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A Medievalist Point of View on George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*: Power and Women: An Examination of Daenerys Targaryen

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**A Medievalist Point of View on George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*:
Power and Women: An Examination of Daenerys Targaryen**

by

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Abstract

George Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* series utilizes the appropriation of historical influences, medieval conventions and fantasy tropes to create a rich and brutal world that both revitalizes and defies its genre. Martin's work focuses on the importance of the struggle of the human condition. His construction of a patriarchal and misogynistic world while reminiscent of the Middle Ages, uses a stark realism and harsh flavor to draw attention to the conflicts his characters fight to survive. Within the confines of his fantasy setting, this work examines the opportunities for agency and power that exist for the women, in spite of the patriarchal setting. Under the right conditions women, particularly mothers, can find agency as peaceweavers, intercessors and nurturers. And on rare occasion, when the proper conditions are met, maternity affords these women real public authority. Using medievalism as a point of reference this work focuses on the struggles of the women, particularly Daenerys Targaryen, within the texts to achieve agency and power. Her struggle to rise above the fray and find influence in a male dominated world, allows us to examine the impact of medieval cultures on both popular culture and modern society.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Medievalism, Martin and Maternity

Near the beginning of George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* series, Daenerys Targaryen, in a moment of longing for a homeland she can barely remember, conjures an image of that lost land: "Somewhere beyond the sunset, across the narrow sea, lay a land of green hills and flowered plains and great rushing rivers, where towers of dark stone rose amidst magnificent blue-grey mountains and armored knights rode to battle beneath the banners of their lords" (GoT, 4 Daenerys 1: 29-30).

The idealized images of knights and castles that Daenerys invokes are part of the recognizable conventions of the fantasy genre in the twentieth century, as well, a genre that rose in popularity with the emergence of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series in the 1950s. Monsters dwell in dark places and bear the marks of their monstrosity in their appearance: "there dwelt in the deep cavern lying beneath the perpetual snows of northern Thalesia a dwarfed and misshapen Troll named Ghwerig. Now Ghwerig was an outcast by reason of his ugliness and his overwhelming greed, and he labored alone in the depths of the earth" (Eddings 1). Princesses and noble ladies are beautiful objects to be admired: "Lady Donilla, a beautiful woman with a mane of chestnut hair, clasped back now like a maiden's for the formality of the thing" (Kerr 5). Magic is present, visible and powerful:

The world seems to stand still for a moment, reverberating with the final word of the spell...Below, those on the ground stand in mute wonder... Ragged bolts of energy flash and the lights from the two stars is dimmed in momentarily blinding displays that will some who viewed them sightless for the rest of their lives.
(Feist, 91)

And evil...well, it's evil:

He turned from the now lifeless body and notice his robes were covered in Lusk's blood; it was not a random spraying, the blood formed a scarlet arc against the

gray. A crescent moon. Baralis smiled, it was a good omen—a crescent moon marked new beginnings, new births, new opportunities—the very currency he would deal in this night. (Jones 1)

For readers of fantasy literature there is something enticing about the image of castles and knights and princesses and trolls. Daenerys, and others like her, invoke these images when imagining this idealized fantasy setting. Beginning with *The Lord of the Rings*, fantasy literature often relies on the appropriation of certain elements of the medieval, though often in an idealized way. As Beth Kozinsky explains, “heroic fantasy mimics the medieval culture that inspires it” (181). It is a trend in fantasy literature to take the more recognizable aspects of historical medieval life and use them to develop an alternative world for storytelling, even if those perceived aspects are not accurate portrayals of like in the Middle Ages. Some of these images popularized by works of literature, such as monsters in the dark, beautiful princesses, grand magic, and overt evil, are as old as medieval romances themselves and regularly find their way into the canon of fantasy literature. As a result, fantasy literature is often understood as an amalgamation of historical concepts appropriated for creative purposes and the existence of the fantastic, something magical, supernatural, or improbable. This amalgamation of concepts provides an environment that allows us to explore the human condition. It allows us to examine the cultural significance of the characters within these fantasy worlds in an environment creatively distanced from our own. Within these worlds it is the “cultural connections between the numerous supernatural elements in the literary output of the Middle Ages (e.g., *Beowulf*, Norse and Celtic mythologies, Arthurian cycle) and modern tales in the fantasy genre which are set in different quasi-medieval worlds (as in *The Lord of the Rings* or *A Song of Ice and Fire*)” (Dixon and Neubaur), that allow us to relate to fantasy literature on a visceral level, even if the subject matter sometimes deviates from the real.

And while there exist countless works of medieval literature and modern fantasy literature that do indeed attempt to relive the idealized image of the Middle Ages, as Michael Kauffman reminds us, “the literary text . . . is never a precise record of actuality” (140). Comparison of life depicted in these romanticized texts and life in Middle Ages reveals stark, and often brutal differences.

It is within this gap where George R.R. Martin’s *Song of Ice and Fire* resides. Martin’s series gives us a much less nostalgic, romantic view of a medieval fantasy world and provides us instead with a dark, graphic image of the medieval fantasy landscape. And while his work is creative and not a “record of actuality” (Kauffman 140), its grim tone is perhaps more closely aligned with a medieval world. Discussing this idea, Brantley Bryant (Associate Professor of English at Sonoma State University) says, “sometimes people who maybe haven’t had a chance to read a whole lot of medieval literature have this idea it’s a kind of fairy tale world, a lot of what happens in medieval stories is just as violent and intense as some of the things we’ll see in *Game of Thrones*” (Bryant).

Yet Martin’s use of such harsh realism is more than just a calculated response to those fairy-tale worlds. Martin, a self-proclaimed fan of both J.R.R. Tolkien and historical fiction (Poniewozik), says he strives to create a world where he can, “combine some of the realism of historical fiction with some of the appeal of fantasy, the magic and the wonder that the best fantasy has” (Gilmore). This combinatory approach allows Martin the freedom to create his own endings for characters inspired by history, but who are not strictly biographical, while at the same time giving him a framework to approximate the harsh realism that existed in the historical Middle Ages. To this end, Martin draws on ideas from *Ivanhoe*, itself a work of medievalism, and historical events like the War of the Roses and Hadrian’s Wall for inspiration, while still

utilizing some of the classic fantasy tropes established by Tolkien. This approach to his writing, the understanding of some of the darker aspects of medieval life and the occasional use of romantic medieval tropes within his world, prompts us to look at his writing through a medievalist lens, which simply tries to “study of the Middle Ages as an imaginative construct in western society since whenever the Middle Ages may be said to have ended” (Workman).

Damian Walter specifically points to the importance of using fantasy as a means to understand our own world: “But in the hands of authors who understand their potential, the secondary worlds of fantasy provide a lens that can bring to sharp focus truths that the chaos of modern life obscures” (Walter). Such a view is particularly germane for a cultural phenomenon like *The Song of Ice and Fire*, because as Bryant explains near the end of his video:

With the popularity of something like Game of Thrones we’re reminded of how vital stories told in the Middle Ages are still to our modern imaginations. We keep coming back to the same kinds of questions about morality and politics and the potential supernatural connections in the world and some of the ways we think about the world in what can or can’t happen, might not be as reliable as we think they are. The world might be a more connected, more interesting, more enchanted place than we might want to think. (Bryant)

It is precisely this kind of connection with the world, and the struggle with the human condition that existed both in the Middle Ages and today, that Martin tells us he wants to explore. In doing so he attempts to challenge some of the fantasy tropes developed over the years, understanding that the world is not really peopled by those who clearly exist in a simple good/bad binary: “the battle between good and evil is a theme of much of fantasy. But I think the battle between good and evil is fought largely within the individual human heart, by the decisions that we make. It’s not like evil dresses up in black clothing and you know, they’re really ugly” (Gilmore). This internal struggle is something that drives Martin’s series and his characters. It is a notion he

borrowed from Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech, "that the human heart in conflict with the self was the only thing worth writing about. And I think that's true" (Gilmore).

The conflicts in Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* often revolve—as those in the Middle Ages did—around government and power. As Varys the spider tells Tyrion Lannister in a particularly Foucauldian moment, "power lies only where men believe it lies" (Martin, CoK 7 Tyrion 2: 132). This right by might notion holds true in the face of superficial scrutiny. Tywin (Tyrion's father) is one of the wealthiest men in the realm, and he brings forth a great army, and therefore, wields incredible power. The wall that defends the north is a massive structure some seven hundred feet tall, its imposing presence and reputation successfully defending the northern borders from the Wildlings, even after the great strength of the Night's Watch that man it has waned, simply because it *looks* intimidating. In some ways Martin approaches power in similar, but far more savage fashion than his fantasy peers: his world is patriarchal, possibly misogynistic, and ruled by, as Varys so aptly puts it, those who carry the biggest stick. But, in many other ways, Martin deviates from conventional fantasy tropes regarding power, much as he does with those regarding knights, and princesses and magic.

It is important when discussing the women that populate Martin's world that we address concerns over the appropriation of medieval trappings that place a negative glare on his treatment of these women. By briefly examining the nature of gender identity, we can see the cultural implications that determined the roles society expected women to perform. Judith Butler explains that gender is a performative act constituted through repetition and social expectation, "*the appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (901). Thus, because of the nature of medieval

expectations for how women were to behave, conformity to those behavioral expectations helped to reinforce their performance of prescribed roles. In this regard, the gender identity of women is less about sexuality and more about conformity to expected roles afforded to women within the cultural framework of the Middle Ages. By appropriating aspects of medieval society, Martin also appropriates social and cultural conditions that place limitations on his female characters' performative behavior.

Because of the limitations Martin places upon his female characters, it may be inferred that women have less power than their male counterparts. Caroline Specter points out that the women of *Song of Ice and Fire* are often seen by popular critics as weak or diminished: "Critics of the series point to examples of sexual assault in the books, the lack of women in positions of power, and the trappings of traditional medieval fantasy as indicative of a lack of feminist perspective in the narrative" (170). The women of Westeros endure great brutality in the stories and might appear to be simply more representations of medieval fantasy conventions within a misogynistic patriarchal fantasy world.

In her exploration of feminism in the *Song of Ice and Fire*, Rhiannon Thomas, begins her argument by echoing popular sentiment that women in Westeros are powerless, to further establish the validity of its connection with our own world: "its women are often powerless, because they are often abused, and because the world they live in does not value them or their opinion. Westeros is a misogynistic society" (Thomas). But then, as Martin often does himself within his own texts, she turns this traditional viewpoint on its ear: "The fact that these girls and women live in a deeply misogynistic world only adds to the realism of their struggles and ultimately to the strength of their achievements" (Thomas). That Martin's world may superficially produce scenarios where women are, at best, mistreated and, at worst, openly

abused, and thus powerless, makes our ability to perceive the subtlety in his rhetorical moves to say something to the contrary, as Thomas says, all the more relevant. If we look beyond the surface of the text and examine it on a deeper level, it may be argued that Martin deviates from conventional fantasy tropes regarding power (much as he does with those regarding knights, and princesses and magic) to imbue women with the potential for power. In particular, Martin places many women who serve as either literal or figurative mothers in positions where they might find influence and power. By studying the influence the women (most notably the mothers) that Martin's texts exert, within a world that mirrors the medieval, but is nonetheless fantastic, and written for a contemporary audience we can look at the similarities that exist to discover what these connections say not just about the women of Westeros, but the human condition.

In keeping with Martin's own tendency to take the traditional and then alter it, I think, it becomes important to redefine our understanding of power in order to form a more cogent argument. As Erler and Kowaleski explain, "history has made some movement away from a limited traditional view of power as public authority to a wider view of power which encompasses the ability to act effectively, to influence people or decisions, and to achieve goals" (Erler and Kowaleski, *Women & Power* 2). The traditional right by might, visible force power that Varys speaks of is still largely the province of men. Yet, on many occasions in the *Song of Ice and Fire*, conditions occur where the less traditional view of power expressed by Erler and Kowaleski, exist. As Judith Butler points out, these conditions that exist where women might find the ability to influence others and achieve their goals is not driven solely by gender, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (900). It is instead driven by the historical conditions that existed in within the social conventions

of the Middle Ages demanding that women perform in certain ways. When women performed in the expected ways and conditions, prompted by social convention occurred, then women could through the enactment of their time-bound roles could influence others and achieve their goals. This alternative viewpoint provides us with a new way to see the potential for the of women in both the Middle Ages and *Song Of Ice and Fire* to display power. And in this regard, it is perhaps best that this new interpretation of power be re-designated as agency.

When looking at traditional power in both the Middle Ages and the world of Westeros, he (and in almost every case it is he) who has the biggest army or the most money has the most power. This right by might type of traditional power is precisely what Erler and Kowaleski explain as public authority. But public authority does not always translate directly into the ability to influence other people, make decisions, and achieve personal goals, which might be seen as the less visible, but no less effective, agency. Robert Baratheon, as King of Westeros, appears to be the most powerful man in the kingdom. But just because he is big, strong, and has a large army does not mean he actually decides what occurs in his land. Only a few chapters into *Game of Thrones* we quickly learn that this public authority is not always the source of agency, when Cersei Lannister, behind the closed sheets of the King's pavilion, manipulates the king's decision to punish the Stark girls for their role in injuring the prince. Despite the fact that Sansa had nothing to do with the encounter between Arya and Micah and Prince Joffrey, it is her dire wolf that is killed as punishment for Arya's wolf (who fled) biting the prince:

The queen regarded him coolly. 'I had not thought you so niggardly. The King I'd thought to wed would have laid a wolfskin across my bed before the sun went down.'

Robert's face darkened with anger. 'That would be a fine trick, without a wolf.'
'We have a wolf,' Cersei Lannister said. Her voice was very quiet, but her green eyes shone with triumph. (*GoT* 12 Eddard 4: 157)

This brief exchange leads to the execution of Sansa's wolf by her father, Ned. Cersei, although subordinate to the King in political and public authority, nevertheless clearly understands how to appeal to the King's vanity and use her own sexuality and role as the injured prince's mother to gain the immediate agency needed to accomplish her goal despite her political position or her gender. This type of exchange is one of many that show us how being able to discuss power and influence with the regards to women using the redesignation of agency is therefore vital to establishing how in *The Song of Ice and Fire*, under the right conditions, women might achieve both influence and their goals, even if the public power appears to reside elsewhere.

Erler and Kowaleski acknowledge that female power might not function in the same manner as male power does, but "by focusing on distinctively female forms of exerting influence and achieving goals, we aimed to provide a more nuanced and inclusive analysis that would demonstrate *how* female agency functioned and *when* conditions enabling the exercise of female power occurred" (Erler and Kowaleski, *Gendering* 2). As we see with this brief interlude between Cersei and Robert, Martin provides some of his women with the conditions in which their agency exceeds that of the men who wield the more traditional hammer and shield style of political, public authoritative power.

In the Middle Ages public authority was certainly primarily the province of men. Under a very defined set of circumstances women could not only find personal agency in achieving their own goals, but sometimes transcend the gender barrier and achieve actual political, public authority. It was possible in those circumstances for women to have both agency and authority. Martin's appropriation of medieval constructs exists not only in displays like that between Robert and Cersei, where the results clearly display her ability to influence action and achieve her goals, but also in his construction of his female characters and their relationship with power.

The women of *The Song of Ice and Fire* and their relationship to power provides an useful opportunity for readers to discover how they are able to exert agency, and possibly—under the right conditions the more traditionally masculine authority.

In Martin's world it is those women who can most deftly maneuver through the Machiavellian politics of Westeros—as Cersei does on many occasion—that achieve the greatest degree of agency. Those women who do not try to act in spite of their gender, or a conscious effort to defy its conventions, but because they recognize the strength within, wield great, if not subtle, agency. The idea of non-traditional power and agency creates situations where we can see many of the women of *Song of Ice and Fire* successfully exert influence on those around them.

