar”, which would enable those semi- or fully illiterate people to make sense of certain documents, a sense that is shared by Clanchy (253).

The books presented in the series cover multiple areas of usage, and are used to record family ancestry, history, poems, songs, and fictional tales. An example of the variety of books presented in *ASOIAF* can be found in this passage, where Tyrion is onboard a ship, and passes the time by reading the same three books over and over again:

Her captain being an especially bookish man, she carried three – a collection of nautical poetry that went from bad to worse, a well-thumbed tome about the erotic adventures of a young slave girl in a lysine pillow house, and the fourth and final volume of *The Life of the Triarch Belicho*, a famous Volantene patriot whose unbroken succession of conquests and triumphs ended rather abruptly when he was eaten by a giant. (*ADWD* 439)

Sansa, another character, is also portrayed reading fiction, texts that resemble the medieval romance. She reads about knights and ladies and lost love (*AGOT* 461). The examples of books and readers in *ASOIAF* are in accordance with how M.B Parkes describes medieval English society, a society where both readers and texts changed over time. Between 1100 and 1425 new and different types of texts were introduced, to meet the demands of a group of

literate readers, who now slowly but steady, commenced to read for pleasure. Written texts were thus used for a different, and incidental new purpose than just to acquire information. Parkes proposes that: “These new texts as well as copies of older ones were produced for new generations of readers: not only for monks but also secular clergy and laymen, who had acquired a more sophisticated level of literacy through higher education, or professional training and experience” (55). Both Tyrion and Sansa seem to belong to this category.

One observes that during the middle ages what people read changed. So which types of texts did the people of medieval England read? Geraldine Heng, in her book *Empire of Magic* presents the medieval English romance as a fictional text that would be enjoyed by several groups of society: “Scholarship believes, in the main, that medieval romances in English were read or listened to by a wide social spectrum ranging from lower nobility and gentry (a designation including knights, squires, *valetti*, yeomen and free landowners in country and city alike) to mercers and burgesses (principally in cities) [...]” (96). This would mean that the medieval English romance appealed to a large part of the English population, and that one could acquire both richer and fully decorated manuscripts of the books, as well as simpler copies, sold by booksellers travelling the country (Heng 96). These are the books Sansa reads, and she is from a noble family, so in this regard Martin’s portrayal is pretty accurate. Laymen, not only monks commenced to read, and soon the purpose of reading varied from only reading for education and information, to reading for pleasure as well.

Books are not only portrayed as fictional texts, or texts to learn from, books are also used to record numbers and debts: “Ned and the girls were eight days gone when Maester Luwin came to her one night in Bran’s sickroom, carrying a reading lamp and the books of account. ‘It is past time that we reviewed the figures, my lady,’ he said. ‘You’ll want to know how much this royal visit cost us’” (*AGOT* 107). Maester Luwin is in charge of bookkeeping, and wants to inform the lady of the house about what they need to stock up on. This way, books are used for important recordings, and several of these representations can be found throughout the series. Some books contain necessary figures and sums, but some books harbor secrets, for those who know what they are looking for:

*The Lineages and Histories of the Great Houses of the Seven Kingdoms, With Descriptions of Many High Lords and Noble Ladies and Their Children*, by Grand Maester Malleon. Pycelle had spoken truly; it made for ponderous reading. Yet Jon Arryn had asked for it, and Ned felt certain he had reasons. There was something here, some truth buried in these brittle yellow pages, if only he could see it. But *what*? The tome was over a century old. Scarcely a man now alive had yet been born when Malleon had compiled his dusty lists of weddings, births, and deaths. (*AGOT* 231)

For Eddard, the truth is right there in front of him, written down in that old book. This is an example of a book being a tool for seeking information for the characters.

Grand Maester Malleon is quoted as the author of the volume Eddard is searching through. But what precisely is a maester? A maester is a man that has spent his years studying and reading books, and has become a scholar. Some of them now spend their time as scientists, like Maester Qyburn (*ASOS* 350). Some of them offer their knowledge as healers like Maester Pycelle (*AGOT* 21). Some work as scholars, and harbor vast knowledge, which they share with others, like Maester Aemon (Larrington 138-139). The maesters all carry a chain, where the different links of the maester's chain each symbolize a skill of a particular subject, signifying that this is a man who knows a great deal about multiple, various subjects:

“There are some who call my order the knights of the mind ... Have you ever thought that you might wear a maester's chain? There is no limit to what you might learn ... I can teach you history, healing, herblore. I can teach you the speech of ravens, and how to build a castle, and the way a sailor steers his ship by the stars. I can teach you to measure the days and marks the seasons, and at the Citadel in Oldtown they can teach you a thousand things more. But, Bran, no man can teach you magic.”  
(*AGOT* 485)

Maesters read and write books, and are able to share their knowledge with common folks, nobles and kings. Indeed, the maesters would be considered fully literate.

The people of Westeros communicate through letters sent by ravens (*AGOT* 22). On more than one occasion such letters are of grave importance to the characters, either because they need to get across an urgent message or to spread important information to the inhabitants of the kingdoms. To be able to communicate this way, it would mean that a high percentage of the population would have at least a basic knowledge of letters and how to put them together. Still, the maesters, who a lot of the time are portrayed as serving the noble families, seems to be the one in charge of the ravens and the messages, like Maester Luwin is at the Stark castle. But what about the lowborn people, who must constitute a great part of the population? How do they communicate, and how do they acquire important information?

When Stannis wants every man, woman and child to know that King Joffrey is not the legitimate heir to the throne, he sends his most trusted men with chests of letters, to put them up at god houses and taverns, to make sure that everybody knows the contents of the letters (*ACOK* 121). This brings up the question of literacy, as Davos is doubtful of how many people can actually read. Maester Pylos proposes that the letters be read aloud instead, and

this pleases Stannis. He accompanies Davos with his knights to do the reading (*ACOK* 121). As important information is read out loud, it gives the lowborn illiterate population the opportunity to gain the same information as the noble, literate families. The way Martin portrays this episode, is similarly explained by Clanchy.

Clanchy gives evidence of proclamations commanded by kings. The proclamation ensued that those who could not read a pamphlet would hear what it said instead: “Proclamations were a quick and effective way of conveying information in crowded cities like London” (Clanchy 264). In fact, even those who could read, might prefer to be read aloud to as it was the norm at the time: “Yet he evidently found it easier to concentrate when he was listening than when he was looking; reading was still primarily oral rather than visual” (Clanchy 267). These examples from medieval England seem to have taken place for the same purpose as the one proposed by Davos; in order for everybody to receive the same message.

The letter that Stannis writes is in addition an example of the fact that the one that is literate, and thus able to write, is powerful. Briggs states that: “By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the combined advances in the academic and administrative uses of literacy had greatly increased the effectiveness of writing as an instrument of power” (416). Those who were able to write, were able to pen the truth, even though this truth might differ depending on who one asked. Literacy was a powerful tool that the Inquisition made use of: “In the hands of the inquisitors, these records were a powerful coercive device that allowed them to gather together disparate utterances made by those they interrogated, words that ‘were often veiled, misleading, and obscure’, and then reshape them ‘so as to reveal the damning “truth” that they believed lay hidden within”” (Briggs 416). Stannis’ letter, whether truthful or not, is an attack on the royal family and the Lannister’s claim to the throne, and Cersei’s reaction to the letter shows the graveness of its contents. This is also exemplified by lord Tywin, as he tells his son Tyrion that: “Some battles are won with swords and spears, others with quills and ravens.” (*ASOS* 50). What is recorded in writing and then distributed throughout the kingdom, is seen upon as truth, and thus Stannis’ letter is a powerful tool that he uses to the best of his abilities.

“Words are wind” is a famous saying in Westeros, and it is repeated a multiple of times throughout the book series. Based on this saying and its frequent use, one could argue that the characters do not put much faith into the spoken words, and largely uphold their confidence in the written word instead. When Stannis’ letters reach King’s Landing and Cersei, her initial thought is to burn them. She is stopped by Tyrion, who reminds her that

even though she destroys the letters, the words are already out there, people are now engaging in talks about the letters contents: “As for burning the letters, to what point? The song is sung, the wine is spilled, the wench is pregnant” (*ACOK* 172). What are the implications of Tyrion’s statement? Does this mean that the characters of *ASOIAF* trust the spoken word to the same degree as the written, or even to a higher degree?

Briggs explains that there was a shift in medieval English society, as it went from a predominantly oral society, to one anchored in the written word: “By the early fourteenth century England had made the transition from a society whose habits of thought and notions of authority were largely oral and memorial to one based more on the written word, in which the lineaments of power in government were thoroughly literate and where even peasants were expected to have seals to authenticate documents” (404). He further proposes, that during the centuries the written and the oral systems of communication and recording at times coexisted, but that this new shift meant that moreover, people started trusting the written word more than the spoken word, which had not always been the case. The reliance on oral communication, which now shifted, had both worked as a complimentary addition to the written word, but had at times also competed with it (Briggs 398). Now, more trust was put in the written word.

It seems that society in *ASOIAF* is more inclined to put its faith in the written word, though examples of the two systems coexisting are also prevalent. That society in *ASOIAF* maybe trusts the spoken word more, becomes clear in this passage, where Davos is sent to gain the trust and alliances of Lord Wyman and his people:

“You have the word of Stannis Baratheon that all I’ve said is true.”

“Words are wind”, said the young woman behind Lord Wyman’s high seat, the handsome one with the long brown, braid. “And men will lie to get their way, as any maid could tell you.”

“Proof requires more than some lord’s unsupported word,” declared Maester Theomore. “Stannis Baratheon would not be the first man who ever lied to win a throne.” (*ADWD* 247)

The two examples of written word given here are different. As Tyrion points out, the first example is more about slander, gossip, the letter containing foul accusations against the king, set forth by a man who seeks the seat of the king for himself. The second example talks about a king’s word, and if it is to be trusted or not. This is a much more serious matter, and the people listening to Davos and his plea uphold that they need more proof than simply trusting Stannis’ words, as he is seen by many as an illegitimate king. It seems that for more serious matters, like when to decide which king to whom they should extend their loyalty, the

characters of *ASOIAF* require more proof than only the spoken word, as it appears that the recorded word seem to hold more legitimacy than the spoken.

Even though it may not be trusted as truth, there are several references to oral storytelling and songs throughout the books. This might be in accordance with how the oral and the written culture of medieval England coexisted for some time. Amodio propose that: “Because the transition from an oral to a literate culture is marked by continuity, not rupture, oral habits of mind not only persist within increasingly literate societies, but retain much of their cultural centrality” (22). Oral communication and retelling was well-established in medieval England, as its tradition were far older than that of the written word. This seems to be the case in *ASOIAF* as well. In addition, it seems as though people trusted their memory: “Memory, then, was often far more useful than a written record” (Briggs 404). Old Nan tells the children of Winterfell ancient stories, something that could indicate that in this society, people have been telling tales and in that way kept the oral tradition alive for centuries. She tells stories of knights, thus Bran learns their names and remembers their feats (*AGOT* 64-65). Furthermore, she tells him about his ancestors, to teach him who built Winterfell, the castle he lives in (*AGOT* 202). But Old Nan tells other tales as well, tales more ominous and grave. She tells Bran of winters lasting for decades, when the dead walks the earth:

“Oh, my sweet summer child,” Old Nan said quietly, “what do you know of fear? Fear is for the winter, my little lord, when the snow falls a hundred feet deep and the ice wind comes howling out of the north. Fear is for the long night, when the sun hides its face for years at a time, and little children are born and live and die all in darkness while the direwolves grow gaunt and hungry, and the white walkers move through the woods.” (*AGOT* 202)

All of her stories are proof of an oral tradition, still being kept alive, and through them, Bran learns both about the history of Westeros.