In almost every case where the women of Westeros find agency, it is not because they have succeeded in throwing off the trappings of their gender, but because they embody either physical or figurative motherhood, much as Cersei did in her exchange with Robert. The role of women as the domestic head of the house provides them with the circumstances for the generation of agency. Nancy Armstrong, a scholar of female power in more contemporary times, identifies the possibility of the agency that Erlar and Kowaleski tell us exists under the right conditions for women to achieve power: “by this I mean we must be willing to accept the idea that, as middle class women, we are empowered, although we are not empowered in traditionally masculine ways” (573). The notion of domesticity and feminine power alluded to by Armstrong is in keeping with the idea that women of the Middle Ages achieved agency by virtue of their control of the more private aspects of the home. And under the right conditions, these women—these mothers—are able to influence the world around them in the form of agency. Such influence certainly applies to some of the women of Westeros, just as it did with women of the Middle Ages, particularly with reference to women who are mothers. Those women who achieve

the greatest degree of agency and power in Martin's *Song Of Ice and Fire* series do so by not only by virtue of understanding the subtle potential of their power but through their identities as mothers, either literal or figurative. In most cases within the series, the exertion of agency occurs within this more private sphere of subtle influence by the women who understand their roles as mothers and use the privilege it affords them to wield significant agency.

Mother Tyrell, the Queen of Thorns, perhaps epitomizes this subtle, domestic view of maternal agency. She clearly understands her role as a woman, and as such knows how to manipulate the system in her favor. She has absolutely no desire to establish herself in any role of public authority. But behind the scenes she scoffs at the tractability of the men around her that hold those positions. Her non-traditional power is subtle in nature, and eschews any designs on masculine notions of power through visible force, and yet is some of the most decidedly successful control of any in the books. She is responsible for her granddaughter being the queen to not one, but three men (boys) with pending or real positions of actual power. This proximity to power allows her to control things from behind the scenes, including the possible murder of an undesirable King in Joffrey Lannister, while at the same time being able to implicate a potential rival for kingly affections in the naïve Sansa Stark, and her conniving, and always dangerous husband, Tyrion.

Like Mother Tyrell, Melisandre, another of the female characters in the series with a position that affords her proximity to public power, wields a terrible influence over the man that holds the place of public authority closest to her. She manipulates Stannis to the point where he is almost a simple servant of her whims. While her position as priestess of R'hllor affords her more public authority than Mother Tyrell, it is her agency and maneuvering behind the rule of Stannis that is truly to be feared. Her most visible detractor, Davos, is able to keep Stannis away

from her total control and on a path that he (Davos) believes is more honorable right up until the moment when Melisandre exerts her maternal power through giving birth to a shadow that kills Renly. She subsequently creates a curse that leads to the deaths of all the other “pretenders” to the throne in Rob and Joffrey. After the birth of her shadow child, Melisandre becomes the mother not only of her religion, but Stannis’ desires and his mind and her agency grows with this new, figurative maternal influence.

Martin no doubt privileges maternal agency to such an extent that those women who utilize it effectively wield the greatest amount of influence, perhaps of any of the characters in his series. But, like all things in Martin’s world, the notion of maternal power (redesignated as agency) cannot stand unchallenged. Such a redesignation cannot possibly encompass every example of female power within the series. Under the proper conditions—as Erler and Kowaleski tell us—it is possible not only for a woman to exert agency, but to obtain the more traditional publically authoritative power. In Daenerys Targaryen we see not only a display of female agency, but find an example of traditional and public power, a position she is ultimately only able to achieve as a result of her identity as a figurative mother. Both her agency and her power wax and wane as her identity as primarily a mother changes.

Daenerys is, in the beginning, a weak and abused fourteen-year-old girl who is literally sold into marriage by her cruel brother. Her status as piece of chattel is designed to reinforce the power structure of the kingdom her brother wishes to build, and is reminiscent of both historical practices of marriage for political gain, such as that of Catherine Valois to Henry V, Eleanor of Aquitaine to Louis VII of France or Henry II of England, and to literary marriages of women who serve as peaceweavers, much like Hildeburh or Freawaru in *Beowulf*:

...Freawaru, where she bought
A studded vessel to heroes. She is promised, young and gold-

bangled, to the gracious son of Froda; the friend of the Scyldings, caretaker of the realm, has determined and counts is advisable that by means of that woman he should settle a sum of fatal feuds and conflicts. (*Beowulf* 2023-2028)

While some of the female characters of *Beowulf* fail in their role as peaceweavers, the historical women are more successful. The historical conditions existed for these woman, as a result of their positions as mothers, where they exhibited not only agency, but power. Eleanor of Aquitaine, as queen dowager, was even able to act as regent of England while Richard I, the king, fought in the crusades. Martin creates conditions for Daenerys within his texts that allow for a similar opportunity to establish both personal agency, and eventually a more public power.

Daenerys may begin the *Song of Ice and Fire* with no power, no agency and a lack of understanding as to her potential for power as a member of the Targaryen dynasty, but as she learns to comprehend first her role within the *khalasar* as *khaleesi* and later her role as the Mother of Dragons, and the potential for agency these designations afford her, she not only achieves influence in the more private setting of the *khalasar*, but she attains the power available through her politically public authority as Mother of Dragons.

George Martin's construction of Daenerys begins with some conventional fantasy tropes: she is a beautiful, silver-haired princess; after the death of her brother, she becomes the de-facto displaced fantasy noble ruler seeking to reclaim her birthright as king (or in this case queen) of her homeland; and she is in possession of the most iconic symbols of power in fantasy in the form of her dragons. But while her beginnings in the story are reminiscent of traditional fantasy texts, her story evolves into something far beyond the conventional, even as Martin is careful to make sure his story is in keeping with what life in the Middle Ages would have been like. It is the struggle that exists within that framework that interests him, which is why in the beginning

Daenerys place in the series as a woman is defined by her gender and the roles and expectations that attend it. Martin explains that:

there are some things that are just don't square with history. In some sense I'm trying to respond to that. [For example] the arranged marriage, which you see constantly in the historical fiction and television show, almost always when there's an arranged marriage, the girl doesn't want it and rejects it and she runs off with the stable boy instead. *This never fucking happened*. It just didn't. There were thousands, tens of thousand, perhaps hundreds of thousands of arranged marriages in the nobility through the thousand years of Middle Ages and people went through with them. That's how you did it. It wasn't questioned. Yeah, occasionally you would want someone else, but you wouldn't run off with the stable boy. (Gilmore)

So, Daenerys' character must be subjected to the expectations of her role, her gender and her place within the carefully constructed confines of Westerosi society. As a woman, if Daenerys simply rejects the role placed on her by the expected norms of society, she will find that it is not the norms that are rejected, but her. We learned from Erlar and Kowaleski that in order for a woman to achieve agency the proper conditions must exist. Those conditions cannot exist where the defining structure of a society is simply disregarded. In order for Daenerys to eventually achieve influence and power, she must first come to accept her role within the culture in which she resides. It is precisely the struggle that Daenerys endures between being able to function in traditionally established gender roles of the cultures she exists in and her potential for power that often resides outside of those cultures that complicate her character. Daenerys' struggle to understand the roles and restrictions of her class and position, as well as the privileges that position provide, often challenge her ability to successfully develop her agency and ultimately her authoritative power. Martin describes the conflict that he wishes to discuss within such a structured class system:

I mean, the class structures in places like this had teeth. They had consequences. And people were brought up from their childhood to know their place and to know that duties of their class and the privileges of their class. It was always a

source of friction when someone got outside of that thing. And I tried to reflect that. (Gilmore)

The friction that underscores Daenerys' rise to prominence comes as a result of both her place within the social scale of the Dothraki and her homeland and her ability to “get outside” of the roles placed on her, by virtue of understanding how to work within those roles. Her struggle to achieve agency in a society that denies it to her, her struggle to gain power in a land that regularly diminishes the rights of women, is exactly the kind of struggle with the human condition that Martin uses to challenge conventional fantasy tropes. It is the journey that Daenerys undertakes to achieve agency and power that is of the most interest. She transforms from a piece of chattel in an arranged marriage to the most prominent female character – and perhaps most influential character regardless of gender – in the series.

In this thesis, I will discuss how Daenerys' ability to generate agency and eventually the more traditional public authority and power wax and wane with her identity as a mother, and more precisely as the Mother of Dragons. Her identity as a woman, but also as a mother, influences not only how she is perceived within the series, but also how she is able to influence the world around her. The work will be divided into three primary chapters.

Chapter II

Chapter One of this thesis will examine the character of Daenerys Targaryen and her role as a peaceweaver and intercessor. The historical and literary Middle Ages defined women in very specific ways. The primary role of a medieval woman “whose ordained role in life was to be a wife and mother” (Shadis 335), had a much defined set of expectations for behavior. Women were expected to operate as submissive intercessors to their husbands who occupied the more traditional roles of public power. An important expectation for these medieval mothers was that they were to help keep the peace while remaining subordinate to their king: “advice to be

submissive to husbands, not to contradict them in public, to make requests of them prudently and to counsel them attentively was common in the lives of medieval women of all classes” (Parsons 55). The role of intercessor was entirely dependent on the woman’s proximity to a male counterpart and could not function in its absence. The role of peaceweaver required a proximity to power and at least the potential for maternity. In the role of a wife, mother, peaceweaver and intercessor, women of the Middle Ages could find ways to exert influence. Beginning with Anglo-Saxon representations of women as peaceweavers in texts like *Beowulf*, the role of the female intercessor became a prominent way for women to be represented across medieval literary tradition. Appropriating medieval historical and literary traditions, as he is wont to do, Martin constructs a world where his women often find themselves fulfilling the traditional role of the peaceweaver and intercessor. Martin’s respect for medieval traditions of the peaceweaver role deserve attention for their ability to highlight how our understanding of traditional gender roles and their expectations can create situations where defiance of those expectations not only becomes necessary, but invigorating and empowering. While the female characters of Martin’s novels certainly suffer and struggle, their plight, particularly that of Daenerys Targaryen becomes a particularly complex discussion of the human condition as she tries to contend with the challenge of navigating her traditional role of the peaceweaver.

Daenerys’ character is of extra interest because she is anything but a traditional representation of the medieval peaceweaver ideal. Where Catelyn Stark is almost a modern Wealhtheow in appearance and demeanor, and Cersei Lannister is the antithesis, Daenerys resides somewhere in between. Her locus as a woman constantly defined by her inability to be properly defined convolutes her character reading beyond the scope of some of the other women in the series. Daenerys resides between two cultures and multiple roles. Her tendency to not only

try and act within the boundaries of her cultures and roles, but her propensity for defiance of those cultures, roles and gender expectations constantly mark her as a figure with the potential for monstrosity. Daenerys' transgression of accepted gender norms is discussed by Karin Gresham, in *Cursed Womb, Bulging Thighs and Bald Scalp: George R.R. Martin's Grotesque Queen*:

not only unfeminine, but beyond the social. Nevertheless Martin grants Dany, the name she is affectionately called throughout the series, her greatest strength when she appears in these liminal states that embrace in combining imagery from the empowering aspects of the feminine, masculine and bestial. Presenting her as the embodiment of all life in this final point of view (POV) section just before the epilogue, Martin show cases her potential to win the throne and become an ideal leader of the people. (151)

Gresham's article examines Daenerys power and her identity through the unfeminine and monstrous traits she exhibits, and reviews these traits through a Bakhtinian view of the grotesque. Monstrosity is a part of her character that is integral to her ability to achieve personal agency and ultimately public authority. Her existence between the lines of what is expected constantly complicates her attempts to fulfill her primary role as a mother. In this chapter her struggle with her identity between the two worlds establishes her failures, her success and her ultimate transcendence of the role of peaceweaver and intercessor.

Chapter III

The role of a peaceweaver was integral to the identity of a traditional medieval wife and mother. Its success depended on the ability of a woman to protect the lineage of her male counterpart and secure "horizontal bonds between tribes, or they nurtured the vertical bonds among men within their tribe" (Morey 488). Inexorably tied with a woman's ability to protect her family line through procreation was her ability to protect and nurture the children that would secure that line. A medieval mother was the lynch pin that insured not only her children

developed into well-adjusted and productive members of society, but that society itself was protected through the act of nurturing her offspring. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, following the lead of Nancy Scheper-Hughes, suggest the role of the medieval mother is “culturally constructed, ‘grounded in specific historical and cultural practices’” (x). Its importance to securing the traditions of a society is paramount. Like her role as a peaceweaver, Daenerys’ role as a nurturing mother is complex. Martin weaves an intricate pattern of struggle, success and constant conflict in her construction.

Daenerys is identified as a physical mother who ultimately fails in her role. The maternal act of nurturing a child began with the sexual act of conceiving that child. Sexuality had very defined performance expectations for both the male and female partner. Daenerys’ defiance of the expected sexual performance links her with monstrosity and leads to her failure as a nurturer.

She is a figurative mother connected primarily to this role through her relationship with her dragons. Her symbolic connection with the dragons as a maternal figure provides her agency as a mother, but also connects her with monstrosity, by virtue of the dragon’s fantastical and unnatural existence. By virtue of assuming her role as figurative mother, Daenerys’ role as protector, nurturer, and guide to her figurative children places her immediately in a position where she has influence over their behavior. Martin acknowledges this maternal power many times throughout the novels as rather than by her name, Daenerys is referred to simply by her role as a mother, an identity that provides her the power she needs to emerge as “an ideal leader of her people” (Gresham 151). In this way it not only becomes possible to connect Daenerys’ power with her identity primarily as a mother, but also to re-examine the important connection between this identity with its social role. Sue Niebrzydowski, in *Monstrous Mothering: the Representation of Sowdanes in Chaucer’s Man of Law Tale*, discusses not only the importance

of mothering to both the medieval and modern cultures, but its ultimately communal role: “In medieval culture, as indeed within our own, successful mothering is a key facet in the construction of the female body, for on it depends not only the physical and social well-being of the child but also the continuation of society itself” (196). It is important to note that this continuation of society provides the mother a powerful role in determining the outcome of social interactions. The directions and influence of the mother might guide the hand of her children. Thus, even in a society where women find themselves in diminished roles, in the role of a mother a woman might find agency. Martin exploration of the mother as nurturer role in Daenerys is muddled by the loss of her natural son and his replacement by both her symbolic dragon children and her figurative citizen children. Daenerys’ complexity as a character who resides on the periphery of a role labels her as potentially monstrous for her defiance of easy categorization and challenges her ability to succeed within the role. At the same time, her monstrosity and residence in the liminal spaces between roles, categories and definitions allows her to transcend the male imposed expectations of her role and provides her with an intricate form of agency and influence. Just as Chapter I explores the possibilities that exist for Daenerys to achieve agency through her struggle with the traditional aspects of the medieval mother’s role of peacemaker and intercessor, Chapter II explores the possibilities that exist for her to achieve agency through her struggle to navigate the traditional aspects of the ideal maternal nurturer and protector.

Chapter IV

Beyond the scope of female agency existed certain circumstances in the Middle Ages where (although rare) women might achieve actual political, public power, such as that of Eleanor of Aquitaine, who achieved power through her marriages. In her role as queen she was able to influence the actions of her children, and particularly her sons (three of whom would

eventually become kings), and thus exhibit some agency. But it was not until the death of her husband Henry II that she—in her role as queen dowager—was able to achieve the power more often associated with public authority. With her son King Richard I away on the crusades, the conditions arose where she could assume the mantle of regent and effectively control the actions of a nation. Tracing the potential for maternal power that existed on occasion in the patriarchal society of the Middle Ages and linking it through its cultural importance to medieval fantasy, there exists an opportunity to draw parallels with medieval queens and Martin’s construction of Daenerys. The third chapter of this thesis will focus on the role of maternal power and its relationship not only to agency, but actual public power and the connection that exists between Daenerys’ role as Mother of Dragons and her ability to wield authority.

In the Middle Ages, a time when “the very existence of a woman ruler challenged traditionally held beliefs that the monarch as God’s representative ought, by definition, to be male” (Levin 2), a queen created all sorts of problems. Yet there were many who were more scared of a disruption in the legitimate line of succession than of a female ruler. Out of this volatile political landscape Elizabeth I emerged as her country’s leader. In a strikingly similar rise to power Daenerys is thrust into the role of a potential leader of Westeros only after the death of her brother. Yet despite her gender she is seen as enough of a political threat, as the last remaining heir to the Targaryen line, that an attempt is made on her life. Conversely her lineage, as a member of that same line, is enough for knights of renown (Barristan Selmy) to travel across the sea to serve her. The strict adherence to medieval rules of primogeniture create a circumstance where a woman, legitimized through her hereditary connection to royal blood, could become queen.

Further helping to promote her ability to achieve real authoritative public power is Daenerys' status as an unmarried woman. Whereas the role of intercessor required a proximate connection with a male ruler, the identity of a woman who would be queen required its absence. So long as Daenerys remains unwed and maintains at least the pretense of a spiritual purity, she finds opportunity for public authority, much as other medieval queens did. Similar to Queen Elizabeth, Daenerys will become the figurative maternal figure to thousands, and as such, will wield the greatest power in the story of all the women, and arguably all the characters in general.

And also like Elizabeth, Daenerys' power derives from her identity as a woman and a mother, but never a wife: "Elizabeth embraced the ideal of chastity and presented herself as a Virgin Queen who was also the mother of her people" (Levin 3). While Daenerys is never seen strictly as virginal, the birth of her dragons occurs without gestation and she too embraces the notion of being mother to her people. As Queen Elizabeth was, Daenerys is constantly forced to deal with the delicacies of rule as both a woman and a queen, which includes the persistent bombardment of suitors for her affections. Unlike was ever proven with Elizabeth, Daenerys occasionally finds solace in the arms of lovers, but comparable to Elizabeth is mostly careful to make sure that those lovers never present a challenge to her role as queen and mother. Her one misstep in this regard coincides with the loss of her identity as a mother first, both to her dragons and her people, and results in her image as a wife, which damages her power base and eliminates all the circumstances that provided her with agency.

Finally, it is Daenerys' connection with her dragons and the figurative maternity it represents that affords her the greatest connection to public authority. Her identity the "Mother of Dragons" is the crucial anchor to her public authority. Her ability to retain influence and

authority are directly tied with her connection to her dragons and their important relationship with her maternity.

Once again, Daenerys's connection to multiple roles and her ability to transcend--or perhaps her failure to adhere to--these roles classify her as something 'other' and connect her to monstrosity. The intricate discussion of her character and its relationship to traditional maternal roles and defiance of those roles displays just how Martin appropriates medieval traditional concepts with the pretext of supporting age old patriarchal systems, only to repeatedly challenge their veracity.

Fantasy literature, grounded in a medieval foundation carries with it certain expectations, certain tropes that encompass not only how readers perceive the world the stories are written in, but the characters that reside within them. George R.R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* series as a work within that genre carries with it certain expectations, expectations that Martin himself expresses a desire to challenge. While he uses some of the conventions available to create his world, he often sets those expectations on their ear in an effort to convey the struggle of the human condition in a more realistic format. To this end, he plays with many of the roles of his characters and the expectations that such a world would impose on them. His approach places a dark, and often sinister light on the relationship of those characters to power and agency.

Women, much as they really did in the Middle Ages, suffer from a lack of either form of influence. Yet, as Erler and Kowaleski note, there are circumstances that exist within these types of societies that "demonstrate *how* female agency functioned and *when* conditions enabling the exercise of female power occurred" (Erler and Kowaleski, *Gendering*,2). The women of Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* exhibit varying degrees of agency and power depending on their status and position, as well as their relationship to the men around them. But those women who exert both

the greatest agency, and in rare cases, any form of power, bear traits that privilege them as either figurative or literal mothers. Foremost among these privileged female characters is Daenerys Targaryen, a woman born into one of Martin's teeth-bearing social classes who is able to achieve agency and ultimately power in her role as Mother of Dragons.

CHAPTER II

Wife, Moon of My Life: Daenerys Targaryen, Peacemaker and the Role of Intercession in the *Song of Ice and Fire*

The women of George R.R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* live in a brutal, patriarchal world dominated by a strict set of gender performance expectations that serve to reinforce the ideal conventional notion of medieval power. Ostensibly, it appears that Martin's appropriation of these conventions furthers the misogynistic ideals of the bygone Middle Ages by subordinating women. However, Martin's use of these traditional medieval conventions and oft used fantasy tropes is not merely an attempt to diminish the potential for power of his female characters, but rather a vehicle for discussing the struggle of the human condition. For the women of the *Song of Ice and Fire* the struggle exists between meeting the expectations of their prescribed gender roles, as informed by medieval construction, and exerting agency and influence, as defined by Erler and Kowaleski.¹

Within Martin's work some of the most intriguing struggles exist with the women in the stories classified as either physical or figurative mothers. In the Middle Ages "motherhood was central to the function of the medieval queen, whose primary duty was always to produce an heir to the throne" (Huneycutt 301). Medieval mothers had a strong connection to the continuation of society. As the person responsible for securing the perpetuation of a respective society, there existed a potential for agency and influence since their well-being insured the well-being of the collective. If the medieval mother thrived, the collective thrived.

¹ For an explanation of how power is redefined as agency or public authority and how certain circumstances allowed medieval women to achieve one, the other, or possibly both see the Introduction to this work, particularly pages 7-10.

As we examine the potential for collective mothers to find influence within the quasi-medieval cultures erected by Martin, it is important to begin that conversation with a discussion of how he utilizes one of the most conventional expectations of female behavioral roles: that of the peaceweaver. Originating in Anglo-Saxon society to define a woman married into a hostile tribe to help end hostilities, the peaceweaver role has been expanded by several scholars like Larry M. Sklute to include a definition of “a person whose function it seems to be to perform openly the action of making peace by weaving to the best of her art a tapestry of friendship and amnesty” (qtd in Carr Porter).² Such an agreement was common in the Middle Ages for women of noble birth, as Morey notes: “Noble women, that is, formed horizontal bonds between tribes, or they nurtured the vertical bonds among men within their tribe” (488). The primary way that these vertical bonds could be maintained was through the procreative act of maternity. Thus, in order for a woman to become a successful peaceweaver, she must, by definition, eventually become a mother.

An important expectation for these medieval mothers was that they were to help keep the peace while remaining subordinate to their king: “advice to be submissive to husbands, not to contradict them in public, to make requests of them prudently and to counsel them attentively was common in the lives of medieval women of all classes” (Parsons 55). The expectation for peaceweavers to make prudent requests of their kings and to provide them with attentive counsel helped to establish the ideal of the peaceweaver, women who as both nobles and mothers had influence, but were expected to use that influence not as active participants in matters of state, but rather as intercessors: “in the ideal submissiveness it inscribes, the queenly-intercessory

² The idea of a peaceweaver has been addressed by many scholars, particularly those who have studied the *Beowulf* text, including Jane Chance. Chance discusses the idea of the peaceweaver role expanding into a hostess role, or that of a cup-bearer who acts to help preserve the peace. For more on Chance’s idea of a peaceweaver see *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (1986).

scenario is a script for female behavior” (Parsons 48). Thus the relationship between the noble mother’s role as a peaceweaver was closely defined by a “close connection between a queen’s intercession and maternity” (Parsons 42). Part of the essential nature of a peaceweaver was as a submissive intercessor to the ruler of the court. While the typical patriarchal society of the Middle Ages granted power to the men of the court, under the proper circumstances noble mothers might be able to influence those men to meet their own goals:

hedged about with restrictions as the queen’s behavior might be, however, the essential informality of her intercession did allow room for maneuvering. Provided the proprieties were observed, queens could (and did) exploit their intercession for their own ends—to win supporters, to create networks of mutual obligations, and ... to shape popular opinion of themselves and the king. (Parsons 48)

It is of particular interest that the situations in which these queens were able to “exploit their intercession for their own ends” all required a relationship to a male ruler. In the case of the queenly intercessor it was mandatory that there actually be a king. While there were situations--and queens--that ruled and displayed agency, or public authority, without the presence of a male ruler, for the purposes of discussing the role of the intercessor, it is assumed a dominant male ruler is present. The integrated usage of intercession as a form of influence rendered by submissive peaceweavers is an example of the agency that Erler and Kowaleski use to redefine the potential for female power.³

The Middle Ages are full of historical examples of these peaceweaving mother-queens who were able to successfully use intercession to achieve some form of influence, from Catherine of Valois to Eleanor of Aquitaine. Medieval literature provides many additional

³ The idea of conditions under which women might achieve personal agency and the discussion of how power might be redefined under given conditions to include personal agency occurs in the introduction of this work, and is informed by the scholarship of Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, particularly discussed in works *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, and *Women & Power in the Middle Ages*.

examples, including several in *Beowulf*, such as Wealhtheow, a noble woman who used her position as an intercessor to maneuver proceedings in her favor. First, Wealhtheow submissively presents the cup to her husband, Hrothgar. This action allows her the forum to subsequently address her nephew and entreat him to act kindly toward her sons, and then do the same to Beowulf: “Be just in your actions toward my sons, you who are the key to our contentment” (Fulk 167.1224-1225). Mindful of her role and the ability it gave her to address the men who controlled the realm, in a setting they would not have deemed threatening, Wealhtheow is able to fulfill her role as a peaceweaver and intercessor.

Like Wealhtheow, Catelyn Stark in George Martin’s *Song of Ice and Fire* series fulfills the peaceweaver role. Her marriage to Eddard Stark began not out of love, but out of an attempt to consolidate power in the North of Westeros. The union of House Stark and House Tully united the river lands and the Lords of the North, providing a much stronger political and military base for both regions, while at the same time securing a lasting peace between both families. The union of two great houses established a barrier between the northern lords and their rivals in the south and gave the river lands the needed prestige provided by House Stark. Perhaps one of the more successful examples of traditional peaceweaving and intercession in the series, a marriage that began out of political expediency (as so many in both the historical and literary Middle Ages did) reveals when the series begins, becomes one built on mutual love and respect. Catelyn Stark fulfills her role as a peaceweaver by providing five children to her husband. But it is her ability to act as an intercessor that separates her from others in the series. Not only does she recognize the agency and influence her proximity to the powerful position her husband grants her, but she understands far better than even her husband the need for maintaining a political “peace.” She warns her husband of the importance of political propriety within the first pages of the series:

‘Prince Tommen is seven,’ she told him. ‘The same age as Bran. Please, Ned, guard your tongue. The Lannister woman is our queen, and her pride is said to grow with every passing year.’
 Ned Squeezed her hand. ‘There must be a feast, of course, with singers, and Robert will want to hunt. I shall send Jory south with an honor guard to meet them on the King’s Road and escort them back.’ (GoT 3, Catelyn 1:27)

This is a subtle reminder to her husband of the importance of the role of propriety and performance in the continuation of peace. It is the first of several over the next few chapters that consistently reinforce both her role as a peaceweaver and the personal agency her relationship with her husband affords her. It displays her ability to influence his thoughts and achieve goals—as an intercessor—she believes are in the best interest of her family and the peace.

Martin’s appropriation of the medieval peaceweaver continues with the construction of Cersei Lannister. Another woman married with a political agenda in mind, her marriage to the King, Robert Baratheon, unites the wealthiest house in the seven kingdoms with the throne, thus insuring a prosperous future for both families. Ostensibly, it appears the Cersei Lannister is another example of a successful peaceweaver woman in the series. Like Catelyn she has provided heirs to the family legacy, and her children will one day rule the entire Kingdom, not merely some icy block of land in the north. Cersei also appears to play her part as submissive wife and nurturing mother. But unlike Catelyn, her role as a peaceweaver is merely a mask she puts on like some noble attending a masquerade. She uses it to play her part in the game of thrones, which Lord Littlefinger reminds us is “the only game” (Storm of Swords). But because Cersei attempts to circumvent the rules of propriety that the constructed pseudo-medieval setting of Westeros prescribes, her role as a peaceweaver is ultimately a failure.

Her failures as an intercessor run far deeper than her pretense of a dutiful wife. First, her children are not the legitimate result of her relationship with her husband, the king, but rather the product of an incestuous sexual liaison with her brother. Thus she has failed in the primary

purpose of the queen, to bear the king a “lawful heir.”⁴ Further, while the Stark relationship appears to be founded on a mutual respect and even love, which, in addition to her desire to protect her children, drives Catelyn Stark to behave in a manner reminiscent of other properly integrated peaceweavers, the relationship between Cersei and Robert is filled with contempt and hate. The dysfunctional relationship between the two goes well beyond her adultery. When Robert hits Cersei after she insults his masculinity, she responds with

‘I shall wear this as a badge of Honor,’ she announced.
 ‘Wear it in silence, or I’ll honor you again,’ Robert vowed. (GoT 39, Eddard 10:429)

This conversation reveals not only the level of domestic violence accepted within Martin’s quasi-medieval world, but also reinforces the importance of roles and responsibilities within that society. Robert hits Cersei in front of both the King’s guard and Eddard Stark, a man who is renowned for his nearly incorruptible honor. Yet neither man so much as comments about the action. Cersei’s beating provides another harsh example of the importance of roles. Her actions throughout the story continually reinforce the consequences of such defiance of roles.

Her attempts to act in a situation that does not permit it, violates the circumstances that Erler and Kowalewski indicate allows for female agency. In the Middle Ages, women could be intercessors, but not actors. Linda Marshall reminds us when discussing another failed intercessor and medieval mother, Grendel’s mother, how her actions defy the role of a peaceweaver: “women can therefore urge action, but cannot take it” (90). Action clearly crosses the boundaries established by the established role these women share as a noble mother. We can

⁴ Although the Targaryen line has often used incest as a practice for preserving the pure strain of their bloodline, with brothers and sisters marrying, significant differences complicate this relationship. Cersei is not married to her brother, but Robert, so her children are not legitimate and her acts, as a woman, deviant in nature. As Ruth Mazo Karras points out, “because the only sexual activity that was at all acceptable for women came within marriage” (39). Cersei’s liaison is not only outside the marriage but done primarily not out of a desire to continue the line, but rather as an outlet for desire. Further, one of the sparks for the rebellion that placed Robert on the throne was the “madness” of King Aerys, rumored to be a product of the family tendency toward incest.

see an example of just how much influence gender had on roles and expectations of the Middle Ages when Grendel's mother, choosing action over intercession invades Heorot in an attempt at vengeance: "The terror was less by just so much as the strength of females, the battle-intimidation of women, is in comparison to males" (Fulk 171.1282-1284) and thus diminished. Yet even diminished, she manages to kill Aeschere. Killing is the ultimate transgression for a mother and an intercessor, the givers of life and protectors of their children. Because of this, "Grendel's dam may have seemed monstrous not only because she was a female exacting revenge but more specifically because she was a mother" (Acker 707). Transgressing her role as intercessor is clearly a sign of monstrosity which signals her failure.⁵ Cersei's propensity for unrestrained action leads not only to her husband's death, but might also be argued to plunge the Seven Kingdoms into war and lead eventually to her eldest son's death and her imprisonment and humiliation. Her violation of the role of peacemaker and intercessor carries with it punishment that extends to her entire community: "in medieval culture, as indeed within our own, successful mothering is a key facet of the construction of the female body, for on it depends not only the physical and social wellbeing of the child but also the continuation of society itself" (Niebrzydowski 196). Martin's appropriation of the medieval concept of maternity extends to his construction of the ideal for the maternal nurturer. The idea that the mother was responsible for not just the well-being of her offspring, but of society is reflected in the problems that arise from Cersei's failures as a nurturer and a mother. Not only must Cersei pay for her failures as a mother and intercessor, but so must her society.

⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen address this monstrosity in Thesis V: The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible, where he notes that "primarily these borders are in place to control the traffic in women, or more generally to establish strictly homosocial bonds, the ties between men that keep a patriarchal society functional" (13).