Daenerys Targaryen is also told stories. Her brother Viserys tells her of Kings Landing, the city where they grew up, and how they had to flee their home during a rebellion against their king father. Through these stories, Viserys keeps his claim to the throne alive, and Daenerys learns to hate an enemy, a family that she never really met (*AGOT* 24-25). These examples of learning stories by heart, could resemble the way children of medieval England learned to read by reciting passages in Latin by heart. When learning Latin, Cruz explains that children were first taught to recite Latin, where the focus was put on pronunciation and learning by memory (453). Thus, one can propose that medieval England was a society where learning a text by heart equaled a certain level of literacy: “What was

required for a textual community ‘was simply a text, an interpreter, and a public. The text did not have to be written; oral record, memory and reperformance sufficed’” (Amodio 20). These examples of the orality of medieval England, could represent the orality that is presented in *ASOIAF*.

Both the written and the spoken word are heavily portrayed throughout *ASOIAF*. To picture medieval England as a highly illiterate society is a grave error, as one fails to detect the many examples of literacy in this society, e.g. visual literacy. The visual literacy of *ASOIAF* is represented by the use of the sigils which are recognized by those who cannot read. Cruz and Briggs argue for a broad definition of the word literacy, and one has to take into account that even though a huge part of the people could not read, they could still make sense of the different elements of a charter, and important information would be conveyed to them through proclamations. This is present in *ASOIAF* as well, where Stannis sends out his knights to read his letters aloud to people of the realm. A shift from who usually read and to what these people read, occurred in medieval England between 1100-1425. Laymen now started reading different texts, and they read more for the sake of reading than just to gather information. An example of a genre that seemed to be enjoyed by a range of the population was the medieval English romance. This is mirrored in *ASOIAF* where numerous genres of books and a variety of readers are portrayed and where some of the characters read for pleasure while some read to gather information. Several characters of *ASOIAF* see the value of books, but few of them see knowledge as a weapon, comparable to an axe or sword. For the most part, the highborn characters are portrayed as literate, while the lowborn characters are portrayed as illiterates, but there are exceptions to this rule, portrayed through the knights that cannot read, and the sellsword who can. A shift turned medieval England from a society that put its trust in the spoken word, to rely more on the written word, as people trusted a written document more than witnesses who had listened to the utterances of a man. If one is to apply the frequently used saying “Words are wind”, to *ASOIAF*, the inhabitants of Westeros place more stock in the written word, than the spoken.

### **7.1 “KNOWLEDGE COULD BE MORE VALUABLE THAN GOLD, MORE DEADLY THAN A DAGGER” – LITERACY IN FANTASY NOVELS**

Literate characters are depicted in several fantasy novels. Veronica Scahnoes states that several fantasy novels depict characters that make use of knowledge of some sort, like *Those Who Hunt the Night* (1988), *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norell* (2004) and *The Alchemist’s*

*Door* (2002) (240). While these fantasy novels all tell different tales set in different worlds and times, the novels have one thing in common namely that knowledge, learning, reading and scholarship are portrayed as positive factors. Whether the characters apply knowledge found in books to hunt vampires, or they make use of already stored scholarly knowledge to create and invent protective creatures, these feats are recognized as positive, not only for the characters, but for their surroundings as well. Some of the characters of *ASOIAF*, fits these descriptions, in the sense that they too apply knowledge, whether to balance existing power structures, or to fight otherworldly creatures. Still, knowledge is not always portrayed as something positive in *ASOIAF*, where one's aim is to adhere to the different power structures of society. In addition to the characters found in the aforementioned novels, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and especially Hermione Granger of the *Harry Potter* series are industrial users of their school's library and the knowledge they extract from books are used in the fight against Lord Voldemort. Moreover, the aspect of knowledge is ever present in the Harry Potter books since much of the story takes place at Hogwarts, a school for wizards and witches where the young students partake in both practical and theoretical classes.

What has been written about the Harry Potter series and their character's quest for knowledge is applicable to what the thesis investigates about knowledge in *ASOIAF*: "The Harry Potter books depict a complex world of knowledge and knowers. Knowledge is depicted as multilayered and multifunctional" (Elster 204). This is true for *ASOIAF* as well. There are several references to books, reading, illiteracy, orality, songs and oaths, which has already been exemplified in the previous chapter. Some of the characters are highly intelligent and read a lot. One character is illiterate, but is taught how to read by a maester. Thus, the knowledge and the "knowers" depicted in *ASOIAF* are just as "multilayered" and "multifunctional" as those depicted in the Harry Potter books.

In her article "The Librarian in the Harry Potter Series" (2014), Mary Freier points to Hermione Granger as a librarian – she is a person that is able to detect and extract information from books. This knowledge is very useful in Harry, Ron and Hermione's fight against the evil Lord Voldemort, and is eventually what brings the dark lord to his knees and defeats him. Without Hermione's abilities to make use of books they would never have been able to complete their task and kill Voldemort. Even so, the discourses that exist in this society does not uphold reading as one of its virtues: "Although it is clear that witches and wizards read for pleasure as well as information, Hermione's study habits are often made fun of early in the series and "book learning" is portrayed as inferior to bravery, strength, morality and even good fortune" (Freier 3). This resonates the discourse of society in *ASOIAF* where you are

deemed an outcast if you cannot fight or if you are not brave. The power of the mind it seems, is less favorable than the power of strength and bravery.

Megan L. Birch points out some of the same things in her article “Schooling Harry Potter – Teachers and Learning, Power and Knowledge”:

“A strong theme in the series is that book learning is very much less important than who one knows, how brave one is, how strong one is, and what one’s moral directives are.” [...] “Further, even outside of class, the intellectual and academic work of students is not as important to their success as other qualities. Harry is braver than he is smart. Though Hermione’s studiousness and her knowledge often rescue Harry and his friends, her tendency to study and read is mocked.” (117)

If Hermione had not spent all those relentless hours at the library, digging up knowledge from books, would Harry have managed to solve all those small quests on his way to defeat Voldemort? Would Harry have been able to fight and conquer lord Voldemort had it not been for Hermione’s knowledge and skills? If one looks at how Freier and Birch characterize Harry Potter, as more brave than smart, the answer could very well be no.

In her article “Harry Potter and the Acquisition of Knowledge”, Lisa Hopkins argues that knowledge is a huge part of the Harry Potter books, that in the books knowledge is turned into something positive, and even essential, if you are going to be able to save the world. Although this may be the main belief of the books, some of the more villainous characters seem to not care about books and their knowledge: “Draco Malfoy, who already know what house he will be in, disapproves of the very concept of acquired knowledge” (Hopkins 25). Furthermore, Hopkins states that: [...] “It is also notable that the villains, by contrast with the heroes, do not learn and tend to be dismissive of the modes and ideology of knowledge acquisition” (Hopkins 30). This is mirrored in *ASOIAF*, where Joffrey Baratheon chops the book he received as a wedding present to pieces with his sword (*ASOS* 662-663). Where some of the other characters share a great respect and reverence for books and find them useful, Joffrey is never portrayed reading, and he does not care that he is ruining a very rare volume. It is clear that Joffrey sees no use in books whatsoever.

Harry, Ron and Hermione frequent the library at Hogwarts, and there they acquire necessary knowledge from books, knowledge that is even adamant to their survival: “[...] just as in Goblet of Fire Harry’s acquisition of knowledge about summoning charms proves crucial to his survival [...]” (Hopkins 29). In addition to Harry, Ron and Hermione, Tyrion and Sam both make use of libraries, though for different reasons. For Tyrion, as earlier stated, he reads to keep his mind sharp. Sam’s reason for reading is more similar to the characters of

the Harry Potter series, he is actively seeking information that may be beneficial for the Night's Watch' fight and survival against the White Walkers. Hopkins ends her article this way: "It is also admirable and necessary – indeed, essential – to work hard, read books, and spend long hours in the library, because the things you learn there may just save the world" (Hopkins 33). Sam spends a lot of time in the library at Castle Black, detecting information about the Others. What he has found so far is an answer to the question: How can the White Walkers be killed? Sam is then sent to the Citadel, to seek out the books of the largest library in the known world. One does not know if what Sam has found, or will find, will be enough to "save the world", but as Hopkins states, the things he has found after all those hours at the library *may* be enough to defeat the White Walkers.

In his article "The Seeker of Secrets: Images of Learning, Knowing and Schooling", Charles Elster discusses Harry Potter as a hero, a seeker of knowledge, knowledge that is crucial in his quest to stop Voldemort. Elster explains that: "He also has child helpers, especially his bookish friend Hermione Granger. Together the two of them solve the mysteries, he by his courage and daring, she by her bookish learning" (204). This is reminiscent of Sam and Jon's relationship, where Jon resembles Harry, and Sam resembles Hermione. Sam may not be much of a soldier, but like Hermione, he proves that he is able to extract the knowledge that they seek. "Important knowledge, knowledge connected to the solution of mysteries and the accomplishment of the evil-foiling quest, is depicted in the Harry Potter books as hidden knowledge. It is the hero's role to actively seek, uncover, and use secret knowledge despite interferences" (Elster 216). This may be similar to what Sam is doing in *ASOIAF*.

## **8.0 LITERACY AND POWER IN CHARACTERIZATION**

What are the central power structures that affect the six characters; Tyrion, Sam, Davos, Cersei, Sansa and Arya? Based on previous statements about power structures in *ASOIAF*, one could argue that all six characters are affected by society's power structures of masculinity, physical prowess, feudal power and chivalric principles. In addition, Tyrion, Sam and Cersei are affected by the power structures within their family, more precisely by the patriarchal figure. The power structures are affected by the norms of society; the inhabitants believe in these norms that have been imposed on them through centuries, as explained by Larrington: "It introduces some of the central concepts, the world views and social rules in the

Known World [...] Most of the peoples of Westeros and Essos adhere to these beliefs and operate according to these social codes” (13). Thus, these structures permeate both society’s and the family’s views of how one should look and act.

Tyrion, Sam and Davos are outcasts of society in Westeros because they do not possess masculinity and physical prowess as presented by the chivalric code of conduct. As such they do not belong to any of the top estates but represent the common man, because in addition to their lack of the right physical qualities, they lack the right appearance. Tyrion is a dwarf, meaning he is short and equipped with an unproportioned body. Sam is a large man, and Davos misses the outer joints of four fingers on his right hand. In the book *Deformed Discourse* David A. Williams presents Isidore of Seville who in the Middle Ages made a hierarchy for how to define and describe the monstrous man. His hierarchy points to physical deformities for the most part (108). This must be because the human body so blatantly demonstrates its perfection but also its imperfections: “As Isidore perceived, the most useful model for a taxonomy of the monster is the human body” (Williams 108). Tyrion, Sam and Davos all share some form of physical deformity.

The physical deformities of the three characters make them different. For Tyrion and Sam their physical deformity is very visible, for Davos less so. Their deformities however make them more monstrous instead of human. Williams explains:

Deformations of the physical body as a whole or of the idea of the body as a whole give rise to several traditional monstrous forms. The most widespread are the pygmy and the giant, who function as physical and conceptual opposites. Their monstrosity consists in contrary violations of the norm for size: the giant exceeds the norm through hypertrophy and becomes a figure of exorbitance; the pygmy, or dwarf, fails to achieve the norm through atrophy and becomes a figure of deprivation.” (111)

Why would society in Westeros think of Tyrion, Sam and Davos as resembling a monster more than a man? It has to do with what is perceived as normal, and how to define what is normal: “In this way, the abnormal always precedes the normal, making possible the definition of the normal” (Williams 113). Due to their appearance, Tyrion, Sam and Davos become representatives of what is abnormal, what is outside the norm. Society in Westeros has a strong notion of how the noble men and women should act, and it would seem that they also have as strong a notion of how the nobility should look. Tyrion, Sam and Davos fail to meet society’s expectations, and as a result find themselves on the outside of society.