While Catelyn Stark provides us with a very typical medieval peaceweaver model, and Cersei Lannister the more monstrous antithesis, somewhere in between lies the complicated character of Daenerys Targaryen. Martin's construction of her character takes the typical role of peaceweaver and convolutes it beyond mere depictions of tradition or monstrous defiance. Daenerys combines both traditional elements of the submissive intercessor and the actor and she both succeeds and suffers for her lack of easy categorization. In fact, her defiance of a simple binary categorization provides an opportunity for analysis. It also provides a means to look deeper at the eternal conflict her place on the edge of two societies creates. As both Westerosi and Dothraki, she is constantly subjected to two very different sets of expectations and roles. Each culture brings with it a different, and sometimes opposing set of rules, yet each clearly expects her submissive cooperation as a woman. Her compliance with and defiance of the roles allows for an intricate examination of the social anxieties that result from her existence on the periphery. As Bildhauer and Mills note, her polysemous nature that defies easy categorization as a peaceweaver helps to define her monstrosity (6). Because of her liminal existence between Dothraki and Westerosi cultures, situations arise for her to influence others and achieve her goals that none of the other women in the series experience. Precisely because of her constant presence at the threshold of society (but never within it) she must bear the consequences of her actions like none of the other women in the series.

In the beginning we see Daenerys Targaryen as a thirteen-year-old girl, who like many young, medieval noblewomen, finds herself the object of a marriage designed to enhance her family's political position, continue a dynastic lineage, and consolidate power.⁶ Like her

⁶ Eleanor of Provence married King Henry III sight unseen at the age of 13 and had her first child by 16. Eleanor of Castile was likewise 13 when she married Edward the Longshanks, of *Braveheart* fame. She conceived her first child at 13, but the daughter died. Isabella of France was also 13 when she married Edward II.

medieval counterparts, Daenerys' personal desires have no bearing on the marriage at all; only the political implications of the union are important. Daenerys and her brother have lived under the protection of a wealthy Magister from Pentos, Illyrio Mopatis. Illyrio helps to arrange the marriage between Daenerys and Khal Drogo in a desire to help her brother regain the Targaryen claim to the Westerosi throne. In return for the marriage, Viserys will gain access to Khal Drogo's mighty army of one hundred thousand Dothraki warriors. Viserys wants Drogo's "bloody screamers" to help him invade Westeros and take back his throne.

‘We go home with an army, sweet sister. With Khal Drogo’s army, that is how we go home. And if you must wed him and bed him for that, you will.’ He smiled at her. ‘I’d let his whole *khalasar* fuck you if need be, sweet sister, all forty thousand men, and their horses too if that is what it took to get my army’ (GoT, 4 Daenerys 1:38).⁷

This brutal exchange between Viserys Targaryen and his younger sister, Daenerys, is a stark example of the medieval practice of arranged marriage. In an effort to return the Targaryen line to the throne of Westeros, Magister Illyrio Mopatis secured a union between Daenerys and Khal Drogo, the most powerful of the Dothraki horse lords. In return for the marriage to Daenerys, Khal Drogo has promised to provide Viserys with his crown. Although painted with graphic strokes, the practice of arranged marriage revealed in this dialogue towards the beginning of George R.R. Martin's Song of Ice and Fire series, nevertheless appropriates ideals taken from the medieval institution of the peaceweaver.

The marriage between Daenerys and Khal Drogo serves as both a vehicle for Viserys to regain his kingdom and for the Targaryen line to continue. In these ways Daenerys serves initially as the prototypical peaceweaver. The primary function of "the medieval elite woman, whose ordained role in life was to be a wife and mother" (Shadis 335), is represented through

⁷ This work will contain several excerpts that are both graphic in nature--as Martin's subject matter often is--and potentially revealing of major story plots. **Spoiler alert**

Daenerys' marriage to the *khal*. As his wife, she will be the mother of his child, thus insuring that the Targaryen line continues. In this position, she will be able to fill the role of intercessor and urge her husband to support her brother in his attempt to reclaim the Westerosi throne.

Her new role as a peaceweaver and intercessor is frightening and exotic to her. Daenerys tries desperately to fill her role as *khaleesi* of the Dothraki, while still trying to fulfill her duty as peaceweaver for her brother. The two disparate cultures necessarily come into conflict and Daenerys' place between the two worlds enhances her ability to act beyond the boundaries of both societies and accentuate the potential for monstrosity that resides within her character, complicating her position as an intercessor.

Trying to fill the role of *khaleesi*, she starts learning her husband's culture and his language (something her brother refuses to do, feeling it is beneath him) in an effort to better understand and communicate with him. Yet, while she is working to become more to the *khal* than simply an outlet for his sexual pleasure and dynastic reproductive needs, she slowly begins to alienate herself from her brother. This problematizes the nature of her role, as the entire reason she originally wed was to help protect her brother's dynasty and legacy. At the same time she begins to endear herself to the *khal* and gain influence in the *khalasar*, aligning herself with her new identity, "'not a queen' Daenerys said. 'A *khaleesi*'" (GoT 24, Daenerys 3:227), thus transitioning to her role as intercessor, she begins to anger her brother. This begins the failure of her role as the peaceweaver designed to bring about the resurrection of the Dragon Dynasty under Viserys. The conflict between her two roles becomes a constant reminder of Daenerys' potential for influence and agency and the monstrosity her perpetual existence at the borders of society creates.⁸

⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in *Monster Theory*, discusses the notion of monstrosity and its relationship to categorization and borders. Daenerys is particularly interesting because not only does she defy easy categorization, but she stands

Her new behavior, accepted by Dothraki society because of her proximity to the power of the *khal* and the representative agency provided by her place as intercessor, is denied by her brother Viserys because it defies his expectations of her submissive role to him. When the new *khaleesi* informs Ser Jorah to “tell them all to stay. Tell them I command it” (GoT 24, Daenerys 3:227) including her brother in this ‘all,’ Jorah immediately complies, as do all of those subject to her as *khaleesi*. Her brother, however, responds angrily. “‘You *dare!*’ he screamed at her. ‘You give commands to *me?* *To me?*’” (GoT 24, Daenerys 3:230). Viserys has not accepted her new role, and still perceives her as his possession, failing to even consider the notion that her marriage transferred the rights of her submissive role to the *khal*. But his rage is accompanied by a clear representation of Daenerys’ monstrosity. He looks at her, now outfitted in the garb of her new culture, and screams, “‘have you forgotten who you are? Look at you. *Look at you!*’” (GoT 24, Daenerys 3:230). Viserys’ reaction to her reinforces the liminal nature of her being. When she fulfilled only the position of his sister, dressed and behaved in the expected manner for a young Westerosi princess, she was merely a girl. Now garbed in the clothing of the Dothraki, a society Viserys clearly associates with the ‘other,’ and behaving in a manner antithetical to the prescribed expectations of *his* dominant cultural viewpoint, Daenerys defies convention. Part of his world, but clearly sitting on its periphery, she resides outside categorization. Not only does she defy easy categorization as a hybrid of cultures at the limit of knowing, which marks her monstrosity, but she “stands as a warning against the exploration of its uncertain demesnes” (Cohen, Theory 12). She symbolizes the potential for this new world to transform Viserys into one of the very savages he demeans. His rage at her appearance underscores the reality that her altered attire reaffirms her new role, which is hostile to the one he

as a warning to two separate cultures about the possibilities of monstrosity as a result of transgressing the borders of their respective cultures. For more see information see *Monster Theory* Chapter 1, Theses: 3, 4, and 5.

expects. Martin clothes Daenerys in monstrous garb and places her outside the Western ideal, but at the same time makes Viserys the monster in behavior and grants Daenerys the first real influence she experiences in her role as intercessor through her proximity to the power of the *khal*. In a move that reaffirms the separation between Daenerys and her brother, she orders that he must walk instead of ride.⁹ In this moment of personal agency she displays both a surging influence and the monstrosity of difference: “The exile knight looked from Dany to her brother; she barefoot, with dirt between her toes and oil in her hair, he with his silks and steel. Dany could see the decision on his face. ‘He shall walk *khaleesi*,’ he said (GoT 24, Daenerys 3; 232). As Daenerys’ influence and power grows and her connection with her yet unborn dragons increases, she will she constantly be defined as both a symbol of power and monstrosity. This interlude with her brother is a harbinger of the constant conflict between her roles that will persist throughout the series, complicating her identity and role.¹⁰ The cultural expectation of female submission that Viserys prizes so much no longer applies to his sister but because his arrogant sense of superiority dismisses the Dothraki society as inferior, he fails to acknowledge that by virtue of her marriage to the *khal*, Daenerys is no longer merely his sister. Her role as intercessor and peaceweaver has transitioned its relationship from him, to the *khal*. It is of course, this transition that further problematizes the relationship and eventually creates a climactic breaking point from which Viserys cannot possibly emerge unscathed.

Daenerys’ influence continues to expand as she gains more comfort in her role, and more importantly, when she first identifies as a mother, “she was lying there, holding the egg, when

⁹ In Dothraki Culture a man who cannot ride is not a man. A man who cannot ride cannot rule. To a Dothraki this is the ultimate insult. And while her brother sees it as defiance and is angry because she dares to tell him anything, he cannot see that he has been symbolically stripped of all his power in this new environment and that it marks him as the ‘other’ rather than his sister. Her acquaintance with monstrosity and power in turns serves to classify her brother as the outcast and monster.

¹⁰ Daenerys’ identification as a harbinger of category crisis once again reinforces her monstrosity as described by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen; see *Monster Theory* Chapter 1; Thesis 3.

she felt the child move within her” (GoT 37, Daenerys 4: 394-95). As a pregnant mother, Daenerys for the first time exhibits the maternity that Martin privileges. Yet, even her connection with maternity is connected to her monstrosity. She is holding a dragon egg, when her child, the son she will be told will become, “the stallion who mounts the world,” (GoT 47, Daenerys 5:491) first kicks. The connection between her unborn son, the dragon and her maternity further complicates her role as a mother and ultimately defines the parameters of her connections with agency and power.

At this point her pregnancy can be defined in terms closely associated with the appropriated Middle Age world. As a woman who now bears a potential heir, her place is elevated. She can now insure that Khal Drogo’s line continues.¹¹ Upon the birth of the “stallion who mounts the world” (GoT 47, Daenerys 5:491) Daenerys will fulfill the primary duty of a medieval noblewoman, “the queen’s ability to bear a lawful heir to the throne was the chief reason for her presence in the realm and in the King’s life” (Parsons 44). The fact that the *khal* now calls her “wife, moon of my life” (GoT 47, Daenerys 5:493) echoes both her place as his wife, and by virtue of her role, intercessor, and as a mother and therefore the security for the continuation of his bloodline.¹²

Daenerys’ identity places her in a position where her brother is forced, through her relationship to the *khal*, to accept her as at a minimum and equal, and potentially as his

¹¹ The distinction that the child will continue *the khal’s* line is an important one. Despite that the child has already identified with the dragon, by virtue of the previously cited proximity to the egg, it has no direct connection to Viserys. It is of his sister’s blood and its birth could serve to insure her success as a peaceweaver, because the child is not of his loins, Viserys’ lineage is not secured, but rather the *khal’s*. The obvious transfer of power that accompanies this distinction is important in the formation of Daenerys’ future identity.

¹² The moon and its connection with both femininity and reproduction are further reinforced by medical science (for further information see 1950s study in lunar fertility by Dr. Eugen Jonas or myriad others since), astrology and superstition, and Martin’s own reference to the menstrual cycle’s bleeding as “moonblood.” By identifying Daenerys as “wife, moon of my life” Drogo is implying that her child will continue his life beyond its own natural term, connecting procreation and descendants to the age old notion of immortality.

superior.¹³ Such a distinctive reversal of roles is something that Viserys cannot accommodate. He refuses to accept her power over him, and thereby refuses to accept the culture that she has come to represent. As he minimizes the cultural beliefs of these “barbaric peoples” he also attempts to diminish Daenerys and her power as a mother. Daenerys’ role as a mother is pivotal to her potential for agency within the stories. Further, her role as mother is not only her source of agency as the story progresses, but the locus of her eventual public authority. Most importantly, at the point when Viserys’ demands for her to fulfill her role as peaceweaver on his behalf and her role as intercessor for the *khal* collide in a climactic series of events, her maternity is the symbol of the *khal*’s continuing lineage. At this moment we see the conflict that exists between her two roles played out with tragic, but necessary, results.

While in the sacred city of *Vaes Dothrak* her brother, considering himself above the rules of the Dothraki, ignores their conventions and enters the feast hall of the *khal* during the celebration of his son’s health.¹⁴ Drunk, he strides up to the *khal* and tells him he is there for the feast, but the *khal* has no time for the “Sorefoot King” (GoT 47, Daenerys 5:498) and casually dismisses him to his place amongst the lower ranks.¹⁵ Viserys, in his idiotic refusal to accept Dothraki customs, draws steel, a forbidden practice in the holy city of *Vaes Dothrak*. Daenerys, however, is not so foolish. She understands the peril her brother has placed himself in instantly.

¹³ It is possible to accept the idea that Viserys’ own actions, and not Daenerys’ maternity, are what diminish him in the eyes of the Dothraki, but with consideration to his *own* perception, he has no regard for their opinions—and cannot even understand their tongue—so he can only see Daenerys’ actions and role as potentially insulting or damaging, and not the incomprehensible notions of the barbaric Dothraki.

¹⁴ Vaes Dothrak is the city of crones. It is considered holy by the Dothraki, but it is also the place where women without men are sent to spend the remainder of their days, fully reinforcing the idea that in order for a woman to have influence as an intercessor she must first have a relationship with a man. Without it, she is condemned to sit outside social convention, even in Dothraki society, and reside on the fringe. However, earlier in the chapter Daenerys successfully consumed a raw horse heart, predicting the power her unborn son would possess. Once again the rites of her motherhood are tied with monstrosity and blood. The city of Vaes Dothrak is thus also integrally tied with not only her role as an intercessor, but as a mother.

¹⁵ As noted, the Dothraki revere those who ride. This is an obvious insult leveled at Viserys in his own tongue.

It is a critical moment where all of her current roles come into conflict. Acting as a peaceweaver, she tries to get her brother to come sit by her, “Please Viserys, it is forbidden. Put down the sword and come share my cushions. There is food... is it the dragon eggs you want? You can have them, only throw away the sword” (GoT 47, Daenerys 5:498). She desperately tries to maintain the peace between her new tribe and her old, thus fulfilling the function of containing the hostilities inherent in that role. Her brother defies her attempts and places his blade against her stomach, pressing the tip against her navel, threatening to cut her unborn child (and Drogo’s heir) from her stomach.¹⁶ The action severs Daenerys’ relationship as a peaceweaver for her brother completely. His violent action makes it impossible for her to nurture the horizontal bond between her brother and the *khal* because Viserys has attacked the maternity required for her to maintain that role. The response by both Daenerys and her husband is swift, and complete. Daenerys must make a choice between fulfilling her role as peaceweaver for her brother, intercessor for the *khal*, and mother. She relays her brother’s message to the call in the Dothraki language, something her handmaiden was too afraid to do.

I want the crown he promised me. He bought you, but never paid for you. Tell him I want what I bargained for, or I’m taking you back. You and the eggs both. He can keep his bloody foal. I’ll cut the bastard out and leave it for him (GoT 47, Daenerys 5:498-99)

This simple and accurate translation of her brother’s venomous words, serves as a prime example of her influence as an intercessor. She could have altered her words. The *khal* understood very little common tongue. She could have embellished, or interceded on her brother’s behalf, rather than simply regurgitate his vitriol. Instead, she fulfills her role as a mother by defending her child

¹⁶ Viserys refers to the Khal’s child as a bastard, which means his disregard for the Dothraki culture is so extreme that he does not even acknowledge the marriage as legitimate, and therefore the child’s birth.

through intercession with her husband. Her words urge an already angry *khal* toward action she knows will end badly for her brother,

Daenerys had gone cold all over. ‘He says you shall have a splendid golden crown that men shall tremble to behold.’

Viserys smiled and lowered her sword. That was the saddest thing, the thing that tore at her afterward...the way he smiled. ‘That was all I wanted,’ he said. ‘What was promised’ (GoT 47, Daenerys 5:499).

Daenerys further reinforces her position as submissive intercessor to the *khal* by placing an arm around his waist just as he is about to sentence her brother to a very brutal death. This subtle act signifies her failure as a peaceweaver, but reminds us of the influence she has over events as an intercessor, while her relationship with the *khal* remains intact. Once again her attempt to reside in the liminal space between two worlds is met with a situation impossible to properly categorize. Her apparent failure as a peaceweaver is necessary for her success as an intercessor. Both roles are integrally tied to her maternity and her ability to produce an heir. More than any other title she will obtain, and there are many, “Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of Mereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, *Khaleesi* of Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Shackles and Mother of Dragons” (DWD 3, Daenerys 1:38) Daenerys is identified as a mother. Her people call her “*Mhysa*,” which means, mother. When her brother attacked her, he directly attacked her maternity.

Viserys’ death served as a warning for defiance of the power of maternity, while also appearing to signal the failure of Daenerys as a peaceweaver. But as Martin is wont to do, he complicates this relationship through an intricate transition of the role. With Viserys’ death the last male heir to the Targaryen line died, thus ending the possibility for success of Daenerys’ intended role as peaceweaver. There no longer exist any male participants of that line for her to nurture a horizontal bond with. In Chapter III of this thesis, I will examine the conditions that set

the stage for women of the Middle Ages to inherit lands, titles and all the relative power (public authority) that came with it. So instead of Viserys' death representing simple failure of Daenerys' role as a peaceweaver, it rather transfers the potential for continuation of the lineage and bloodline to Daenerys herself, which eventually leads to her assumption of public authority.

Martin directly reinforces this transfer of the role when there is an attempt on Daenerys' life. Those from the Seven Kingdoms send an assassin to kill her. The attempt fails, but results in enraging the *khal*.¹⁷ Drogo, who has been hesitant to cross the "poison water" and honor his promise to the now deceased Viserys to help conquer Westeros, responds to the assassination attempt by vowing to destroy those responsible:

I will take my *khalasar* west to where the world ends, and ride the wooden horses across the black salt water as no *khal* has done before. I will kill the men in the iron suits and tear down their stone houses. I will rape their women, take their children as slaves, and bring their broken gods back to *Vaes Dothrak* to bow down beneath the Mother of Mountains. (GoT 55, Daenerys 6:594)

As a mother who will secure this line, Daenerys is of paramount importance. This statement of vengeance against the attempted destruction of his lineage by Khal Drogo both insures that the "peace" that Daenerys' marriage to the *khal* was supposed to produce remains intact, and serves as yet another reminder of the importance of maternity both to medieval sentiments, and Martin's construction of Daenerys. It serves as yet another complication in the ever changing arabesque that is Martin's story by reinforcing Daenerys submissive position to the *khal* as a woman in need of protection (and the mother of his unborn son), while simultaneously reinforcing the legitimacy of her potential to rule Westeros in her own right.

¹⁷ In yet another complicated permutation of her role, we can see that those across the sea acknowledge her potential as the last heir of the Targaryen line, thus accepting her potential for power, something more closely examined in Chapter III.

Medieval expectations thus tell us that she must remain the submissive intercessor demanded by her relationship with the *khal*.¹⁸ According to Westerosi lines of succession and primogeniture, when Viserys died, she became the dragon. Consequently, Daenerys struggles to continue to align herself with the submissive role of the intercessor, when her brother's death would make her ruler of all the Seven Kingdoms. The new relationship between *khal* and queen changes. The Dragon can have no King, and must not bow to anyone, but the *khaleesi*, must have a *khal*. It is a conflict that requires resolution. Unfortunately, the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros are literally a world away, and any function Daenerys would have in that society (as Dragon Queen or otherwise), is relevant only to those who have an interest in that society. In this role, only Jorah Mormont supports her. The dominant culture of relevance is the one she resides in. And within that culture she is not the Dragon, but the *khaleesi*. Within the Dothraki culture, yet another, more exotic example of a patriarchal society, Daenerys is still expected to fulfill the role of intercessor. And within this role, Daenerys can urge action, but she cannot, herself act. Conversely, as a Targaryen Queen, she is expected to act. This conflict, this struggle, that Martin is fond of embracing leads to more tragedy and another transition of her role.

After a rather simple battle (or perhaps more appropriately labeled, a massacre) Daenerys witnesses the brutal actions of a victorious war band: looting, pillaging and rape. Outraged by the acts of some of the Dothraki warriors she intervenes directly, which is counter to her role as intercessor. She hears the heart-rending cry of a young captive girl behind her.

‘Make them stop,’ she commanded Ser Jorah.
‘*Khaleesi*?’ The knight sounded perplexed” (GoT 62, Daenerys 7:667).

This confused response by the Westerosi knight is interesting. First, it displays the complete acceptance of this act in the brutal setting of the story. Second, it reinforces the potential for

¹⁸ Page 3 of this chapter outlines medieval expectations of intercession according to John Carmi-Parsons.

problems that arise from action initiated by Daenerys. And finally, when this sentiment is echoed by the Dothraki warriors in her *khas*, it serves to completely reinforce both the patriarchal and misogynistic nature of the world she must operate in, and the fact that she is operating outside of the parameters described by her role as an intercessor that might afford agency. However, when both Jorah and her the Dothraki of her *khas* follow her command, it reinforces her identity as the heir to the Westeros throne and the authority it provides.

Her actions are outside the expectations of the dominant culture she currently resides in. The momentary success of saving the girl from rape (at the cost of several lives), can ultimately lead only to problems. After saving the girl, Daenerys continues to save others. Eventually Jorah responds and tells her that she cannot save them all. Daenerys responds, “‘I am *khaleesi*, heir to the Seven Kingdoms, the blood of the dragon,’ she reminds him.” (GoT 62, Daenerys 7:669). Her statement expresses the great complication of her character and displays even her own confusion as to her proper role. She cannot possibly fulfill the role of intercessor and ruler at the same time, a sentiment echoed by her continued connection with the dragon and monstrosity. Precisely because she attempts to reside in both worlds, she represents a continual transgression of boundaries associated with monstrosity. As Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills argue in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, “monsters are polysemous entities, no singular discourse of the monstrous can be discerned in this period, and hence there can be no singular conclusion” (6).¹⁹ Bildhauer and Mills further note that monsters are “meaning-laden.” These scholars and others, such as Miller, Acker, Marshall and Trilling acknowledge that monsters represent cultural fears and a transcendence of cultural norms or expectations.²⁰ Daenerys has gone outside of the scope

¹⁹ Sarah A Miller echoes these thoughts in *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body*, particularly chapters 1 and 2.

²⁰ For further information on these authors and where to find their works on monstrosity, women and the Middle Ages, see the works cited page.

of her role as an intercessor and *acted*, rather than urging action. In the immediate term her actions appear to solidify her place as *khaleesi*, and the transference of legitimate hereditary power from her brother to her. However, as the story progresses, it is clear that her defiance of cultural expectations and her role defined role as an intercessor do not come without cost.

By choosing to act as a dominant force in the culture, a role reserved for the *khal*, Daenerys has crossed pre-defined gender barriers, thus becoming something more than female, but less than male. Within both of the cultures that Daenerys resides in, it is the male body, not the female one, which is classified as dominant. By gender Daenerys is female, yet through her actions, she is male. Therefore, she resides in a place between, one that can be considered monstrous. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that a monster might act as a harbinger: “The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically ‘that which reveals,’ ‘that which warns,’ a glyph that seeks a hierophant” (Cohen, Theory, 4). The monster serves as a warning for transgressions of cultural expectations and roles. In this case, Daenerys is both mother and monster and her defiance of cultural expectations prophesies a destruction of the very culture she operates within.

This destruction begins with the decline of the *khal*. A seemingly innocuous injury becomes septic and leads to his death. Once again, it is the *actions* of Daenerys that lead to this eventuality. Rather than wait for the holy men to heal the *khal* as social convention dictates, she steps outside the realms of social convention and asks one of the women she rescued to help her husband. In the Middle Ages, women, as an entire gender, bore the potential for monstrosity: “the monstrous female body, however, took the form of mother, sister, lover, wife and daughter. It was pervasive, proximate, and necessary on social, sexual and reproductive grounds” (Miller

1). Precisely because the woman herself bears the taint of monstrosity that all women share as they “inevitably change from something stable and attractive (i.e. the virgin body) into something loose and leaky (i.e. the multiparous body) before the final dissolution into old age and eventual decay” (Miller 3), in her physical description “the robes she wore had once been the lightest and finest of woolens, rich with embroidery, but now they were mud-caked and bloody and ripped. She clutched the torn cloth of her bodice to her heavy breasts” (GoT 62, Daenerys 7:671), the convention-challenging monstrosity of Daenerys’ actions are reinforced by a physical representation of medieval female monstrosity and thus doomed to tragedy.²¹ Under the healing ministrations of Mirri Maz Duur, the *khal*’s wounds turn sour and he lies on the brink of death.

In a desperate action to save her husband Daenerys once again acts, and once again relies on acts that are outside the realm of socially accepted conventions. This time, the monstrosity of her actions are literally reflected in the outcome. While her husband undergoes a necromantic ritual at the hands of the crone Mirri Maz Duur, Daenerys is warned twofold “this is blood magic, lady. Only death mage pay for life” (GoT 65, Daenerys 8:710), and “once I begin to sing no one must enter this tent. My song will wake powers old and dark. The dead will dance here this night. No living man must look on them” (GoT 65, Daenerys 8:712). Daenerys promises to abide by the conventions of the ritual, but the stress of her husband’s situation, the burden of her pregnancy and the rule of the *khalasar* take their toll and she enters an early labor. Trying to help, Jorah Mormont unwittingly takes Daenerys into the *khal*’s tent during the ritual. The ritual itself is an act that transgresses social boundaries, defies conventions and the dominant ideology of both the Dothraki and the Westerosi ideals. By participating in the ritual, even in a passive

²¹ see Sarah A. Miller’s *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body*, particularly the introduction “The Monstrous Borders of the Female Body,” for a full examination of the female body and potential for monstrosity according to Medieval standards for behavior and social expectation.

manner, Daenerys becomes culpable for the violation. The result is that her son is born, or rather unborn, a monstrous thing: “‘Monstrous,’ Mirri Maz Duur finished for him. The knight was a powerful man, yet Dany understood in that moment that the maegi was stronger, and crueller, and infinitely more dangerous. ‘Twisted. I drew him forth myself’” (GoT 69, Daenerys 9:756). For the sin of producing an improperly formed child, Daenerys is condemned to monstrosity, much like another medieval mother who also failed to produce a normal offspring: Grendel’s mother. Offspring that bore the signs of abnormality were considered the product of a monstrous mother. Dana Oswald expresses this idea when discussing Grendel’s mother: “she has conceived and borne the monster; her fecundity, then, is her most monstrous and most dangerous trait” (Oswald 77).²² Daenerys’ monstrosity is literally written in the still birth of her child and the death of her husband. As a queen mother with a living king, she was forced to play the role of intercessor, a role that afforded her the ability to urge action. As Erlen and Kowlewski note, under the proper circumstances, she could exert great influence. But Parsons points out that certain proprieties needed to be maintained: “in the ideal submissiveness it inscribes, the queenly-intercessory scenario is a script for female behavior” (Parsons 48). When she failed to honor those proprieties her actions went beyond the scope of intercession and became action. This action defined her as monstrous and led to the destruction of the world that allowed her to gain agency as an intercessor.

The destruction of her world is immediate and nearly total. The *khals* that paid homage to the male strength of Khal Drogo all leave. Only those too weak to depart remain, “where the other forty thousand made their camp, only the wind and dust lived now” (GoT 69, Daenerys

²² Chapter 2 of this work will deal more directly with the role of the mother in both producing a viable heir and nurturing and protecting a normal heir, as well as discussing the potential for monstrosity that resides with the female body. In the Middle Ages the sexual practices, morality and lineage of the woman could all contribute to the potential for personal and descendent monstrosity.

9:758). Worse, one of the slave girls she saved from the ravages of the men, suffers a horrific and monstrous end.

‘Ereoh?’ asked Dany, remembering the frightened child she had saved outside the city of the Lamb Men.
 ‘Mago seized her, who is Khal Jhaqo’s bloodrider now,’ said Jhogo. ‘He mounted her high and low and gave her to his *khal*, and Jhaqo gave her to his other bloodriders. They were six. When they were done with her, they cut her throat’” (GoT 69, Daenerys 9:758).

Young Ereoh pays for Daenerys’ monstrous defiance of convention with her life. As a symbolic mother in Martin’s appropriated world, she is responsible for not only the well-being of her children, but as Niebrzydowski commented, the “continuation of society itself” (169), her sins necessarily transfer to her community.

Aside from the weak, excepting Ser Jorah, those who remain are those sworn to her while her *khal* remained alive. They will not remain with her in his absence. For not only has she lost her husband, but with the death of her child she is no longer privileged with the power that Martin’s construction of her character allowed when she was a mother. She has lost both of the conditions that allowed for her to gain personal agency and influence: royal wife and mother. She is condemned to go live with crones of the *Dosh Khaleen*. As function mandates, those previously sworn to her as both *khaleesi* and the mother of the “stallion who mounts the world,” now will serve only so long as to honor their obligations to those now defunct roles. When she offers to make her *khas ko*, an honored gift from a respective and powerful khal, they respond by either citing the dishonor it would bring to serve a woman, “Jhogo took the whip from her hands, but his face was confused. ‘*Khaleesi*,’ he said hesitantly, ‘this is not done. It would shame me, to be bloodrider to a woman’” (GoT 70, Daenerys 10:800), or that they will do as they are tasked and no more, “‘you are *khaleesi*,’ Rhakaro said, taking the *arakh*. ‘I shall ride at your side to Vaes Dothrak beneath the Mother of Mountains, and keep you safe from harm until you take

your place with the crones of the *dosh khaleen*. No more can I promise” (GoT 70, Daenerys 10:801). Only Ser Jorah, whose service is to the Queen of Westeros and not to the *khaleesi*, agrees to remain with her.²³

At this point it may appear that not only has Daenerys failed as a peaceweaver and as an intercessor, but as a mother and as a wife. Her defiance of the conditions that existed to provide her with the influence and ability to exert some form of agency, led not only to her own descent into monstrosity, but to the destruction of those she may have influenced as a result of the perversion of the role that afforded her the influence to begin with.

Yet, while it may seem plausible to simply accept this outcome, it would hardly be fair or accurate. For Daenerys, death is an important and transformative process. With the death of her brother, her role as peaceweaver, already complicated by her position within two worlds, became even more so as she was forced to reconcile her role as intercessor to Khal Drogo, and her place as rightful heir of Westeros. Her inability to navigate the changes brought on by this transformation led to the death of her husband and her son. However, with the death of her husband she is no longer beholden to the role of intercessor and can assume the mantle of heir to Westeros without conflict.²⁴ The death of her son denies her the privilege of maternal power and marks her as monstrous. These circumstances lead to a final category defying transformation.

No longer encumbered by a marriage, Daenerys’ role as the heir to the Westerso throne becomes her primary one. Her ability to succeed in this new role is challenged by virtue of her geography and her lack of martial support, and further complicated by her lack of maternity, and

²³ There is an entire argument to be made whether or not Jorah is motivated by loyalty, love or a search for his own potential for power, but that is an argument best dealt with outside the confines of this work.