For Tyrion, Sam, and Davos books act as a positive force, at least to some degree, because the knowledge they attain from books makes them more powerful, to them, literacy is

power. Self-fashioning is one example where literacy works in the favor of one of the characters; Tyrion. In this imagined medieval society Tyrion, Sam, and Davos will not be accepted as knights or lords, but they know how to read and how to make use of the knowledge they find. For them, the discourses that exist limit them, they will not obtain the social skills to become what society demands of them (a knight, a tall man, soldier, a brave man, a King's Hand), but when placed in front of a book, or when they get to apply their knowledge, they are in charge, and they find ways to apply this knowledge to survive and succeed. This way, their peers, and consequently society, accepts them to some degree. Although, literacy and books may be useful to some of the characters it may not aid them all of the time, and literacy as a tool certainly works differently for the six characters.

### **8.1 "SLEEP IS GOOD, HE SAID. AND BOOKS ARE BETTER" – TYRION LANNISTER**

In the book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt presents different Renaissance men and shows how they construct a persona, a fantasy, a performance and a certain way to act and behave, to be able to live the life they want. In Greenblatt's words, they are *self-fashioning* themselves. Like these men; More, Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Tyndale, and Wyatt, Tyrion Lannister too self-fashions himself: "[...] fashioning may suggest the achievement of a less tangible shape: a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving" (Greenblatt 1980:2). Tyrion has created a personality and a way to address society. The fact that he had to do this, shows that society's power discourses affect him gravely. He struggles for social acceptance. The power discourses of society influence not only how society views him, but in addition how his own family views him, and as such, how he views himself.

Tyrion is not characterized by his true personality and family name, as he is not referred to as Tyrion Lannister, but by a moniker that describes his physical appearance. When Sansa Stark spots Tyrion for the first time, she refers to him as "the one they called the Imp" (*AGOT* 36). It is hard to know precisely who "they" are, but one is lead to believe that the nickname must be known to more than just his family and the court where he resides, as it seems like this moniker is used by society in general. Tyrion is nicknamed "The Imp" and it seems that this is the name he is known by in Westeros, more so than his birth name Tyrion. This way people fear him because he is a dwarf, not because of his family name. Furthermore, both Sansa and Jon Snow comment on how ugly Tyrion looks. "Grotesque", "mismatched", "bulging", "brute", and "squashed-in-face" are some of the adjectives that are used to

describe him. Tyrion is feared and mocked as a monster in Westeros, even though this is neither an accurate nor truthful description of his personal traits.

It is no wonder that Tyrion self-fashions himself, and probably has from a young age. He has decided that his character is not going to be phased by the names society applies to him, and this is one of the probable reasons why he tries to change his persona through self-fashioning: “Let them see that their words can cut you, and you'll never be free of the mockery. If they want to give you a name, take it, make it your own. Then they can't hurt you with it anymore” (*AGOT* 155). A part of Tyrion’s self-fashioning is being rude and untactful. He is quick-witted, and seems to not always think before he speaks, as he tells Jon Snow: “Dwarfs don’t have to be tactful” (*AGOT* 46). This could suggest that people expect rudeness from him because he is a dwarf. Due to this discourse, Tyrion has fashioned a persona that fits the image people already have of him, to maintain his place as a noble. If people are going to detest him anyway, he may as well act the part. Society fashions him as a monster and he uses it to his advantage.

Another part of his self-fashioning involves using derogatory names when referring to himself, to keep others from applying these names first. This method creates a protective shell to hide beneath, where society’s discourse will not be able to hurt him. This is evident in this passage where Tyrion meets Jon for the first time, and refers to him as “bastard”. Jon takes offense to this, something Tyrion then tries to advise him against:

“Let me give you some counsel, bastard,” Lannister said. “Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armor yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you.” Jon was in no mood for anyone’s counsel.

“What do you know about being a bastard?”

“All dwarfs are bastards in their father’s eyes.” (*AGOT* 47)

To Tyrion it seems that it has been important to accept who he is and to turn his so-called weaknesses into strengths. He has self-fashioned a persona who is witty and always ready to laugh at himself. Tyrion is well aware of the fact that he is a dwarf, and he also knows what this means in regards to both his family and society. Tyrion is the black sheep of the flock who is used to being the disappointment of the family, but he still always keeps his head high. He is the “half-man” who will never live up to his father’s expectations, and who will never resemble his brother Jaime, neither by looks nor by skills. He recognizes the power structures of society, and knows that society will never see him as anything other than a dwarf: “It doesn't matter, he told himself as he waited for moonrise. Whatever you wear, you're still a

dwarf. You'll never be as tall as that knight on the steps, him with his long straight legs and hard stomach and wide manly shoulders.” (*ASOS* 136) Tyrion has accepted how society views him, and has self-fashioned a persona to meet this view.

Even though Tyrion is highborn, he is incapable of meeting the demands of the noble families. An acceptable way for Tyrion to enter society would be if he performed as either a soldier or a knight, and in that way showed his chivalric conduct and his physical prowess. Unfortunately for Tyrion, he is unable to do this, even though he at times tries, and thus he is looked upon as an outcast of society. Tyrion’s social status is decreased, as he becomes a common man in the eyes of the nobility, instead of the noble man he was born as. The rest of the nobility do not see him as a part of their inner circle, because he is not able to participate in their world the way they expect. The noble families may regard themselves as generous and well-behaved, but the truth is that they behave worse than Tyrion does, and one could claim that a lot of the noble men and women of Westeros do not act very chivalrous or lady-like. Tyrion, is not only diminished by society, but by his family as well.

Tyrion’s family has certain expectations towards him that he fails to meet. The expectation to look a certain way is the first one Tyrion is unable to accommodate. His siblings Jaime and Cersei are both described as beautiful, and his father would be characterized as a handsome man. Jaime is everything Tyrion is not. Ever the perfect romance knight, Jamie is tall, blonde and beautiful, perpetually dressed in a shining armor, repeatedly winning duels at tournaments and defeating enemies in battle. Tyrion on the other hand is described as short, with mismatched eyes and unruly hair. His arms are too short and his head is too big (*AGOT* 43). Tyrion is seen as a monster, an outcast, and only half a man due to the fact that he is a dwarf. This affects his body so that he of course is short, but in addition his head, arms and legs are unproportioned. Due to his physical appearance he is therefore many times given the description of a monster, also by his own family.

Even though he is a dwarf, it seems that both society and his family expect him to act a certain way and to do great things, as he is born into a very powerful family: “‘Things are expected of me’. [...] ‘I must do my part for the honor of my House, wouldn’t you agree?’” (*AGOT* 103). According to Greenblatt, self-fashioning was all about advancing socially, both in the political world, and within one’s own family: “[...] More’s sense of his own distinct identity is compounded of a highly social role, fashioned from his participation in a complex set of interlocking corporate bodies – law, parliament, court, city, church, family – and a secret reserve, a sense of a life elsewhere, unrealized in public performance” (42). This concept of secret reserves also describes Tyrion’s self-fashioning, where he first and foremost

strives to reverse the hatred of his own family, and then labors to succeed as a noble in a society that loathes and fears him, just because of his looks.

Society limits Tyrion's freedom, because he is not able to fulfill the role of the knight in the shining armor. This role is taken on by his brother Jaime instead. It seems that due to his physique, Tyrion would not be able to fight alongside other knights, at least this is the description Tyrion himself gives (*AGOT* 103). Still, he is portrayed fighting several times in the books, thus proving that he is able to do so. Something else may be the reason why he has not pursued this path. One could argue that society's discourse dictates what Tyrion can and cannot do, and because he was born a dwarf, society decides that he is not fit to be a knight.

The fact that he is a dwarf seems to take a toll not only on his social life, but on his family life as well. In fact, had he been born into a peasant family he had been killed, because dwarves are not accepted by society (*AGOT* 103). It is said that the fact that Tyrion is highborn is the only reason he is still alive. In Sistoron, a part of Westeros, they used to throw dwarves out to sea, because they believed that they were monsters created by god (*ADWD* 128). Due to their atypical appearance, they did not deserve to live. Tyrion, however, was born into a noble family, and so he is granted life as a gift. Still, Tyrion's mother died giving birth to him, and this is the main reason both his father and his sister Cersei hates him. They see him as the sole reason for their wife's and mother's demise. In addition, his sister finds him distasteful (*ACOK* 40), and his father seem to not care if he lives or dies (*AGOT* 510), all due to the simple fact that he is a dwarf.

How does Tyrion make use of his intellect and the knowledge he gains from books? In *ASOIAF*, Tyrion is depicted as a character that reads a lot and harbors a lot of knowledge. This is the second part of his self-fashioning, as he uses his brain and his knowledge as a weapon, because other more conventional weapons fail him. For Tyrion, books are important and he cares about how they are treated and if they are looked after (*AGOT* 72). It is evident that he reads a lot, and that he is used to occupy the libraries of the places he visits and that he shows great respect to the volumes and scrolls that he borrows. Because he is highborn he has been taught how to read and write, and he is also skilled in other languages than that of Westeros. This is in accordance with how Cruz describes boys from noble families in medieval England. He knows how to speak High Valyrian, a language he was taught when he was a boy. In addition, he is able to speak Braavosi and Myrish, and it appears he would be able to make himself understood in Tyroshi (*ADWD* 17). This would make Tyrion a multilingual. Again, this is how literacy in medieval England is described by Cruz, that to be defined as literate, one would have to know Latin, French and English.

For the most part, Tyrion is seen reading secular writings, and he does not appear to be a religious man. Still, it becomes clear in *A Dance with Dragons* that he has studied holy writings as well (79). He claims that he studied to be a High Septon, but one can only guess as to whether this is true or not. Parkes proposed that eventually people of medieval English society started to read for pleasure, and Tyrion too is portrayed several times reading for his own enjoyment. If one were to impose Briggs' "three-tiered taxonomy" of readers on Tyrion, which category would he fall into? Throughout the book series, Tyrion would be definable by all three of the categories. He could be defined as a professional reader, as he is very close to being a scholar, though he would not be defined as a maester, therefore the second part, a "professional man of letters.", would not apply to him. He can certainly be defined as the cultivated reader, as he reads for his own enjoyment. Lastly, he could be characterized as a pragmatic reader, because he does use his literacy skills to conduct business, as is exemplified in the passage below.

In the final book in the series, Tyrion is given the task of writing down all his knowledge about dragons (*ADWD* 185). Tyrion is presented as a laborer and a scribe, he reads and writes down everything he can find concerning dragons. He shows a vast knowledge of these creatures, and he even knows which books he would need to gather the best information. These books are unavailable to him as he is onboard a ship, so he writes from memory instead. If Tyrion had not dedicated his life to reading, to sharpen his mind, he would not be able to build on this knowledge when he needs it the most.

Does Tyrion's literacy and knowledge help him in his self-fashioning, and as such help him balance society's power discourses? In *A Game of Thrones* Jon Snow and Tyrion are on their way to Castle Black, Jon is to join the Night's Watch, Tyrion is visiting The Wall. During their travels Tyrion is approached by Jon, who asks the question, why do you read so much? Tyrion answers: "[...] "My mind is my weapon. My brother has his sword, King Robert has his war hammer and I have my mind...and a mind needs books as a sword needs a whetstone if it is to keep its edge. That's why I read so much Jon Snow" (*AGOT* 103). One could argue that because Tyrion is literate, and because he constantly reads, he is able to use his mind as a tool.