²⁴ Technically Drogo is left in a vegetative state and it is Daenerys who smothers him by her own hand to end his suffering. This act of euthanasia is important in that it displays her monstrosity as a woman who takes action when her role is still that of an intercessor, and in that its very defiance of cultural expectations is what allows her to later transcend these expectations and assume the role of both King and Queen.

potential to continue a line of successors many see as the only legitimate line. Once again she stands on the border between worlds and between roles.

Daenerys' existence constantly straddles the line between two worlds, and is the centerpiece of her struggle. It is highlighted by tragedy and transformation. The last and greatest transformation of the first book is the most important. Angered by the betrayal of Mirri Maz Duur, Daenerys has her strapped to her husbands' funeral pyre. She also chooses to have her dragon eggs, the symbol of her hereditary potential for power, burned with him. These unhatched eggs, have, like Daenerys the *khaleesi*, wife of Khal Drogo, the potential for great action, but must break free from both the perception that they are mere stone, and the stone shells themselves in order to become dragons rather than eggs. In her final conversation with the *maegi* she realizes the importance of Mirri Maz Duur's instruction: "I remember what you told me. Only death can pay for life" (GoT 73, Daenerys 10:803). Social convention may have prescribed intercession as the perceived role of Daenerys' character, but in order for her to truly achieve the role Martin's construction of her intended, she must both become intercessor, and break free of that role through its literal destruction. Like the shells of her dragon's eggs, her role is cracked, burned, and ultimately discarded.

As the funeral pyre rages, consuming Daenerys' husband, the crone and the dragon eggs, Daenerys realizes the importance of the fire, the potential that resides within its cleansing flames,

The fire is mine. I am Daenerys Stormborn, daughter of dragons, bride of dragons, mother of dragons, don't you see? Don't you see? With a belch of flame and smoke that reached thirty feet into the sky, the pyre collapsed and came down around her. Unafraid, Dany stepped forward into the firestorm, calling to her children (GoT 73, Daenerys 10:806).

She disappears into the conflagration and is totally consumed. But, when the flames dissipate, she emerges, burned, and without her hair, but wholly renewed.

Her baptism is literally by fire. She is no longer merely intercessor, but rightful legitimate queen. She is no longer a wife of a *khal*, but a queen of the line of Dragons. And, with milk running from her breasts and the newly hatched dragons perched on her singed body like babes in their mother's arms "the cream-and-gold dragon was suckling at her left breast, the green-and-bronze at the right. Her arms cradled them close. The black-and-scarlet beast was draped across her shoulders, its long sinuous neck coiled under her chin" (GoT 73, Daenerys 10:806), she is no longer childless, she is once again a mother. This time, her maternity is both physical, as she will act as the nurturer, protector and mentor to her dragons, but also symbolic. Her association with the dragons as her children marks her as both monstrous and powerful. This symbolic motherhood forms the centerpiece of her connection with personal agency from this moment forward.

At this moment, when Daenerys is at her most bestial so far, we can clearly see the power that maternity affords her:

Wordless the knight fell to his knees. The men of her *khas* came up behind him. Jhogo was the first to lay his *arakh* at her feet. 'Blood of my blood,' he murmured, pushing his smoking face to the earth. 'Blood of my blood,' she heard Aggo echo. 'Blood of my blood,' Rakharo shouted (GoT 73, Daenerys10:806).

Men who previously could not bind themselves to her, do so now without question. Her maternity provides her something beyond intercession, allows for her to achieve public authoritative power. However, the potential for monstrosity and defiance of cultural norms that resides within Daenerys is always at the periphery of her character in the literal presence of her children dragons and serves as both a catalyst for, and a foil to, her potential for agency and power. The conflict that exists between her relationship with the dragons, the ultimate source of her agency and what will become her potential for public authority, and her role as a mother, both to her dragons, and to those that will later call her *Mhysa*, forms the central struggle of her

character in the remainder of the series. The role of a medieval woman was always first and foremost as that of a mother. Now, for the first time inescapably linked with maternity, it becomes important to examine Daenerys not just as a peaceweaver and intercessor, with the potential for maternity, a *khaleesi* granted deference by virtue of her ability to produce an heir, but as a mother—both physical and figurative. As a mother, Daenerys primary role changes from that of an intercessor to a nurturer and protector. The next chapter will examine her function within that role.

CHAPTER III

Mother of Dragons, *Mhysa*: Daenerys Targaryen, Nurturer and Protector, the Role of

Mothering in *The Song of Ice and Fire*

In the Middle Ages there were strong expectations regarding women and the performance of gender roles. As was discussed in Chapter I, one of the most important of those roles was as a peaceweaver and intercessor. While this role afforded medieval women opportunities for agency because of its proximity to power, it only worked because of its necessary link with maternity. In fact, in the Middle Ages there were various conditions under which women could achieve some degree of agency--peaceweaving, being one of them—but they all shared a common link: the concept of either physical or figurative maternity. Discussing the role of Berenguela of Castile, Miriam Shadis underscores the importance of medieval maternity, particularly for upper class women: “the medieval elite woman, whose ordained role in life was to be a wife and mother” (335). And, briefly harkening back to Chapter I to reinforce the idea of the importance of the link between maternity and expectations for women in the Middle Ages, we can see that the queen’s “ability to bear a lawful heir to the throne was the chief reason for her presence in the realm and in the King’s life” (Parsons 44).²⁵ Maternity was the most important aspect of a medieval woman’s performed roles. It was key to her ability to find agency, influence, and in some cases, public authority.

Maternity brought with it certain expectations for medieval mothers, who were expected to “engage in a number of performances, most designed to mother their children in Ruddick’s sense of the word—they desire to protect, nurture and teach their children...the protective aspect of maternal performance becomes paramount” (Dockray-Miller 78). How mothers treated their

²⁵ For more information on the work done by Miriam Shadis and John Carmi-Parsons see the works cited list

children defined their character and their success. Medieval mothers were to be nurturers and protectors. They were to be the moral and social guides for their children's behavior. Maternity was key in identifying opportunities for agency for a woman. For the women of *Song of Ice and Fire* maternity also plays an important role in developing scenarios where they might exert influence over others. The women who are most readily able to do so are either physical mothers like Catelyn Stark or Cersei Lannister, figurative mothers like Melisandre, or, in the more intricately developed and complex case of Daenerys Targaryen, both.

While Daenerys begins her maternal journey as a physical mother, her true emergence as a figure of prominence does not really begin until she becomes associated with the symbolic maternal imagery centered on her dragons: "The cream-and-gold dragon was suckling at her left breast, the green-and-bronze at the right. Her arms cradled them close. The black-and-scarlet beast was draped across her shoulders, its long sinuous neck coiled under her chin" (GoT 73, Daenerys 10:806). When we think of the classic image of a mother and her offspring, this is hardly the first image that comes to mind. Nonetheless, there is a clear connection between Daenerys Targaryen as the mother, and the dragons, who are literally suckling at her breasts. This is an important link that will define Daenerys' maternity throughout the series, and will connect her with her figurative role as mother "*mhysa*" to her people and eventually afford her the ability to assume public authoritative power.

For Daenerys, as for women in the Middle Ages, the role motherhood plays in nurturing, protecting and guiding her children is of paramount importance. Noble medieval mothers were supposed to be "actively engaged not only with their children's futures as public figures, but also with their physical, material and spiritual well-being—with their persons and personalities" (Parsons and Wheeler xiv). Producing socially well-adapted and productive children was an

integral part of the role of the medieval mother. Noble mothers were responsible not only for the continuation of their blood, but of the furthering of society itself, a feature Karin Gresham speaks of when describing Daenerys' role as a symbolic mother: "The role of the mother represents one who both leads and protects. Here the role is not uniquely aligned with a stage of femininity but instead with one who nurtures, cares for and protects a community, an ambivalent figure who represents social regeneration" (163). Successful medieval mothering was a difficult task that required submission, devotion, nurturing, and protection and began during the very act of conception. Here it is important to note that it is not merely the act of mothering that is important, but the potential for motherhood, including the procreative act of sex that leads to motherhood itself. For women of the Middle Ages proper maternal nurturing was connected with sexuality and therefore it was not just the nurturing of the living child that came under scrutiny, but the means by which the child was first conceived that determined the potential for successful nurturing. The actions of the medieval woman during the sexual act that resulted in conception was closely linked with the idea of maternity, and subsequently with the ability of the mother to nurture her child. Deviance during the act of conception displayed a deviance of maternity and a failure in the performance of maternal nurturing.

Just as George Martin appropriates medieval ideals of gender performance regarding the peaceweaver role, he appropriates those more directly related to maternity, motherhood and the expectations of nurturing, and protecting, as well. In the historical Middle Ages those expectations for maternity began with the sexual act of conception. The performance of the woman during the act of conception helped to define her construction as a medieval mother and nurturer. Martin's construction of his female mothers in the *Song of Ice and Fire* also begins with performance during the sexual act.

During the Middle Ages the view of sexual liaisons was far more restrictive than today. The act of sex was regarded as a necessity for procreation, while sex for the sake of pleasure was strongly frowned upon. Ruth Mazo Karras cites a ninth-century Frankish Church Council on the chaste nature of supported sexual activity: “[Lay people] should know that marriage is ordained by God and should be sought out not for the sake of lust but rather for the sake of offspring. Carnal connection with wives must take place for the sake of offspring, not pleasure” (84). In the *Song of Ice and Fire*, sexual morals within the Seven Kingdoms, driven by the dominant religious ideology, often mirror those of medieval Europe. Karras, in her examination of sex and the Middle Ages, readily acknowledges that the practice of sex, particularly by the middle class, was likely not the prudish affair the church regulated. The perception of what was moral and what actually occurred in private however were sometimes at odds. Yet it was the perception of religiously driven views that created the ideal for proper behavior. Sarah Miller discusses similar public ideals and practical examinations in her work as well. Certainly, demands for social propriety aside, sex was a real part of the middle ages. Brothels certainly existed, rape occurred and men often maintained mistresses.²⁶

Dothraki culture, more exotic in its ideals than traditional Western society, is far less reserved with regards to sexuality. Sex is a practice that is both openly engaged in, and often accepted as not needing to be consensual. The lack of consent was not important as long as the woman was passive in her role during the sex act. It was passivity, not consent that was important in defining the proper role of a nurturing mother during intercourse. After the victory of Kahl Drogo over Khal Ogo and his son Fogo, the Dothraki loot, pillage, and rape their way through the broken *khalasar* and the Lhazareen of the town. Daenerys, appalled by the rape of a

²⁶ For more information on this topic by both authors see the works cited pages.

young girl demands the action be stopped. The Dothraki, both men and women, respond, “‘she is a lamb girl,’ Quaro said in Dothraki. ‘She is nothing, Khaleesi. The riders do her honor. The Lamb Men lay with sheep. It is known’” (GoT 62, Daenerys 7:668). Displaying a shocking consent, Daenerys’ female handmaid echoes Quaro’s comment in a matter of fact manner. “‘It is known,’ her handmaid Irri echoed” (GoT 62, Daenerys 7:668). And while this is both a brutal reality and one that is offensive to our more reserved Western sensibilities, it reinforces the patriarchal and harsh nature of Martin’s world, and establishes a place where, as Rhiannon Thomas reminds us, “the fact that these girls and women live in a deeply misogynistic world only adds to the realism of their struggles and ultimately to the strength of their achievements” (Thomas). The conditions and pressures of the world(s) Daenerys lives in ultimately makes her ability to exert influence and in some cases public authoritative power more invigorating. Because of her existence on the borders of both Dothraki and Westerosi culture, Daenerys is subject to the expectations of both, a situation that makes her ability to find any form of influence even more impressive. Before Daenerys can begin to exert influence in either society, she must come to understand the role she must play. The sexual restrictions of Dothraki culture might not be as stringent as those of Westeros culture, but they do have a very important similarity in that it is the male that controls the act of intercourse: “the idea of the woman’s contribution to conception as inert matter waiting to be shaped by the man’s contribution gave scientific justification (though far from a universally accepted one) to the common cultural view of women as passive in intercourse, people who have something done *to* them” (Karras 84). In both cultures Daenerys’ role in the act of intercourse is deemed as the receptacle. She is neither to initiate, nor enjoy the act. Women were not to enjoy sex, not to engage in sex for purposes beyond reproduction and certainly were not to display their potential for sexuality. By its very

nature, the female body possessed a degree of monstrosity in the eyes of medieval society: “female bodies are monstrously out of bounds ‘by nature’ (where ‘nature’ does not imply nature at all, but a set of assumptions and prescriptions by which medieval authorities defined women and their bodies” (Miller 5).

Martin’s appropriation of the notion of the requirement of sexual passivity on the part of the woman during the conception of a child in order for her to properly perform her role as a nurturer and protector draws similarities to not just medieval society, but literature as well. One of the most demonstrative acts of sexual defiance in medieval literature happens in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. Grendel’s mother, who like Daenerys walks the borders of two worlds, serves as an example of sexual deviance in the face of restrictive medieval morals and prescribed female behavior. Grendel’s mother openly displays her sexuality, and thereby marks herself as a threat to Christian society. As a sexual being she is a figurative ghost, a “monstrous body [that] manage[s] to haunt those individuals and institutions that mark them as such” (Miller 13). She is a being whose open sexual nature fails to uphold the expectations of the culture that defines her. Her sexual nature is at its most prominent in her battle with Beowulf:

In turn, she promptly paid him in kind with her relentless grasp and reached toward him; then she overturned the weary-hearted strongest of fighters, of the foot-soldiers, so that he came for a fall. Then she held down the hall-visitor. (Fulk 187.1541-1544)

Scholars have advanced varying interpretations of the original Old English of this passage, which have Grendel’s mother sitting on, setting upon, straddling, or even besieging Beowulf.²⁷

²⁷ Fred Robinson, in *Did Grendel’s Mother Sit on Beowulf?* discusses at length the problems and disparity that lead many translators to interpret the Old English word *ofsittan* as sit upon. His discussion includes the possibilities for many different interpretations, including besiege, oppress, occupy and press down. Regardless of whether we agree with Robinson’s optional possibilities or accept sit up, straddle or some other form of the word, it remains true that she is, in fact, physically holding Beowulf down in a manner that is at least a reversal of dominance and most probably sexual in nature.

Regardless of which interpretation we accept, though, it is clear that Grendel's mother is restraining Beowulf physically, and, at least briefly, she is on top of him. In a further reversal of the sexual male role, she "drew her long-knife, broad and bright-edged" (Fulk 189.1548) and tries to penetrate Beowulf with a symbolic phallus. How the sexual act was viewed in the Middle Ages was dependent not only on whether or not it was procreative in nature, but also dependent on its context: "the idea that sex was polluting also had a great deal to do with gender. For men it was not just the act that was polluting, but also the women *with whom they committed it*" (Karras 35). Thus, sex with Grendel's mother, an unwed woman who openly displays a promiscuous dominance and thereby defies gender expectations, would have been seen as an act that dirtied Beowulf in the eyes of God and Christian morality. The fact that only moments after Grendel's mother sexually restrains him, Beowulf uses a massive sword, a clear phallic proxy, to end the fight and extricate himself is a commentary on the unacceptable nature of her sexually aggressive behavior that must be countered. Glenn Davis notes, in echoing the thoughts of Jane Chance, "this entire episode, then, with its portrayal of a monstrous woman as a martial and at least metaphorically sexual aggressor, can be read as an expression of anxiety about untamed, unconstrained female sexuality that is ultimately resolved by the reassertion of masculine dominance through penetration" (49). Moreover, such a victory cleanses Beowulf of his sexual taint, and helps to restore the expected Christian sexual morality of the time.

We see the release of Grendel's mother's unholy, toxic, female monstrosity after her death: "the observant men who were gazing with Hrothgar at the water saw that the muddled waves were all tainted, the seawater stained with blood" (Fulk 191.1591-1593). This exposure of female fluids which "causes cancer in the male member" (Miller 84), dissolves the surrogate member used to kill her: "then the sword began on account of the battle-sweat, the war weapon,

to be reduced to combat-icicles, that was some miracle that it melted completely” (Fulk 192-193.1605-1607). So toxic and dangerous are the fluids that leak from the sexually aggressive Grendel’s mother that they literally destroy Beowulf’s surrogate sexual organ.

And yet, the dissolution of Beowulf’s metaphorical member accompanies a restoration to more conventionally accepted Christian sexual morality. Immediately after the death of Grendel’s mother “the radiance beamed, a light stood within, just as the candle of heaven shines brilliantly from the firmament” (Fulk 189.1570.1571), furthering the intervention and approval by God of Beowulf’s actions to thwart her sexual deviance. The death of the woman who openly displayed her sexuality, thereby defying the Christian expectation of a mother whose sexuality remained modestly cloaked, necessarily restores a normalcy that Rosemary Huisman says “it is from this stage in the text that the social context, in which a heroic world-view and a Christian are reconciled” (224). With the death of Grendel’s mother boundaries are restored, monstrosity is defeated and the expectations of the spiritual chastity of motherhood are upheld.

Grendel’s mother exerts her sexual dominance over Hrothgar and is punished for it with the loss of her life. Daenerys’ defiance of the male role as sexually dominant is more directly sexual, but just as defiant of the social expectations of male dominance. In both cases the female character straddles the male character in a dominant manner. Prior to her defiance of sexual convention, Khal Drogo is clearly the dominant sexual force: “Yet every night, sometime before the dawn, Drogo would come to her tent and wake her in the dark, to ride her as relentlessly as he rode his stallion. He always took her from behind, in the Dothraki fashion,” GoT 24, Daenerys 3:228). This passage reinforces the idea that he is dominant “riding” her and “taking” her, both words that imply her consent is unnecessary and, irrelevant. He would have his way whether or not she defied his wishes.

After a time, Daenerys begins to grow more comfortable in her new world, and more comfortable with her role as *khaleesi*. She seems to even start to enjoy herself, and her place as the wife of the *khal*. This role as *khaleesi* sets her apart from her brother and the Westeros traditional values. She eschews the western clothing for Dothraki garb, begins to learn the language and assert herself as an intercessor within the culture. For a time it appears that she will immerse herself in this new world, this new role and fulfill both the desired role of peaceweaver for her brother's claim to the throne and as intercessor within the *khalasar*. But Daenerys sits eternally between two worlds, and the struggle that exists defines her every move, complicates her actions, affords her agency, denies her agency, illustrates her monstrosity and sketches the lines of her maternity. It is impossible for her to simply plod forward in oblivious contentment; such a story line would defeat the purpose of aligning her character with monstrosity and minimize her triumphs.

Daenerys' first confrontation with her brother displays her newfound agency as the *khal's* wife, thereby expressing her ability as an intercessor within Dothraki culture. The confrontation also places her at odds with her brother and her role as peaceweaver.²⁸ Additionally, it inspires courage in her. As a result of publically emasculating her brother, she gains the courage to defy the sexual conventions of male dominance and sexually dominate her husband. The sexual interlude vividly displays a transference of sexual dominance and defies expectations, much like Grendel's mother in her sexual encounter with *Beowulf*. The very sexual act upsets the culturally dominant ideologies held by the Dothraki:

When he tried to turn her over, she put a hand on his chest. 'No,' she said. 'This night I would look on your face.'

There is no privacy in the heart of the *khalasar*. Dany felt the eyes on her as she undressed him, heard the soft voices as she did the things that Doreah had told her

²⁸ For a more detailed look at the confrontation and the implications and complications it has on her dual role as intercessor and peaceweaver, see Chapter I of this work, pages 10-12.

to do. It was nothing to her. Was she not *khaleesi*? His eyes were the only eyes that mattered, and when she mounted him she saw something there that she had never seen before. She rode him as fiercely as ever she had ridden her silver, and when the moment of his pleasure came, Khal Drogo called out her name (GoT 24, Daenerys 3:236).

This public sexual domination of her *khal* not only upsets the cultural dynamics of sexual propriety, but also leads to the conception of her son,

‘*Khaleesi*, you are with child.’
‘I know,’ Dany told her (GoT 24, Daenerys 3:236).

To medieval standards the sexual act itself was definitive of monstrosity: “The significance of offspring, and their legitimacy meant that husband’s control of their wives’ sexual activity was very important” (Karras 84). Daenerys’ assumption of control of the sexual act therefore not only threatens the social order, but the dynastic lineage.²⁹ As Karras notes, when a woman acted in a way that openly displayed a sexuality that failed to preserve the patriarchal order, she became threatening to a male dominated society. The idea of the female monster being pregnant with meaning becomes a literal marker of sexual conflict with medieval ideals in the form Daenerys Targaryen.

As a result of the sexual liaison that led to her pregnancy being connected with monstrosity, the result is that the child itself bears the markers of such deviance. Mirris Maz Durr informs Daenerys just how her sins have taken shape in the body of her stillborn son,

Monstrous... Twisted. I drew him forth myself. He was scaled like a lizard, blind, with the stub of a tail and small leather wings like the wings of a bat. When I touched him, the flesh sloughed off the bone, and inside he was full of grave worms and the stink of corruption.” (GoT 69, Daenerys 9:756)

²⁹ Sarah Miller also examines the idea of women and their defiance of sexual convention. Her discussion is primarily focused on sexual chastity and spiritual cleanliness, “the orifices and internal material of the female body are abject: they must be hidden in order for men to find the female body attractive; but they also pose a threat to the soundness of the male body” (Miller 35), but nevertheless still reinforce the idea of the connection between sexual activity and its place as a socially accepted means of enforcing male dominance.

The production of a child that is both stillborn and marked by physical deformity means it bears traits that in the Middle Ages would have been seen as a product of the mother's impurities and monstrosity. Sarah Miller's analysis of the Ovidian *De Vetula* describes a monstrous birth: "most monsters are born with either too much, or too little matter" (87). She goes on further to note that such abnormalities might result from a defective womb or improper sexual positions on the part of the woman (87). Since monsters are meaning laden, and markers of social deviance or warnings of the potential for such to exist, the "abnormal births in this text suggests that monsters not only issue from within the boundaries of the female body, they materialize the disordered interior of the female body" (Miller 87).³⁰ Rhaego's monstrous birth is the result of physical, spiritual, or moral imperfections in his mother, and specifically her defiance of sexual convention and position. As a noble mother, from the very moment of her son's birth, Daenerys' failure to produce a normal child signifies her as a monster by medieval standards—like Grendel's mother—and for that she is punished: "The monster mother must endure the death of her child and the realization of her failure to mother her son—to protect him" (Dockray-Miller 89). Before Daenerys can even begin to really identify as a maternal figure, she has already failed in that role, for the birth (or unbirth) of her son.

At this point, it might be easy to simply discard Daenerys as another example of the perpetuation of a misogynistic patriarchal society in both the Middle Ages and *Song of Ice and Fire*, a series, that like much of fantasy, appropriates medieval notions and ideals. It might appear that Martin has simply done as the anonymous *Beowulf* author and use the defiance of male order by a female character as inspiration to condemn his female characters to secondary in

³⁰ For a full discussion of the connection between the female body and its tendency for monstrosity and the resulting abnormal births see Sarah A. Miller's *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body*, particularly chapter 2 Gynecological Secrets, Blood, Seed and Monstrous Births in *De Secretis Mulierum*.

both importance and agency. After all, prominent critics like J.R.R. Tolkien, who perhaps single-handedly legitimized the discussion of monsters in literature in his seminal essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, did little to help dispel notions of women as secondary. In the main body of his twenty-six page essay on the monsters of the poem, he never so much as mentions Grendel's mother, rather relegating her to a brief anecdote buried in the confines of the appendices. Certainly Martin's portrayal of Cersei Lannister, one of the most morally bankrupt characters in the series, who echoes Grendel's mother in many ways, including her opposition to the male hierarchy of the series and her role as a warning regarding the possibilities of female sexuality run amuck, presents a strong case for such a commentary.³¹ When we examine the idea that the success of a medieval mother came vicariously through the successes of their children, in the case of both Cersei Lannister and Grendel's mother, then, part of their monstrosity derives through their failures as nurturers: "The mother-as-monster motif recurs in psychoanalysis: the monstrous mother impedes her child's development; the monstrous mother smothers her child; she does not nurture enough; she emasculates" (Dockray-Miller 90). These two mothers in their behavior directly contribute not just to the monstrous births of their children but in their performance. Grendel "occupied for some time the habit of monstrosities" (Fulk 93.104), and Joffrey's behavior is shockingly nefarious for such a young boy. It might, therefore, be just as easy to lump Grendel's mother, Cersei and Daenerys, whose defiance of sexual norms leads to a

³¹This idea emerges in a discussion of the *Beowulf* Manuscript with Jane Chance, who puts forth the idea of her opposition to the peaceweavers of the poem, her threat to male power and hierarchy is discussed by Gwendolyn Morgan as she counters male authority as a representation of the Great Mother. Glenn Davis comments on her threat as a sexual creature who challenges the expected sexual norms of the time. Certainly, Cersei Lannister's use of her sexuality as a literal weapon: it leads to the birth of her illegitimate children, her husband's murder, and her constant manipulation of several key players in the "game of thrones," to exert her own form of influence. The diversity of medieval scholarship that discusses female sexuality (particularly Grendel's mother) and monstrosity illustrates one the importance of discourse surrounding women that defy ready categorization. Oswald, Taylor and Trilling, among others, highlight this difficulty in classification as a basis for her monstrosity, a notion promoted by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in his book *Monster Theory*, as one of his Seven Theses on monsters.

son so monstrous he does not even survive, into this same category, relegating them all to simple monstrous archetypes, but that would be both unfair and inaccurate.³²

As Frank Kermode says, it is important to look past the surface or “carnal” reading of a text and find the “spiritual” reading lying beneath the simple surface framework. By choosing to look beyond the mere portrayals of sexual defiance of these characters we can find ourselves in a place where meaning has multiple possibilities, “insiders can hope to achieve correction interpretations, their hope may be frequently, perhaps always, disappointed, whereas those outside cannot” (3). Simple either/or interpretations of texts quantify ideologies and simplify debate into a right or wrong, good or evil binary. Both of these are extremes Martin soundly rejects.³³ It is this kind of bifurcation of thought that problematizes readings of a character whose complexities often defy conventional categorization. Dana Oswald speaks of this same type of difficulty when discussing Grendel’s mother: “but what makes her interesting and troubling is that she resists these binaries: she is a woman, she is a mother and she is a monster” (78). It is for these same reasons that Daenerys is so interesting. The struggle of her character to survive in such a harsh world, resonates with, or angers many, because of its relevance. Not only is there a case to be made that our modern world is only marginally different when it comes to the restrictive nature of social convention and the control of the dominant ideology, but that the plight of those outside the dominant culture experience conditions similar to those that existed more than half-millennium ago. It is precisely for this reason that when discussing literature we must be willing to engage in the conversation to begin with.

³² Neither Grendel’s mother, nor Cersei Lannister are so easily defined as monsters either, but a detailed discussion on their potential for category breaking activity is outside the scope of this current work.

³³ For Martin’s self-proclaimed ideas on good vs. evil and morality see notes in the introduction. For further information on Martin’s personal views on these ideas see his interviews with Herman, Gilmore or Pozniewozik, listed in the works cited pages.

The death of Daenerys' son Rhaego is not the end of the conversation, but rather the beginning. From the flames of Daenerys' failures as a physical mother, rises the possibilities for her rebirth as a symbolic one. As it turns out, the child's death is an unfortunate, but necessary, step in the evolution of Daenerys' character as a not just a monster, but a mother, nurturer, protector and a woman who exerts influence. Like his father, Khal Drogo, and the *maegi*, Mirri Maz Duur, Rhaego burns in the crematory flames of the funeral pyre that gives life to Daenerys' dragons. Martin continues the theme inexorably linking death and life. He links Daenerys' personal growth with transformation and with monstrosity. He links her tragedy with triumph in his exploration of the struggle of her character.

In the most basic sense Daenerys fails in her role as a nurturer by her gender dominant defiance of sexual norms (she assumes the dominant position during sex with Khal Drogo). She also fails to produce a living, legitimate heir. Despite these failures, the analysis of her role as a maternal nurturer should not end there. First, the legacy of her son continues through the fires of the dragons' birth. Second, the dragons that are born from those fires will (as previously mentioned) now serve as not only icons of her monstrosity and her symbolic children, but as symbols of her maternal potential for influence and ultimately public authoritative power.³⁴ Her dragons not only provide her with a symbolic maternity, but afford her the ability to transfer this maternity beyond the dragons to those who will be her subjects. It is the discussion of Daenerys

³⁴ In the Middle Ages Dragons were depicted as monstrous, and often times, evil beings. We need look no further than the regularly mentioned *Beowulf*, or the fight between St. George and the Dragon in the *Golden Legend* to see their link to monstrosity. But at the same time, they are revered for their power and strength. One of the most iconic Middle Age heroes and kings is Arthur Pendragon, or in earlier texts Arthur son of Uther Pendragon. His last name in Celtic (Welsh) translates as *Pen Draig* "chief dragon." Druids of the middle ages believed that the earth itself was connected with dragons. The King of Hungary and later Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund founded the chivalric order of the Dragon in 1408. This order would be integral in the crusades and later the defense of Eastern Europe against incursions of the Turks. Vlad Dracul and his infamous son, Vlad Dracul II (Vlad Tsepes) and the inspiration for Stoker's *Dracula*, were members of this honored order. Thus, the idea of dragons as symbols of nobility and power is as old as their connection with monstrosity.

as a symbolic mother of dragons and a figurative mother of her people, and the conflict that exists between the two, that we can uncover something beyond initial examinations of her failures as a nurturer.

Daenerys is no longer a physical mother; she is incapable of filling that role. Her association with the dragons displays her identity as a mother (even though her maternity is symbolic). In fact, throughout the remainder of the series she is identified that way more than any other. Her subjects will call her *Mhysa*, a word which simply means “mother”; and the ultimate end of her noble title is that of Mother of Dragons. When we examine Daenerys’ physical, symbolic and figurative maternity, the intricacies of her role as a nurturer and protector is reminiscent of other medieval figures as well.

Her connection with Grendel’s mother continues through her maternal tie with her children (the dragons) that are both monstrous in nature and conceived without the benefit of a man. Like Grendel, whose lineage marks him a descendant of Cain —“the ill-starred man had / occupied for some time the habitat of monstrosities, after / the Creator had cursed him among the race of Cain (Fulk 93.103-105)—Daenerys’ dragon children might be linked, through medieval fears, with the devil. Somehow both Daenerys and Grendel’s mother conceived children without male intervention, which in itself defies social and spiritual convention. When discussing the medieval expectations of Ovidian poetry, Sarah A. Miller, an expert on medieval monstrosity and the female body, explains how such an unnatural birth would have constituted monstrosity: “the virgin body... becomes transformed into a monstrous maternal body not through intercourse, but by avoiding it” (26). The medieval idea of the chaste woman as a virgin was important for those who remained unmarried. And, in some cases, as with Queen Elizabeth I, it became an example of spiritual purity. Queen Elizabeth’s identification with virginity, coupled

with her role as a symbolic mother to her people led to “the identification of Elizabeth with the Virgin Mary, which developed in the mid-1570s, was very effective in encouraging loyalty to the queen” (Levin 27). Daenerys’ connection with her dragon children as an unwed mother is problematic, but her connection to maternity for her people is reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth. Where her relationship to the dragons is disquieting in many areas, without her connection to the iconic symbol of power in the dragon and her direct tie to the dynastic line of Targaryen she would not be able to establish the authority that allows her to identify with her people as a figurative mother in the first place.