Tyrion is obviously aware of his physical weaknesses, but clearly states that what he possess is comparable to any weapon. Tyrion self-fashions himself to be able to be a part of a tough world that favors masculinity and physical prowess, and where his skills are not the most sought after. It seems that Tyrion very early has come to the realization that he needs to replace the skills of society, the skills he never had, with a set of skills of his own, and he

turns books and knowledge into his set of skills. Thus, one could argue that through reading books from a young age, he has gained both knowledge and intellect, which he uses to self-fashion and balance society's power structures.

Although Tyrion self-fashions, although he has created a persona that is self-confident and quick witted, this mask crumbles when he is in the presence of his father: "He crossed the room to their table, acutely conscious of the way his stunted legs made him waddle with every step. Whenever his father's eyes were on him, he became uncomfortably aware of all his deformities and shortcomings" (*AGOT* 510-511). Tyrion has known his whole life that he is different, because he has been treated differently by the people who are closest to him, namely his family. The fact that his own father does not believe in him makes it hard for him to keep up the mask that he has self-fashioned, one he carries every day. Tyrion carries this mask effortlessly in front of strangers, but in front of his father he is reduced to nothing more than his looks and his awkwardness. Thus, the skills that he has achieved and perfected through his life are suddenly not viable. How his father thinks of and perceives him must affect Tyrion sometimes even when he is not there, because it does seem like Tyrion from time to time doubts himself and the skills that he possesses, as is exemplified in the passage below:

People seemed to be asking a great deal of him today, Tyrion Lannister thought. "You could put all this in a letter, you know."

"Rickon can't read yet. Bran..." He stopped suddenly. "I don't know what message to send to Bran. Help him, Tyrion."

"What help could I give him? I am no maester, to ease his pain. I have no spells to give him back his legs."

"You gave me help when I needed it," Jon Snow said.

"I gave you nothing," Tyrion said. "Words."

"Then give your words to Bran too." (*AGOT* 179)

Even though Tywin may not believe in Tyrion, and this makes him doubt himself and his abilities, Jon believes that Tyrion can make a difference for Bran the same way he did for him. This notion differs from the power discourses of society, which do not put much faith in neither written, nor spoken words. Throughout the books there are other examples of people who do appreciate Tyrion's skills of knowledge and wits, but they are not people of any real power, they are not the people who are in charge. Maester Aemon the lord commander of Castle Black is one of these people. It may seem that he is powerful as he is the commander

of an army of soldiers, but the fact is that the Night's Watch operates independently of the kings and rulers of Westeros, and therefore have no true power to neither change, nor influence the laws of the realm. Maester Aemon identifies Tyrion's qualities as positive ones, and therefore sees him differently from what the rest of society see when they look at him:

“Oh I think that Lord Tyrion is quite a large man,” Maester Aemon said from the far end of the table. He spoke softly, yet the high officers of the Night's Watch all fell quiet, the better to hear what the ancient had to say. “I think he is a giant come among us, here at the end of the world.” (*AGOT* 173)

Still, very few individuals view Tyrion as the “giant” he really is, a term Aemon must have used because he recognizes his verbal skills and his intelligence. Moreover, these skills are not recognized by society, and thus Tyrion is not accepted by society as it seem to be ingrained into people's beliefs how a man should appear and behave.

Tyrion does not fit the image of the knight or the soldier, upheld by society's power discourse, but he does on several occasions partake in battles. In these instances, he shows that he certainly is able to fight, even though society believes that he is not. The first encounter is when he joins his father's army to fight off Robb Stark's army, and the second time is when he fights the battle of The Blackwater Bay, to protect King's Landing against Stannis Baratheon. Tyrion did most of his work not as a soldier in this battle, but rather he put his strategic mind to use as he was the architect behind the defense of the city. He ordered the pyromancers to produce barrels upon barrels of wildfire, and he made every smith in King's Landing work together to forge a huge chain that he used to trap Stannis' ships in the bay. This way the city was able to stand its ground until Tyrion's father arrived with his host, though Tyrion had to forfeit his place at the wallwalk and join the battle after all (*ACOK* 635). In the frenzy that followed, he was badly injured. After this battle, with the feeling that he had saved the city, he is angered and offended by both his family and the city's lack of gratitude towards him. The victory is instead dedicated Tywin and his host, and people seem to either not believe that Tyrion fought at all, or those who know that he did choose to not give him the praise he is entitled to. In addition, his strategic defense of the city is overlooked:

“They say that you've filled the city with swaggering sellswords and unwashed savages, brutes who take what they want and follow no laws but their own. They say you exiled Janos Slynt because you found him too bluff and honest for your liking. They say you threw wise and gentle Pycelle into the dungeons when he dared raise his voice against you. Some even claim that you mean to seize the Iron Throne for your own.”

“Yes, and I am a monster besides, hideous and misshapen, never forget that.” (*ACOK* 452)

Why are the people in general, and his father in particular, so hesitant to give him the praise that he deserves? It would seem that the power structures of society do not allow Tyrion to be a hero, they only allow him to be a dwarf, an imp, a monster. He does not fit the description of the knight in the shining armor who rescues the entire city. This description fits his father more, and so it is easier for the city to celebrate him as their victor. It seems like no matter what Tyrion does, no matter how hard he tries to be a part of society, he will not be accepted. Still, he feels that the city would have never lasted that long had it not been for his preparations and efforts, although his father disagrees. As hard as it is to achieve society's acceptance, it seems like it is equally hard to achieve the acceptance of his father.

When Tyrion goes into battle, he is not depicted as scared or craven, as Samwell Tarly (*ACOK* 646). Thus, one can argue that Tyrion so far fits the discourse that upholds masculinity as a positive trait. Even though society does not recognize him as a soldier, he plays the part of one. Tyrion fights to the best of his ability, and he even has the gift to motivate other men to follow him into battle (*ACOK* 634). Later on, Tyrion is haunted by the battle in his dreams, and in the dream he is occupied with not letting his father see him cry, as it is very important to him not to show any signs of weakness in front of his father Tywin. (*ACOK* 701). Throughout *A Game of Thrones* and *A Clash of Kings* it is made clear that Tywin Lannister does not very much appreciate his youngest son, but it is not until the third book in the series that we understand how much he really detests him:

“You are an ill-made, devious, disobedient, spiteful little creature full of envy, lust and low cunning. Men's laws give you the right to bear my name and display my colors, since I cannot prove that you are not mine. To teach me humility, the gods have condemned me to watch you waddle about wearing that proud lion that was my father's sigil and his father's before him.” (*ASOS* 53)

Finally, Tywin's feelings toward his son are unveiled, and we fully understand why Tyrion has felt the need to self-fashion himself from a young age. Not only to be able to be accepted by society's power discourse, but to be able to endure his family, who adheres to the same discourse as the rest of the society. If these are the words from a father to a son, we can only imagine the feelings society may have towards Tyrion.

Tyrion has created a persona to be able to survive and succeed, within his own family and within society, despite the ruling power discourse. Tyrion's aim always seems to be to show his father his worth, that he is an able man, even if his father views him as nothing more

than a dwarf. It is as if he craves his father's attention and acceptance, probably because he has never felt loved or appreciated by his family. Still, no matter what Tyrion does or says, it seems it is never enough to gain his father's respect, nor to gain the trust of society. Tyrion rose from the shadow of his brother Jaime, to be the Hand of the King, thus his social status increased, at least temporarily. He prepared the defense of King's Landing and even fought the battle himself. For a while, Tyrion was a part of the inner circle that he had always longed for, and even his father placed some trust in him. Tyrion had fashioned the life he always dreamed of, and due to his intelligence and wit he had conquered society's power discourse:

"It is real, all of it, he thought, the wars, the intrigues, the great bloody game, an me in the center of it . . . me, the dwarf, the monster, the one they scorned and laughed at, but now I hold it all, the power, the city, the girl. This was what I was made for, and gods forgive me, but I do love it . . ." (*ACOK* 340)

Like Tomas More, who self-fashioned himself and thus achieved a lot, Tyrion managed to do the same. For More it ended badly, when he refused to accept that King Henry VIII was the Supreme Head of the Church of England, and was sentenced to die and later beheaded (Greenblatt 12). As More and Tyrion followed the same path of self-fashion and success, their downfall is similar, at least to some degree. In the end, Tyrion was discarded as Hand and used as a pawn in his father's power play, forced to marry a girl he did not love, only to strengthen the family's power. Moreover, he is accused of killing the king, and put on trial for the deed, impeached by his own sister. To make matters worse, his father resides as one of the judges in the court. During the trial Tyrion understands that regardless of all his hard work to be an equal part of his family, and all his laboring to help the city's inhabitants he will never be accepted neither by his family, nor by society:

"Nothing of the sort," said Tyrion. "Of Joffrey's death I am innocent. I am guilty of a more monstrous crime." He took a step toward his father. "I was born. I lived. I am guilty of being a dwarf, I confess it. And no matter how many times my good father forgave me, I have persisted in my infamy."

"This is folly, Tyrion," declared Lord Tywin. "Speak to the matter at hand. You are not on trial for being a dwarf."

"That is where you err, my lord. I have been on trial for being a dwarf my entire life." (*ASOS* 792)

Although his knowledge and literacy helped him fashion the life he wanted and aided him in balancing the power discourse of society, it seems like the power discourse is too strong and is what dominates in the end.

Graff presents the literacy myth as; “the belief, articulated in educational, civic, religious, and other settings, contemporary and historical, that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement and upward social mobility” (35), and thus asks the question if literacy necessarily always equals success. For Tyrion, one finds that literacy did aid him to some degree, but that in the end, the skill and intellect he harbored were not enough to balance the power discourses of society. Tyrion’s persistent self-fashioning has thus terminated. His self-fashioning has failed, it seems, as the power structures of society, stating how one should look and act, triumphs. The same way self-fashioning worked for Thomas More to some degree, it did so for Tyrion, but it seems that like More, self-fashioning becomes Tyrion’s downfall in the end. In addition, Tyrion has failed to impress and win over his family, who sees him as they always have, as a monster. From here on out it seems that Tyrion gives up on both his family and people in general.

## **8.2 "A BOOK CAN BE AS DANGEROUS AS A SWORD IN THE RIGHT HANDS" – SAMWELL TARLY**

Like Tyrion, Sam seems to recognize exactly what he is and what his shortcomings are:

Jon turned. Through the eye slit of his helm he beheld the fattest boy he had ever seen standing in the door to the armory. By the look of him, he must have weighed twenty stone. The fur collar of his embroidered surcoat was lost beneath his chins. Pale eyes moved nervously in a great round moon of a face, and plump sweaty fingers wiped themselves on the velvet of his doublet. “They . . . they told me I was to come here for . . . training” he said to no one in particular. (*AGOT* 218)

One can tell by the way he is dressed that he is high born, and one can sense that he does not really fit in at Castle Black. Sam is described as fat and unattractive. Further on in this passage, Samwell is given nicknames such as “Lord of Ham” and “Ser Piggy” by the master-at-arms, Ser Alliser Thorne. When he is forced to fight one of the other recruits, he simply gives up and yields. The other recruits laugh at Samwell, and he is mocked by Thorne. Similarly, he does not fight back when he is charged by the recruit, he does not defend himself when spoken to in a derogatory fashion. It is as if Sam has given up his training before he has even started, and that he lacks any self-respect and self-belief. It makes one wonder what he is doing at the Night’s Watch and how he ended up there. He does not strike one as the ordinary recruit for the brothers in black, which normally consist of poachers, poor peasant boys, thieves, rapists and murderers.

Sam soon explains to the perplexed group of newcomers why he behaves as he does:

[...] “I . . . I fear I’m a coward. My lord father always said so.” [...] Samwell Tarly must have read their thoughts on their faces. His eyes met Jon’s and darted away, quick as frightened animals. “I . . . I’m sorry,” he said. “I don’t mean to . . . to be like I am.” He walked heavily toward the armory.  
(*AGOT* 221)

He admits to the other boys at Castle Black that he is a craven, and in later talks with Jon he reveals that he really does not know how to fight and that the sight of blood makes him sick. Although he confesses these things, he is still embarrassed about who he is, so he too must know that he is an outcast of society, like Tyrion. He certainly knows, like Tyrion does, that he is the disappointment of his father.

Sam is the first-born boy of the Tarly’s, and was supposed to inherit his father’s title and lands. His father expects him to grow up to be a strong and brave man, to enter the world of physical prowess. But as Sam grows older his personal traits became more transparent, and for his father these traits do not coincide with his personal virtues. His father’s solution to his son’s personality is to try and change it, so it would better fit both society and his expectations of physical prowess. In this he is unsuccessful, and so for him Sam becomes nothing else than a burden and a liability, an embarrassment to his name and family. His solution is to offer Sam the choice of joining the Night’s Watch or to suffer a hunting accident:

His passions were books and kittens and dancing, clumsy as he was. But he grew ill at the sight of blood, and wept to see even a chicken slaughtered.” [...] “So. There is your choice. The Night’s Watch” – he reached inside the deer, ripped out its heart, and held it in his fist, red and dripping – “or this.”  
(*AGOT* 226)

The quotation shows that in a society that favors masculinity and physical prowess, Sam falls short. But what would make a father so embarrassed about his son that he would go to the lengths of murdering him?

It appears that society’s expectations towards men requires them to grow up and enter a world of physical prowess, as this seem to be the norm of society. These norms permeate all of society, and as such they affect the noble men of society. Thus one can explain that Sam’s father’s virtues would mirror those of society, and would coincide with the virtues that the noble families of society uphold. Society’s expectations towards Sam mirrors those of Tyrion’s, to either become a soldier or a knight. Sam is incapable of fighting, both because he

lacks the skills and because he becomes physically unwell at the sight of blood. Thus, he, as Tyrion, is reduced to a common man instead of a part of the nobility. This also shows that the noble men may be the ones who act the most brutal in this society, and as such they differ from how they would want to present themselves to society, as better than the commoners, generous and well-behaved. It turns out that Sam's traits better fit this description than those of his father.

It seems like Sam, in contrast to Tyrion, has somehow accepted who and what he is, but has not self-fashioned himself in any way. Maybe he does not know how, or maybe it is too hard for him to do, maybe he lacks Tyrion's resources. For Sam, it looks like somebody else fashions him, when they uncover his strengths and skills. Jon has discovered some of these qualities in Sam, and he believes that they should be considered as favorable as some of society's other positive attributes: "He can do sums, and he knows how to read and write. I know Chett can't read, and Clyda has weak eyes. Sam read every book in his father's library." [...] "There's a lot he could do, besides fighting. The Night's Watch needs every man" (*AGOT* 377). At the Night's Watch Sam is fashioned through the belief of Jon Snow.

For Jon, the fact that Sam knows how to read and write is seen as an advantage. The same way some individuals recognize Tyrion's knowledge and literacy as skills that are favorable in a society that upholds a different set of discourse, Jon recognizes these traits in Sam as well. It does seem like the Night's Watch is in need of men with skills like this, as they have several soldiers but not too many literate men. Jon's advice to the lord commander is taken to heart, as Sam is given the title of steward, and the responsibility of reading and writing messages. Thus, Sam's set of skills becomes an advantage to the Night's Watch.

Sam seems to change throughout the series, although it may be wrong to say that he self-fashions himself the way Tyrion does. It is more as if Sam is forced to experience new things and thus learns that he is capable of more than he believed. When he is ordered to join the other men in the Night's Watch on a ranging, he is terrified at first, and believes that he will not make it back to Castle Black alive. Still, he tags along on the outing, and overcomes his initial fear:

"Well", said Sam, "yes, but . . . I'm not as frightened as I was, truly. The first night, every time I heard someone getting up to make water, I thought it was wildlings creeping in to slit my throat. I was afraid that if I closed my eyes, I might never open them again, only . . . well . . . dawn came after all. He managed a wan smile. I may be craven, but I'm not *stupid*." (*ACOK* 158)

Sam experiences a lot on this ranging, and his newfound belief in himself is put to the test as the brothers are attacked by the White Walkers. When they attack, it is Sam's responsibility to send ravens back to Castle Black to let the remaining men know what is happening. Sam had, due to Lord Mormont's warnings, already written the messages prior to the attack, so that he would be prepared when the attack came (ASOS 199). Still, during the assault, Sam is able to write and send off several messages:

*Wights all around us, he wrote, when he heard the shouts from the north face. Coming up from north and south at once. Spears and swords don't stop them, only fire. [...] He wrote faster, note after note. Dead wildlings, and a giant, or maybe a bear, on us, all around. [...] Wights over the ringwall. Fighting inside the camp. [...] Lord Commander Mormont is meeting them with fire. We've won. We're winning. We're holding our own. We're cutting our way free and retreating for the Wall. We're trapped on the Fist, hard pressed. [...] Lost, Sam wrote, the battle's lost. We're all lost."* (ASOS 202)

The messages work as an eye-witness account of what happens at the Fist of the First Men. Due to Sam's literacy the reader is witness to history in the making, as he writes down what happens the exact moment. More importantly, had Sam not survived this encounter with the White Walkers, the messages he wrote down and sent would have been the Night Watch' only remaining information about the Others. They could still have found the same data at the library at Castle Black like Sam does when he returns, if they shared his skills to read and gather facts. Still, it is stated that most of the men in the Night's Watch do not harbor these skills. Thus, from Sam's messages they would have known that the White Walkers can only be killed by fire, which is crucial information.

Like Tyrion, Sam is forced to fight, when the Walkers attack. In this passage Sam is depicted talking to himself, urging himself to fight. He also hears the voices of family members of the past, his father and brother, and his new "family", his brothers in the Night's Watch. Although it seemed as if Sam had changed, as he revealed to Jon that he was no longer afraid, when danger knocks on his door, it appears Sam returns to his shell of cravenness:

*Do it now. Stop crying and fight, you baby. Fight, craven. It was his father he heard, it was Alliser Thorne, it was his brother Dickon and the boy Rast. Craven, craven, craven. He giggled hysterically, wondering if they would make a wight of him, a huge fat white wight always tripping over its own dead feet. Do it, Sam. Was that Jon, now? Jon was dead. You can do it, you can, just do it.* (ASOS 208)

Is this an example of Sam self-fashioning himself? Sam finds the courage to step forward and thrust the knife in the direction of the wight, and maybe by sheer luck he hits and kills the Other. So maybe this was not Sam's proudest moment, and maybe he did not face his fears, because he literally closed his eyes, but at least he did not turn and run away screaming, or failed to do nothing, he actually acted upon his fear. Maybe, in some way, this is an example of Sam self-fashioning himself. Even though this must have been a huge step for Sam, most of his brothers at the Night's Watch treat him the same as they did before, meaning they mock him and laugh at him. Maybe they do not believe it is possible that Sam actually killed a wight, when so many other decent fighters lost their lives. Sam tries to tell them that it was the dragonglass that killed the thing, and not him, but they laugh it all off like a bad joke (*ASOS* 369). They even give him a new nickname replacing "Ser Piggy": *Sam the Slayer*.

Even though it is clear that most of the brothers do not believe Sam, his friends among them do. They make him tell Lord Commander Mormont, who listens attentively to everything he has to say. They are all stunned to think about the dragonglass they lost, there had been a lot in the bag Jon found. All they had left were two daggers, some arrowheads and a spear. Mormont questions why the watch never knew about the dragonglass, and he points out that the Others must have been the true reason why the Wall was built, not to keep the wildlings out. He now turns to Sam for more information about the dragonglass, and Sam is able to tell him that it is made from something called *obsidian* (*ASOS* 373). It is not made clear in this passage how Sam knows this, or where he got this information from, but it is plausible to think that he has read about this in a book.

Like Tyrion, Sam is portrayed reading throughout the book series, and one understands that he is intelligent. Like Tyrion, Sam values books. He is amazed by the amounts of books and scrolls at the library at Castle Black, and he handles them with a lot of care and respect:

"This vault is a treasure, Jon".

"If you say so". Jon was doubtful. Treasure meant gold, silver, and jewels, not dust, spiders and rotting leather". [...]

"I found drawings of the faces in the trees, and a book about the tongue, of the children of the forest . . . works that even the Citadel doesn't have, scrolls from old Valyria, counts of the seasons written by maesters dead a thousand years . . ." (*ACOK* 72)

For Sam, books and words are equivalent to treasure, this means that he knows that there is a lot to be learned from books. In this example, Jon represents the discourse of society which

finds little value in words, compared to the value of a sword. Like Tyrion, Sam sits reading the whole night, and does not seem to notice that dawn has broken, this is how essential reading is to him (*ACOK* 71). He is adamant about extracting the vital knowledge he recognizes is to be found. To give a definition of Sam's literacy based on Briggs' "three-tiered taxonomy", one could argue that he would be defined as both the professional and the pragmatic reader. He is no maester yet, but he is in the work to become one, and his role as steward would deem him a "professional man of letters" (Briggs 400). Sam is presented as one who searches for information in documents, scrolls and books, and as such is closer to the definition of the pragmatic reader than the cultivated reader.

Sam is not just the bearer of knowledge; he is the bringer of knowledge as well. When Mormont is stabbed by Ollo, he uses his last breath to command Sam to "tell them" about the wildlings, what took place at the Fist of the First Men and most importantly, the dragonglass. This is a special moment for Sam, because this is also the moment where he understands that he is not afraid anymore. He recognizes this as a strange feeling (*ASOS* 379). This means that Sam changes throughout the book, as he comes to some sort of a conclusion, something along the lines that there is nothing to be afraid of anymore.

In the fourth book, *A Feast for Crows*, Sam is back in the library at Castle Black, looking for information about the Others in dusty books and ancient scrolls (*AFFC* 71). Sam is again portrayed as a diligent reader who stays up all night to finish another volume. He has been ordered by Jon to find more information about the Others, information they need to fight this invincible enemy. Most of what Sam is able to extract from the books are things they already know about the Others. Sam harbored some knowledge of them before he encountered them, but his experience with them gained him even more wisdom. Still, Sam's search through all the old books and rolls of parchment has not been in vain. He has found an account of an old legend, where "the last hero" managed to kill the Others with a sword made from *dragonsteel*. Jon frowns at this, as he has not heard about it before, but quickly asks the question: "Valyrian steel?" (*AFFC* 81). Sam's answer to this question is a positive one, though he states that he still has several hundred books to go through in his quest for information. This is an example of where Sam's skills of reading and his knowledge about how to gather information is crucially beneficial to Jon and the rest of The Night's Watch. With this information, they now know how to defeat the Others.

Throughout the books, Sam evolves as a character, as he is forced to face his fears, and he grows on account of his trials and tribulations. Still, one could argue if he has changed visibly. At some point he states that he is not scared anymore, and he did manage to kill one

of the White Walkers, but it seems that he was more lucky than skilled in doing so. When he is back at Castle Black, and Jon proposes that he has to leave for the Citadel, Sam once again retreats into his shell, and wonders why he cannot just stay in the library with his books. Clearly, there is some of his old, anxious self left inside him, even though he has come a long way from the highborn, scared, craven boy, who first walked through the gates of Castle Black. Sam's literacy has helped the Night's Watch several times, as his ability to read and search for truths in old books is an ability shared by few others at Castle Black. Thus one could argue that the literacy myth put forth by Graff (35) does not apply to Sam's literacy narrative. Even though the rest of society and Sam's brothers in the Night's Watch favor those who can fight, Jon and Maester Aemon appreciate Sam's literacy, and believe that he can aid them somehow, even though he is hesitant to pick up a sword.

### **8.3"READER, HE SAID INTO THE QUIET, YOU WOULD DO WELL TO KEEP YOUR NOSE IN YOUR BOOKS" – DAVOS SEAWORTH**

Davos Seaworth is a sailor of trade, but his other occupational titles include smuggler and pirate. He is not of noble birth, but Stannis, his lord, have graced him with the title "Ser", as he has knighted him (*ASOS* 118). Davos is presented as a simple, but a loyal man, who is never afraid to speak his mind, even if he is addressing a lord or the heir to the throne (*ASOS* 713). Davos is one of the illiterate characters in the book series, but at the time he is introduced to the readers, it seems as if this has not been a serious obstacle to him:

"Ser", the king said when Davos entered, "come have a look at this letter." Obediently, he selected a paper at random. "It looks handsome enough Your Grace, but I fear I cannot read the words." Davos could decipher maps and charts as well as any, but letters and other writings were beyond his powers. (*ACOK* 120)

For the tasks he needed to perform as a sailor, or a pirate or a smuggler for that matter, to be able to decode maps would have been enough. The power structures of society have not affected him that much, because as a smuggler he is already standing on the outside of society, rather than being an individual affected by society (*ASOS* 110). One can therefore argue that Davos has not been in need of self-fashioning.

It is when Davos decides to enter the political arena, and take part in the power play of The War of the Five Kings that he finds his illiteracy a shortcoming. Still, his lord Stannis finds Davos to be an intelligent man, even though he is aware that he cannot read: "You have

a passing clever father, Devan', the king told the boy standing by his elbow. 'He makes me wish I had more smugglers in service. And fewer lords'" (ACOK 463). As with Sam, Davos' traits do not include physical prowess as much as it does intelligence, and as in Sam's case there are individuals like Stannis that appreciates these characteristics, although society may not.

Even though Davos cannot read, he is still described as clever by Stannis, who always appreciate his advice. Davos is also an earnest man, and for some reason he is not afraid to speak his mind to his liege lord whenever he sees fit. At the same time Stannis seems to appreciate his honesty, and the tongue that gives him that truth, as he states: "And I would have it speak the truth" (ASOS 410). To speak out against lords and kings is not a common feature of society in Westeros. People of lower birth are not allowed to speak up against lords, knights and kings, and heavy punishments await the one who would do so. Stannis and Davos clash more than one time due to Davos stubbornness, and at one point Stannis throws him in the dungeon for being disrespectful and insubordinate. Still, on some level he also respects him for his honesty and outspokenness, and therefore ends up naming him Hand of the King:

"Your Grace, you cannot . . . I am no fit man to be a King's Hand."

"There is no man fitter." Stannis sheathed Lightbringer, gave Davos his hand and pulled him to his feet.

"I am lowborn," Davos reminded him. "An upjumped smuggler. Your lords will never obey me."

"Then we will make new lords."

"But . . . I cannot read . . . nor write . . ."

"Maester Pylos can read for you. As to writing, my last Hand wrote the head of his shoulders. All I ask of you are the things you've always given me. Honesty. Loyalty. Service." (ASOS 413)

In this paragraph it becomes clear that although his illiteracy did not seem to cause Davos any grief earlier, when he is named Hand this changes. Society's expectations must be present in Davos' thoughts, because he clearly states that as he is lowborn and illiterate he is not worthy of this appointment: "*I cannot read, I cannot write, the lords despise me, I know nothing of ruling, how can I be the King's Hand? I belong on the deck of a ship, not in a castle tower*" (ASOS 604). This shows that there is a clear line between the nobility and the common men in society, and there is a clear line between what is expected from the different estates. The third estate is made up of those who work, the first estate consists of those that fight and rule. By naming Davos Hand, Stannis challenges these notions of the qualities a man should harbor to fulfill the task of Hand to the king.

For Davos, the problem is not so much his family as it is society. Davos has worked his whole life as a pirate and a smuggler, and as such one could argue that he is already on the outside of society, because he is not a part of the nobility. Davos could thus be categorized as a common man. Davos is pardoned and knighted by Stannis, and eventually acts as his advisor. Even though Davos now has moved from the third estate to the first and is now a knight, he still thinks of himself as a smuggler, meaning a common man: “That was all he was at the end of the day; Davos the smuggler” (*ASOS* 706). Davos’ problem arises when Stannis announces Davos as his Hand. The Hand of the king is the closest advisor to the king, so in reality this new position does not change much for Davos, as it is the same job he has performed for Stannis for a while now. Still, Davos struggles with accepting Stannis’ offer, as he sees this as a great honor, an honor he does not feel that he deserves or is worthy of: “The King’s Hand should be a highborn lord, someone wise and learned, a battle commander or a great knight...” (*ASOS* 604). Davos knows that a King’s Hand is supposed to come from a noble family, and thus a Hand is supposed to be able to know how to read and write. Davos is an illiterate and a lowborn, and so for him it becomes a problem accepting this position. Is it society that does not want Davos to be a part of their inner circle, or is it Davos himself that is the problem?

The nobility of Westeros upholds certain positions, including the position of the Hand of the King. The Hand is the king’s closest advisor, and is at times left to rule in the king’s stead. It is said that: “The Hand speaks with the king’s voice” (*ASOS* 708). It is therefore both a great responsibility and honor to hold this position. It has been common practice that the Hand is of the nobility, as are many of the other people at court and of the Small Council. Davos has already met some resistance when meeting with high lords, navigating the waters for Stannis, and he is certain this stems from the fact that they have to deal with a lowborn smuggler instead of a highborn envoy: “Only those that would see me. They do not love me either, these Highborns. To them I’ll always be the Onion Knight” (*ACOK* 8). He is unable to convince some of these men to support Stannis’ claim to the throne, and is therefore worried that he will not be able to act as a proper Hand for him. Still, it is hard to pinpoint exactly why these noble men refuse Davos’ offers. It could be because they do not want to discuss important matters with a lowborn smuggler, but it would be as probable to say that it is Stannis they refuse and not Davos (*ACOK* 11). Thus, it could be argued that even though society’s notion affects Davos, it may as well be his notion of how he should act, as he is caught up in what he believes society expects of him as Hand of the king.

The Hand needs to deal with letters and messages, and in Davos' case also the reading of maps. This will not pose a challenge to him, as he knows how to decipher maps, but he does not know how to read, and this worries him very much. When Stannis proposes to make him Hand, the fact that he is lowborn and illiterate seem to trouble him a great deal. He cannot change the fact that he was born into a poor family, and Stannis has already knighted him. Still, he wants to be able to perform all of his duties for Stannis, so he wants to learn how to read. If one applies the literacy myth (Graff 35) to Davos' literacy narrative, one finds that the myth stands. In Davos' case, literacy does enable him to climb the social ladder. One could argue that this is where Davos' self-fashioning begins, as he self-fashions from a lowborn illiterate into a noble literate through the written word.

Although Davos is named Hand by Stannis he continues to doubt himself and if he is really up to the task. As the king's Hand he is no longer not only a knight, but a lord as well, and is addressed as one. Even when he is addressed as "lord" by the people around him, it does not sound right to him (*ASOS* 706). As he predicted, the lords in Stannis' service do not respect him, and in addition the fact that he is not highborn and cannot read and write continues to fret him (*ASOS* 604). There must be some sort of discourse in society that states that a king's hand should be of noble birth and should harbor some specific traits like being able to read and write. It seems like these are characteristics that a king looks for when deciding who is going to be his right hand man.

Both Stannis and maester Pylos identify other, more important traits in Davos, than the ability to read. Maester Pylos is willing to teach him to read, but he also informs Davos that there may be other traits that are just as important to function as the king's Hand. True, almost all the previous Hands came from noble families, but a great deal did not perform their duty very well (*ASOS* 604). How is it that maester Pylos is aware of this fact, and Davos is not? Why does Davos hold on to this notion that being noble equals being a great Hand? "Read your history, Lord Davos, and you will see that your doubts are groundless" (*ASOS* 604). This shows that because Davos has been unable to read the history of Westeros, he has adopted the same notion that is shared by all of society, that a Hand should belong to the nobility. Had he been able to read the history, he might have known that the previous Hands were diverse and not always successful in their position.

What types of books does Davos read? Does he heed maester Pylos' advice to read up on the history of Westeros? His son Davos, the princess Shireen and Edric Storm all read about "King Daeon the First" (*ASOS* 606). Maester Pylos asks Davos if he wants to read the same book. Davos refuses this, and says that: "I am the King's Hand. Give me another letter,

if you would”” (*ASOS* 607). The letters he reads are letters that have been sent to King Stannis, and it seems that Davos finds it more useful for a man in his position to read matters that affect the King directly, than reading history: “Davos enjoyed a good story as well as any man, but Stannis had not named him Hand for his enjoyment, he felt. His first duty was to help his king rule, and for that he must needs understand the words the ravens brought” (*ASOS* 607). Thus shows that even though Davos could read books, he chooses not to.

Davos reads letters that are sent to king Stannis for practice, some of these letters are older letters that the king has not even seen yet:

“To the . . . five kings,” read Davos, hesitating briefly over *five*, which he did not often see written out.

“The king . . . be . . . the king . . . beware?”

“*Beyond*”, the maester corrected.

Davos grimaced. “The King beyond the wall comes. . . comes south. He leads a . . . a . . . fast . . .”

“Vast.”

“. . . a *vast* host of wil . . . wild . . . wildlings. Lord M . . . Mmmor . . . Mormont sent a . . . raven from the . . . ha . . . ha . . .”

“Haunted. The *haunted forest*.” Pylos underlined the words with the point of his finger.

“. . . the haunted forest. He is . . . *under* a . . . attack?”

“Yes.”

Pleased, he plowed onwards. “Oth . . . other birds have come since, with no words. We . . . fear . . .

Mormont slain with all . . . with all his stench . . . no, strength. We fear Mormont slain with all his strength . . .” Davos suddenly realized just what he was reading. He turned the letter over and saw that the wax that had sealed it had been black. “This is from the Night’s Watch. Maester, has King Stannis seen this letter?” (*ASOS* 607-608)

This is an important passage, because it shows Davos in the act of reading, a skill he has acquired to meet society’s notion of the skills the Hand of the king should hold. This would define Davos as the pragmatic reader, described by Briggs as: “[...] the literacy of one who has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business” (400). The letter Davos is reading seems to be of interest to him, beyond being a piece of paper with words on for him to practice. Later on, the exact same paper is what rescues him from being beheaded by his lord king for treason:

Davos fumbled inside his cloak and drew out the crinkled sheet of parchment. It seemed a thin and flimsy thing, yet it was all the shield he had. “A King’s Hand should be able to read and write. Maester Pylos has been teaching me.” He smoothed the letter flat upon his knee and began to read by the light of the magic sword. (*ASOS* 713)

As it turns out, Stannis does hear him out, and furthermore, he is very interested in the content of the letter. The letter saves Davos' life, because of the importance Stannis places in the letter's content. If Davos had not been taught how to read, he would not have discovered the letter and probably would have lost his life. In addition, the fact that Stannis is made aware of what is taking place in the north, changes his luck in a way. Stannis later recognizes Davos' part in this in a conversation with Jon Snow. He states that if it had not been for his Hand, he would never have ridden north (*ASOS* 867).

Davos starts out as a smuggler and a pirate, and then rises to be the Hand of the King. When Davos himself summarizes his journey, he adds to his feats that he is now able to read and write (*ADWD* 386). This could be seen as an example of his self-fashioning through the written word. The fact that he has gone from illiterate to literate, has affected both his work as a Hand and has to some degree helped him oppose the discourses of society. At one point his newfound literacy even saved his life, so to him personally, this must mean a lot. Among other things, it means that he can write letters to his family, to offer his goodbyes to them. In a passage in *A Dance with Dragons* he is portrayed sitting in his dungeon, a captive waiting to be executed, writing his letters of apology to his wife and his sons (385). Davos is taught how to read and write and due to his new set of skills, he succeeds as Hand and his lord Stannis is able to navigate the political waters of Westeros and position himself. Something that would have been hard to accomplish without Davos' new skill. One could argue that more than anything, it has been Davos' expectations of himself that has made him a common man, and not society. However, when accepting the position of Hand, it seems as if Davos does move from one estate to another one, as he enters the nobility as a Hand who is not only knighted but in addition knows how to read.

#### **8.4 “THE FAULT LIES IN THE READER, NOT THE BOOK” – CERSEI LANNISTER**

Like the ladies of the romance, Cersei Lannister is described by her physical features. She belongs to a noble family, and like the ladies of the romance she is described as a very beautiful woman. Her brother Jaime describes her this way: “She had never looked more beautiful than she did that day, with a smile on her lips and the autumn sunlight shining on her golden hair” (*AFFC* 230). But Jaime is not the only man who finds Cersei to be a gorgeous lady, it seems as if her beauty is known across the realm: “Your Grace,” the Tyroshi murmured, bowing low, ‘I see you are as lovely as the tales. Even beyond the narrow

sea we have heard of your great beauty, [...] (*AFFC* 533). What does Cersei's beauty entail for her?

Cersei's beauty serves a purpose. Because she belongs to a noble family, it is important for her father to marry her off to the right husband, to secure an alliance with another family: "Their father had summoned Cersei to court when she was twelve, hoping to make her a royal marriage. He refused every offer for her hand, preferring to keep her with him in the Tower of the Hand while she grew older and more womanly and ever more beautiful" (*ASOS* 128). It seems as though her beauty is a factor in the marriage process, as one assumes that is one of the reasons why she would attract a lot of suitors. Thus, more value is put on her outer features, and she would probably not have a say in who she is going to marry. She would at this point be characterized as a passive character, who is controlled by her father.

It seems as if Cersei at one point has become aware of her beauty and the fact that she can use her looks to get what she wants. Thus she would be characterized as a more active character. She also seems to know that men are attracted to her, and that she can use this to her advantage:

Men had been looking at her that way since her breasts began to bud. Because I was so beautiful, they said, but Jaime was beautiful as well, and they never looked at him that way. When she was small she would sometimes don her brother's clothing as a lark. She was always startled by how differently men treated her when they thought that she was Jaime. Even Lord Tywin himself . . ." (*AFFC* 243)

Being aware of her beauty, she also seems to be aware of the fact that she is different from her brother, and that this difference stems from the fact that she is a woman and he is a man. Even at a young age she felt the desire to be born a boy instead of a girl, because she knows that in this society, which favors physical prowess over feminine traits, men are treated differently than women. Cersei is a woman in a man's world, but she is not merely a beautiful lady to look at, like Guinevere, she is a woman with agency. How is she able to get what she wants, when she possesses few of the traits that society praises? Does she self-fashion herself via the written word, like her brother Tyrion?

There is no doubt that Cersei can read, because she is described reading letters and messages occasionally throughout the books (*AFFC* 243). One can assume that because she is from a noble family, she has been taught how to read from an early age, along with her brothers. Still, she is not portrayed reading to the same degree as her brother Tyrion or like

Sam. True, they are men, and so that may be the difference. But Sansa is depicted reading, and she is a noble woman just like Cersei. Maybe Cersei, as a part of the ruling family has no time for books, or maybe she does not need books. Compared to Sansa, Cersei is a more active character, and it seems as if she does not need the comfort that the books offer Sansa. If Sansa is more of a dreamer, who pretends to live the life of the ladies of the romances she reads, Cersei lives in the real world, and deals with the realities of her life.

It may be that Cersei has been reading different books than Sansa. Sansa reads romances, but Cersei is never portrayed reading for pleasure. Instead, she is depicted reading letters and official decrees, as she is a part of the ruling family of King's Landing (AFFC 345). She is either a part of the Small Council or she rules through her two sons who sit the throne successively; Joffrey and Tommen: "Tommen did as he was bid. His meekness troubled her. A king had to be strong. *Joffrey would have argued. He was never easy to cow*" (AFFC 98). Where would she get that notion that a king had to be strong? It could be a part of her experience, as she was married to King Robert, a strong king. Still, it might be possible that she read a book about how kings should think and act.

Cersei appears to mirror Lady Bertilak of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Like Lady Bertilak, Cersei knows what she wants and acts accordingly, and for Cersei, the only thing that means anything to her is the Iron Throne. Cersei wants to rule: "The rule was hers; Cersei did not mean to give it up until Tommen came of age. I waited, so can he. I waited half my life. She had played the dutiful daughter, the blushing bride, the pliant wife" (Martin 2005:345). For Cersei, the problem is that she is a woman, and in Westeros men sit the Iron Throne. Cersei is able to rule through both her sons. However, it seems that the fact that she is a woman, and that her life would be different if she was born a man, is always in the back of her head: "*If I were a man I would be Jaime*", the queen thought. "*If I were a man I could rule this realm in my own name in place of Tommen's.*" (AFFC 535). Either way, Cersei is not a passive character, she is far from the damsel in distress that needs to be rescued, and it seems as though she has a very realistic view of the world:

"True knights would never harm women and children." The words rang hollow in her ears even as she said them. "True knights." The queen seemed to find that wonderfully amusing. "No doubt you're right. So why don't you just eat your broth like a good girl and wait for Symeon Star-Eyes and Prince Aemon the Dragonknight to come rescue you, sweetling. I'm sure it won't be very long now." (ACOK 616)

It seems that even though Cersei may not use books to her advantage, she is still an active

character who does not rely on somebody else to help her.

Cersei is a character who uses the weapons that are available to her: "Tears," she said scornfully to Sansa as the woman was led from the hall. "The woman's weapon, my lady mother used to call them. The man's weapon is a sword. And that tells us all you need to know, doesn't it?" (*ACOK* 637). Again Cersei shows her notion of the difference between men and women, but this also shows her distaste for being weak, or maybe for showing weakness. Like Lady Bertilak, who uses her body in the ruse against Ser Gawain, Cersei is no stranger to using her looks and her body to trick men and thus to get what she wants: "You little fool. Tears are not a woman's only weapon. You've got another one between your legs, and you'd best learn to use it. You'll find men use their swords freely enough. Both kinds of swords" (*ACOK* 638). Cersei, even though she wishes she was born a man, is never going to be a passive lady, she is going to use everything it takes, even her own body, to get what she wants. If the society that she lives in favors masculinity and physical prowess, she is going to use all her female might to balance out those powers.

### **8.5 "IT'S BETTER THAN THE SONGS" - SANSA STARK**

Sansa mirrors the damsel in distress from the romance. Like Guinevere she is described as beautiful, and she encompasses the more feminine traits of the lady of the romance: "Sansa could sew and dance and sing. She wrote poetry. She knew how to dress. She played the high harp and the bells. Worse, she was beautiful. Sansa had gotten their mother's fine high cheekbones and the thick auburn hair of the Tullys" (*AGOT* 59). She is portrayed as a very sweet and innocent child, but she is also depicted as immature and naïve. Valerie Frankel explains about Sansa: "Sansa's girlish crush on Ser Loras makes her seem hopelessly naïve as she gushes about the red rose that actually means nothing to him" (Frankel 108). Like Guinevere she is a very passive character, who has spent her life dreaming of the day she is going to marry her prince. She wholeheartedly believes that the knights she encounters in life are going to resemble the knights of the romance books she reads.

Sansa Stark very much believes in the romantic image of the knight, as it has been presented to her in the books she reads, and it is through her point of view that one is introduced to the knights one would recognize from the romance: "The splendor of it all took Sansa's breath away; the shining armor, the great chargers caparisoned in silver and gold, the shouts of the crowd, the banners snapping in the wind ... and the knights themselves, the knights most of all" (*AGOT* 246). However, Sansa soon learns that not all knights are gallant

and just, and that some of them attack maidens instead of rescuing them. Her own betrothal, King Joffrey, has one of his knights strip and beat her in front of court.

Like Cersei, Sansa knows how to read, and it seems that she reads well: “She could read and write better than any of her brothers, although she was hopeless at sums” (*AGOT* 459). Sansa is depicted reading romances, and it appears that she reads these books frequently: “She pulled a chair close to the hearth, took down one of her favorite books, and lost herself in the stories of Florian and Jonquil, of Lady Shella and the Rainbow Knight, of valiant Prince Aemon and his doomed love for his brother's queen” (*AGOT* 461). How does Sansa's literacy aid her in balancing the power structures of society?

To Sansa the world of the romance and the world she lives in blend together. It seems as if she struggles to keep the two worlds apart. Instead of using her literacy skills to aid her in this very masculine-driven society, it seems as if her literacy does the complete opposite, it restricts her. One could argue that Sansa self-fashions into a lady of the romance through the written word. Had she not been so affected by the romances, she may not have been so engrossed over prince Joffrey, and she may have detected his true traits behind the beautiful exterior. Instead her obsession with true knights makes her blind.

The conception of the knight that she extracts from her books, makes her fall in love with the dream of the knight: “[...] Sansa's romanticized belief that handsome princes are perfect within” (Frankel 106). This is evident when she talks about Joffrey before she has even met him: “Sansa did not really know Joffrey yet, but she was already in love with him. He was all she ever dreamt her prince should be, tall and handsome and strong, with hair like gold” (*AGOT* 117). It is as if she does not even focus on his character, just his appearance. Because she reads these romances, she is not able to see prince Joffrey for who he really is, because she is so caught up in the image of the knight, and thus she ascribes some qualities to Joffrey that he certainly does not possess:

A whole day with her prince! She gazed at Joffrey worshipfully. He was so gallant, she thought. The way he had rescued her from Ser Illyn and the Hound, why, it was almost like the songs, like the time Serwyn of the Mirror Shield saved the Princess Daeryssa from the giants, or Prince Aemon the Dragonknight championing Queen Naerys's honor against evil Ser Morgil's slanders. (*AGOT* 123)

Sansa keeps holding on to the dream of the true knight. When they first meet, Joffrey does act very gallantly towards her, kissing her hand and complimenting her (*AGOT* 250). As he reveals his other sides to both Sansa, her sister and her father, Sansa refuses to listen to

reason. Joffrey becomes the only thing that means anything to her, so much that it does not really matter what even her father says to her:

“I love him, Father, I truly truly do, I love him as much as Queen Naerys loved Prince Aemon the Dragonknight, as much as Jonquil loved Ser Florian. I want to be his queen and have his babies.” [...] “I don't want someone brave and gentle, I want him. We'll be ever so happy, just like in the songs, you'll see. I'll give him a son with golden hair, and one day he'll be the king of all the realm, the greatest king that ever was, as brave as the wolf and as proud as the lion.” (AGOT 399)

However, even as Joffrey eventually shows his true colors, and Sansa understands that he is nothing like the knights of her romances and songs, her naivety shows when she holds on to the image of Joffrey as a true knight: “She could not hate Joffrey tonight. He was too beautiful to hate” (AGOT 250). It seems that even though she eventually recognizes his lack of knightly traits, his beauty overpowers her: “Sansa's character reveals the flaws in that kind of upbringing as she's hopelessly naïve, trusting in beauty and rank over character” (Frankel 105).

The dream Sansa lives in makes her nonresponsive to other people's advice. The Hound, who is one of Prince Joffrey's men, confronts Sansa and her childish belief in knights, but even his harsh and direct words will not make her give up her beliefs:

“True knights protect the weak.” He snorted. “There are no true knights, no more than there are gods. If you can't protect yourself, die and get out of the way of those who can. Sharp steel and strong arms rule this world, don't ever believe any different” [...] *There are gods, she told herself, and there are true knights too. All the stories can't be lies.* (AGOT 569)

It is as if Sansa lives her life inside a romance, as if she lives inside one of those songs, or even a dream, and she refuses to give up on this dream. She spends a lot of her time thinking about or dreaming about Joffrey. Cersei and Sansa's view of the society they live in seem to differ a lot. Whereas Cersei seems to understand that physical prowess is favored over weakness and thus knowing she cannot be passive, Sansa's protected upbringing at Winterfell may have created the dream she now lives in. Bit by bit this dream is torn apart when she understands that Joffrey is not the knight in shining armor that she has dreamed of all her life: “The feast was over and the beautiful dream had ended with it” (AGOT 252).

In *ASOIAF* Sansa is portrayed as the damsel in distress, the beautiful girl who needs her true knight to come and rescue her (ACOK 211). Even though her true knight fails to do

this, even though that very knight, prince Joffrey is the one she needs to be saved from, she is very reluctant to give up her beliefs. It is not until she is beaten by several of Joffrey's knights, on his command, that she finally realizes that there is a difference between the romances and the real world:

Knights are sworn to defend the weak, protect women, and fight for the right, but none of them did a thing. Only Ser Dontos had tried to help, and he was no longer a knight, no more than the Imp was, nor the Hound . . . the Hound hated knights . . . I hate them too, Sansa thought. They are no true knights, not one of them. (*ACOK* 367)

This episode is a true eye-opener for the sweet and innocent Sansa, who comes to the hard conclusion that reality is entirely different than what she has read in her romances of knights and ladies. It seems that this incident is what catapults Sansa from her dreamlike position as a lady of the romance, to a lady living in and feeling the effects of a society that is permeated by physical prowess. Still, this episode changes Sansa and one can thus argue that even though Sansa is portrayed as the damsel in distress during the two first books, she changes throughout and becomes a more active character. She learns the hard way that no knight will come to her rescue, and that the only person she can trust is herself.

### **8.6 “SWORDS HAVE BEEN MY LIFE, NOT BOOKS.” – ARYA STARK**

Arya Stark does not resemble her sister Sansa in physical appearance or other feminine traits. Contrary to Cersei and Sansa, Arya is not portrayed as a particularly beautiful girl: “Her hair was a lusterless brown, and her face was long and solemn” (*AGOT* 59). As such she would not resemble the women of the romances *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*. Where Sansa is described as a girl who is skilled in song, dancing and sewing, Arya lacks these skills, but she harbors different traits. Her skills include riding, arithmetic, and eventually sword-fighting.

Society in Westeros has different expectations for boys and girls from noble families. For Arya these expectations entail that she is supposed to become a lady. This includes how she is supposed to look and act, but Arya opposes these expectations: “‘I don’t want to be a lady!’, Arya flared” (*AGOT* 185). It seems that even though society expect Arya to grow up to be a lady, encompassing all of the feminine traits, Arya’s skills represent those of the noble boy: “‘I can be strong too. I can be as strong as Robb’” (*AGOT* 187). Even though society

expects femininity of Arya, her father supports her male traits to a certain degree, and hires a sword master to teach her how to fight (*AGOT* 188).

Arya starts out as a noble girl, but throughout the books she at times lives the life of a lowborn boy. This is not so much her choice as it is her appearance; people mistake her for a boy: "They were looking for a girl, but he thought she was a boy. She'd *be* a boy, then" (*AGOT* 603). Arya has to flee the castle in King's Landing when her father is accused of treason. The first days she survives as a lowborn boy, chasing pigeons and sleeping on the streets (*AGOT* 601). Her survival in these first days mostly depends on her ability to fight (*AGOT* 450). Is her survival or success in any way also linked to her level of literacy?

At times Arya does benefit from her ability to read. At Harrenhal she is given the task of running messages. Because the man she serves here believes she is lowborn, he assumes that she cannot read, so he does not seal the messages he hands her (*ACOK* 412). She is able to read these messages and thus gain information, but this information is in no way helpful to her. During her time at Harrenhal she survives because she hides that she is a noble girl, and to escape Harrenhal she again uses her sword skills and kills a guard (*AGOT* 680). To find her way from Harrenhal to Riverrun her ability to read does aid her. As she does not know exactly where Harrenhal is located, she has to use a map: Riverrun was painted as a castle tower, in the fork between the flowing blue lines of two rivers, the Tumblestone and the Red Fork. "There." She touched it. "Riverrun, it reads." (*ASOS* 38). Still, it would be wrong to say that Arya self-fashions through the written word, to the same degree as Tyrion or Davos.

Arya is seen as a very active character. She in no way resembles the damsel in distress, like her sister Sansa. Sansa is a more passive character who waits for the help of others. True, Arya does have people helping her along the way, but most of the time she is the one who asks for that help (*ACOK* 678). By being an active character she mirrors Cersei and Lady Bertilak. But where those two ladies use their beauty and bodies to get what they want, Arya uses her clever skills to blend in and her ability to fight to survive and succeed. This way one could argue that she resembles Lady Morgana more, as an active character who initiates clever schemes. Or, one could argue that she mirrors the traits of a noble boy, or a young knight, as her skills are close to physical prowess.

The female characters of *ASOIAF* are as diverse as real people. Some of them are passive characters, like Sansa. Some of them are more active characters like Cersei and Arya. Not many of them are aided by their literacy skills, instead they use different skills to survive and succeed in a society that favors physical prowess and masculinity. Sansa's reading works counteractively for her, and Cersei prefers to use her body and her beauty to succeed. Arya's

literacy aids her to a certain degree, but more often it is her skills with the sword that works to her advantage. She becomes the girl that operates as a boy and shows signs of physical prowess. Graff's literacy myth (35), that literacy always equals success does not apply for the female characters. They gain success through other skills than literacy. Thus it may seem like overall literacy is more of a resource to the male characters than the females.

## 9.0 CONCLUSION

“Sharp steel and strong arms rule this world, don't ever believe any different”  
(*ACOK* 569).

This thesis has studied the characters of George R. R. Martin's book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* to reveal if literacy and self-fashioning aid them in balancing society's social structures of physical prowess, masculinity, feudal power and chivalric principles. The characters exist in a very masculine and patriarchal driven society, and even though literacy aids some of the characters to some degree, like Tyrion, overall it does not succeed in balancing the existing power discourses. The same social structures determine how the noble families of Westeros should look and act, and cause some of the characters like Tyrion, Sam and Davos to become outcasts of society. When Gregor Clegane states that “sharp steel and strong arms rule this world” (*ACOK* 569), he gives quite a precise description of society in Westeros.

Self-fashioning via the written word seems to not be enough to balance the social structures of masculinity and physical prowess. It works to a certain degree for Tyrion and Davos, but maybe not so much for Sam, Cersei, Sansa and Arya. The male characters are portrayed reading more often than the female, and thus it would almost seem that the female characters have little opportunity to self-fashion this way. Still, one knows that all three of them being noble women have the opportunity to read. It would seem as though Arya has accepted the powers structures of society as she fights instead of relying on her literacy, and Sansa too eventually realizes that reality is far from what is portrayed in her romance books. This would be in accordance with the literacy myth (Graff 35), that literacy does not necessarily equal success. This would also be in accordance with Martin's take on realism and thus the merge of the high fantasy genre and new historicist fiction. His characterization

makes for realistic portrayals one would connect more with real people than the stock characters of the fantasy or romance.

Another aim of the thesis was to investigate any connections between medieval England and society in *ASOIAF*, to determine to what degree Martin had appropriated any elements from this era. The thesis concludes that Martin has borrowed several elements from medieval England, like feudalism, the nobility and the peasants, as is put forth by Larrington. One area where Martin differs in setting is religion, as he does not only add one religion – like the church of medieval England – but several. In addition, the task of education is placed on the maesters, a non-religious group, and is as such an element that deviates from medieval England. The power structures that rule society in Westeros are similar to those of medieval England; mainly based on systems of feudalism and patriarchy. Still, Martin creates multiple exceptions to the rule in his book series, as they feature female rulers and power of the written word. Furthermore, the thesis concludes that Martin appropriates tropes of the medieval English romance like the knight and the damsel in distress, but that he turns the tropes into characters more reminiscent of real people than stock characters.

Based on the findings of this study, it could be argued that Martin's books are a blend of genres and new historicist in nature. His universe not only reminds one of the past, but also the present as Grenby explains: "Indeed, even if fantasy writing is, by definition, generally disengaged from reality, it is often easy to discern its entanglement in the ideological controversies of its day. This may be, of course, because fantasy so readily invites symbolic reading" (154). This quote exemplifies some of the traits of the fantasy genre, where not all worlds portrayed are worlds far away or imaginary worlds, and many of them remind one of the time and place of the real world society. Grenby further argues that: "It is often very unclear where fantasy and realism begin and end. Rather than being a weakness, this ambiguity is one of the strengths of much good fantasy writing" (146). The fact that Martin incorporates elements of 21<sup>st</sup> century society, is one of the interesting aspects of *ASOIAF*, as it makes for a more detailed reading. Still, the lines between the fantastical and the medieval world that he creates may not be as blurry as the ones that Grenby describes, as the magical aspect is placed at the outskirts of the tale, more than at the center.

The thesis has explored the link between J.R.R Tolkien and George R. R. Martin. Martin has stated in several interviews that he is a huge fan of Tolkien, and that he indeed is inspired by him. Still, it seems that even though Martin may have been inspired by Tolkien, he differs from Tolkien's *TLOTR* when it comes to elements such as feudal life and the outcast of society. In an interview with Rolling Stone magazine, Martin explains it this way:

“Ruling is hard. This was maybe my answer to Tolkien, whom, as much as I admire him, I do quibble with. *Lord of the Rings* had a very medieval philosophy: that if the king was a good man, the land would prosper. We look at real history and it's not that simple” (Gilmore). This may explain why Martin’s characterization differs from the many stock characters of fantasy, and why they are not solely good or solely evil, as they perform both great and horrible deeds.

*ASOIAF* is defined as fantasy, or high fantasy by many critics and fans. The already established link between Martin and Tolkien is not a surprising one although *ASOIAF* and *TLOTR* differ on several elements. Martin has been recognized as someone who has brought something new and different to the genre of fantasy. The merge between realism and fantasy, where emphasis is put more on the realistic than on the fantastical elements, is something that seems to appeal to readers of the book series, as explained by Johnson and Abercombie. Westeros mirrors both medieval England and contemporary societies, where outcasts of society struggle to fit in. This makes for a reoccurring and realistic portrayal of society, although the tale is sprinkled with hints of magic. The level of realism in the book series, something that may be new to the fantasy genre, is the reason why Martin’s tale represents a merge of fantasy and new historicist fiction.

The thesis based its study on all five books in Martin’s series, to be able to study the characters literacy narratives, and to be able to investigate all aspects of society in Westeros. Still, as the completion of two more books are planned, investigation of the development of the literacy narratives could be a topic for eventual studies. The hope is that this thesis has provided a sound basis for any such planned studies.

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