The symbolic maternity that exists as a result of Daenerys’ title of Mother of Dragons, and eventually extends to her role as *Mhysa*, is similar to the symbolic maternity that a likewise unwed Queen Elizabeth used to establish both influence and public authority: “by not marrying, by being both no-one’s mother and everyone’s and by presenting herself as both a virgin to be revered and a sensuous woman to be adored, Elizabeth held a strong psychological hold on her subjects” (Levin 87).³⁵ As long as Daenerys is unwed the role of her symbolic maternity is accepted because there is no biological offspring to vie for the need of nurturing. Further, because of her physical issues: “Mirri Maz Duur had sworn she would never bear a living child, and what man would want a barren wife” (CoK 13:Daenerys 1:200). Being unwed prevents the necessary complications that would arise from her role as a wife. As long as she remains unwed, she is free to fill the role of symbolic mother and nurturer. And, while Daenerys is no virgin, she is very careful to avoid public entanglements of sexuality that would encumber her with

³⁵ The connection between Daenerys and Queen Elizabeth is not intended to be a perfect correlation, and it is understood that there are also significant differences between the two figures, but the relationships that exist, particularly with reference to medieval expectations and performance of symbolic maternity are important in defining how agency might occur in the appropriated culture of *Song of Ice and Fire*. Further, a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the two as female monarchs and the connection they have in regard to public authority is the focus of Chapter III of this work and will address some omissions present in this discussion.

expectations. As a young and very beautiful woman, she naturally attracts men to her cause and is repeatedly seen as a sensuous creature.³⁶ It is the aspect of nurturing and protection that exists in her dual role as Mother of Dragons and *Mhysa* that drives her to have a strong connection with her people, inspiring loyalty and adoration, while at the same time inspiring fear and anger in those who fall outside the bounds of her role as maternal protector. Her dual role and the complications that exist within its framework problematizes her rule and challenges her maternal being throughout the remainder of the current series.

Shortly after her dragons emerge, she must find a way for her hatchlings and the few remaining members of her *khalasar* that remained to survive. She risks everything to protect both sets of her children. In the beginning, many of the *khalasar* die, and she grows weak, but the fear she displays is not for herself, but only for her children,

Dany hungered and thirsted with the rest of them. The milk in her breasts dried up, her nipples cracked and bled, and the flesh fell away from her day by day until she was lean and hard as a stick, yet it was her dragons she feared for” (CoK 13, Daenerys 1:190)

Against uncertain odds, facing imminent death, she fights not for herself, but her children. Her persistence pays off and the group eventually finds sanctuary in a dead city. Then, from out of the wastes, like three wise men in search of the Christ child, three strange visitors, Pyat Pree, a warlock, Xaro Xhoan Daxos, a wealthy merchant, and Quaithe, a mysterious masked woman arrive, “seeking dragons” (CoK 13, Daenerys 1:202). The three strangers seek out the dragons to see them with their own eyes. They want to witness the miraculous appearance of the creatures long thought dead. The arrival of the three strangers seeking to verify the veracity of a

³⁶ There are myriad intricacies that come with the role of an unwed queen including constant rumors of impropriety, a string of suitors that will both help continue the line and return rule to male hands, among others. But, the scope of this chapter focuses only on those centered on symbolic maternity. Those that deal with public authority will be addressed in Chapter III, others are beyond the scope of this work.

miraculous birth further links Daenerys with maternity and with something beyond human.

While her character is inexorably tied with the dragons and monstrosity, in this instance she is also clearly tied to the Virgin Mary and the positive implications of a miraculous birth. She will, like Queen Elizabeth, be able to use the connection to inspire and influence those around her.

The three strangers bring promises, lies and most importantly, protection for both her sets of children. She ventures with them to the city of Quarth. And while her stay here is laced with intrigue, lies and danger, it affords her the opportunity for her children to recover. Playing the dutiful mother, for a time, she sets aside her drive to reclaim the Westerosi throne and allows her children to recover.

Once her children are recovered we see Daenerys resume her sojourn toward conquering Westeros. She ventures to the slave city of Astapor in search of an army that will help her regain control over Westeros. It is here, amidst the backdrop of slavery and subjugation that we see Daenerys' first real display of public authority as a result of her connection with her dragons emerge.³⁷ But, what we also see is the first conflict that arises as a result of her symbolic maternity and her role as a queen that results from that maternity. In order to achieve her ends of conquering Westeros, she must sell one of her dragons. This sale will provide her with enough of the "unsullied" soldiers to form the basis of her army, but it comes at the cost of one of her children. During the entire process of negotiation for her purchase of the army, the slaver Kraznys mo Nakloz refers to her in derogatory and insulting terms. He is unhappy dealing with a woman: "tell the Westerosi whore to lower eyes" (SoS 8, Daenerys 2:312), he says to his interpreter in a language he believes Daenerys cannot understand. While he is unhappy dealing with a woman and a foreigner, whom he deems inferior, he is very conscious of the presence of

³⁷ The role of her dragons and public authority is more deeply examined in Chapter III of this work.

the dragons and the potential for power that accompanies them. His choice to insult her behind her back reinforces her monstrosity; he treats her as an “other,” and clearly places a boundary between himself, his society and her, signaling her position on the periphery. At the same time, his choice to avoid insulting her directly reinforces the perception of power that the dragons, her metaphorical children, bring with them. Despite his control of a massive army and his disdain for her as an outsider and a woman who threatens his masculine power, the presence of the dragons keeps him from taking any form of action.

The choice Daenerys faces between selling one of her dragon children and obtaining her army appears to be a difficult one. From the moment the dragons were born at the end of *Game of Thrones*—when they appeared suckling on her breasts—they were directly tied to her as more than icons of power. She identifies with them as “*my children she told herself and if the maegi spoke truly, they are the only children I am ever like to have*” (SoS 8, Daenerys 1:107). Although a cursory reading may leave readers wondering whether she would actually commit a transgression against motherhood that would even make the despicable Cersei Lannister frown in disapproval, it is clear from the instant the offer is made that it is little more than pretense.

She clearly understands the potential for agency that resides in her connection with her dragons, and thus her maternity. The conditions therefore exist where she is able to exert influence and obtain her goals by playing on the perceived expectations of those who see her in that role. She uses Kraznyz Mo Nakloz’ arrogance and disdain for women to easily maneuver him into a situation where she not only gains the army she seeks but retains possession of her dragons. Having successfully nurtured them from birth and taught them how to act according to *their* roles, they support her maternity through action. The young Drogon reacts precisely as any loving child would when asked by their mother to do something,

‘Drogon,’ she sang out loudly, sweetly, all her fear forgotten. ‘*Dracarys*’
 The black dragon spread his wings and roared.
 A lance of swirling dark flame took Kraznyz full in the face. His eyes melted and
 ran down his cheeks (SoS 26, Daenerys 3:380).

What ensues is complete chaos, the destruction of Astapor and the successful completion of Daenerys immediate goal of obtaining an army.

As a result of her action, she frees the slaves of the city from their overseers and gains their loyalty, “the raggle-taggle host of freedmen dwarfed her own...*I told them they were free. I cannot tell them now they are not free to join me*” (SoS 40, Daenerys 4:574). These people are scared and see sanctuary in the host of the Mother of Dragons. They identify protection with her role as mother and begin to see her as a figurative mother. After the city of Yunkai falls to her, those she frees begin to chant *Mhysa*:

Dany looked at Missendei. ‘What are they shouting?’
 ‘It is Ghiscari, the old pure tongue. It means ‘Mother’
 Dany felt a lightness in her chest. *I will never bear a living child*” (SoS 40,
 Daenerys 4:588),

Indeed, she may never bear natural children again, but those that call her *Mhysa* serve as a figurative proxy.

At this point, Daenerys not only sees herself as the mother of dragons, but like Queen Elizabeth, sees herself as the mother of the multitudes. She will, like her historical counterpart, begin “presenting herself as one whose great strength came in the love she had, almost suggesting an all-loving mother, and implying that this was the key to her successful reign” (Levin 146). Daenerys’ role as a nurturer affords her agency and the ability to rule many. Her self-identification as a symbolic mother allows her to successfully accomplish her goals. But by aligning herself with the role of figurative mother, she also becomes responsible for the well-being of her children. It is her role as *Mhysa* and as a nurturer that begins to drive almost every

decision she makes over the next several books. It is also the role of Mhysa that complicates her performance as a public authoritative figure and that leads eventually to her undoing.

From the moment her dragons help her free the first slaves in Astapor, the conflict of her maternal duality begins. On one hand she is *Mhysa*, and on the other Mother of Dragons. While she tries desperately to navigate these two identities, hoping for a resolution that allows her to be both, the resolution to the conflict does not have such an easy compromise. Certainly, her children, those who call her *Mhysa*, look to her for protection and guidance, and so as their figurative mother she has influence over their lives, but this influence is not the same as that granted by her dragons. Rather than helping her achieve her goals, it acts as a burden, forcing her to re-evaluate everything she does with their well-being in mind.

As a female ruler, Daenerys' identity as a mother is necessary for her assumption of power, but it is also an inescapable flaw. At times, she will face condemnation for decisions made not as a queen, but as a woman and a mother. Since the Middle Ages, women, even those in positions of power, were perceived to be weak simply by virtue of gender. Carole Levin, when commenting on Queen Elizabeth, outlines this problem, "her body was a human female one, and hence to both Elizabeth herself and to her people, an imperfect one" (147).³⁸ Thus the queen faced challenges that no male ruler would ever have had to face. Queen Mary, Elizabeth's predecessor, was identified as "Bloody Mary" for her harsh and gender-defying execution of over three-hundred Protestants.³⁹ Aware of this perception, Elizabeth carefully weighed her options before doling out punishments, and was likewise chastised for it, but often for "being too

³⁸ A more detailed discussion of the two bodies of ruling queens and the idea of gender transgression appears in Chapter III on Public Authority. For now, the discussion focuses more directly on the maternal complications of nurturing.

³⁹ Mary's identity as an overly harsh ruler whose tendency to react outside the expected social ideal of a female mercy, created a resentment in her rule. By assuming the typically male dominated posture of punisher, many found her decisions hard to stomach. For more information on this see Sarah Duncan's essay "Most godly heart, fraught will al mercie" Queen's mercy during the reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I.

merciful, particularly toward Catholics” (Duncan 42). Simply by virtue of being a woman any leniency could be met with derision, any severity of punishment challenged, “she also understood, however, that no matter what her actions during her reign, she could be accused of being both too merciful and merciless at the same time” (Duncan 43). Daenerys, by virtue of her similar position as a figurative mother to all and to yet to none, bears similar responsibilities and suffers similar condemnations, particularly when trying to protect those who call her *Mhysa*.

Her city is in chaos. It is under the pressures of a siege; it is dealing with constant threats from the Sons of the Harpy (who attack her children) attempting to get her to vacate her rule; and it is struggling to accept her as the rightful ruler. Daenerys must try to rule, but struggles as she identifies more and more as *Mhysa* rather than Mother of Dragons.

Trying to fulfill her role as *Mhysa*, after the brutal murders of some of her citizens, to prevent further attacks she plans to claim prisoners:

‘They are afraid for their children,’ Reznak said.
Yes, Daenerys thought, *and so am I*, ‘We must keep them safe as well’” (DwD 11, Daenerys 2:150).

Her decision to take hostages is met with derision. Those who must give up the hostages see her as a tyrant. When she promises not to harm the hostages (after the attacks continue and more deaths occur), there are those who see her as too weak:

‘The Sons of the Harpy are laughing in their pyramids,’ Skahaz said, just this morning. ‘What good are hostages if you will not take their heads?’ In his eyes she was only a weak woman’ (DwD 23, Daenerys 4:294).

Her need to protect her children as *Mhysa* repeatedly comes at odds with her rule and her role as Mother of Dragons. “Dany vaulted down from her horse. ‘I cannot heal them, but I can show them that their Mother cares’” (DwD 36, Daenerys 6:476). Her desire to nurture in this instance takes her into the heart of a plague stricken section of her city. By risking her own life, trying to

comfort those who are suffering (in an act she believes shows that she cares) she actually endangers them all, which counters her role as a nurturing and protecting mother. If she should grow ill as a result of the plague, the consequences could be catastrophic, as the city is left without a ruler or an heir. With the loss of the figurative mother there would no longer be anyone left to nurture and protect her children, thus insuring that there would be more losses.

Many around her see her reckless behavior and fear for the well-being of the city. The looming possibility of the anarchy that would result from her death, causes a resurgence in desires for her to marry and thus secure the future of the city. As she continues to make rash decisions in an effort to protect her children, she drifts more and more away from her role as Mother of Dragons. By trying to protect those who call her *Mhysa*, she forgets that it was the role of Mother of Dragons that originally granted her the ability to become *Mhysa*. Her loss of connection with the dragons begins an erosion of her influence and agency.

For a long while Daenerys had been making decisions to protect her children at the expense of her dragons, the children physically linked with her maternity. While she believed each of these decisions was in the best interest of her city, what she failed to realize is that the role of Mother of Dragons is what afforded her the right to those decisions in the first place.

By deciding to remain in Mereen, she first places her ability to maintain the influence she is gaining at risk. Not only does her presence in Mereen stand at odds to her legitimate rule of Westeros, which is critical, but it places her role as mother (*Mhysa*) is at odds with her role as queen and Mother of Dragons. Her identity as a dragon, and a legitimate ruler as Mother of Dragons, lies far away, across the sea. In Mereen, she is simply seen as a usurper, much as she views those who rule in Westeros. Even had she been male, the possibility of ruling a foreign

city would have been daunting, a task Machievelli describes in detail in the *Prince*,⁴⁰ and plagued with intrigue. But as a woman, and a figurative mother, the task is impossible. And when her role as Mother of Dragons and *Mhysa* come to a heart-rending, climactic confrontation, her decision severs her tie with the dragons and thus her power, and by doing so also unknowingly severs her ability to effectively nurture as a figurative mother of those that call her *Mhysa*.

Bones they were, broken bones and blackened. The longer ones had been cracked open for the marrow.

‘It were the black one,’ the man said, in a Ghiscari growl, ‘the winged shadow. He come down from the sky and ... and...’

No. Dany shivered. *No, no, oh no...*

No, Dany thought, *those are the bones of a child*. (DwD 3, Daenerys 1:45)

It is a position where almost nothing she can do will succeed. One of her symbolic dragon children appears to have killed one of her figurative children. As Mother of Dragons, she is condemned to monstrosity for the actions of her dragon child, but as *Mhysa*, she suffers the loss of one of her own. How can she possibly reconcile the two? No matter what she chooses she will fail at least one aspect of her maternity. She has drifted so far from her connection with the dragons that she cannot see the integral part they play in her ability to function as a ruler. She makes her decision then, not as a queen mother, but as a grief stricken mother. She does what she thinks is best and tries to protect both sets of children. She imprisons the dragons to keep them safe from those who will seek vengeance—although Drogon escapes before this can happen—and she imprisons the dragons to protect the remainder of her children from more possible

⁴⁰ An entire section could be devoted to the strategic and political intrigues and errors that scar Daenerys’ attempt to control Meereen as a foreign “Prince.” I am aware that there is an argument to be made that her downfall is political, but ultimately, the decisions she makes are made out of a desire to save her children and therefore the strategic errors she makes are directly tied to her role as a mother, and not a ruler. It is by virtue of her loss of identity as Mother of Dragons that she commits these errors. This situation compounds the already difficult challenge of foreign domination that would have plagued even a male ruler and made such a task difficult at best.

predation. From the moment she does this, she loses her identity as Mother of Dragons and thus erodes her agency. More telling is the fact that, as yet, she does not understand her folly. In a moment of contemplation regarding the dragon's imprisonment, she wonders "What sort of mother lets her children rot in darkness" (DwD 11, Daenerys 2:159), suggesting that she mistakenly sees her power as coming from the people and not the dragons. "*Was I so blind, or did I close my eyes, willfully, so I would not have to see the price of power?*" (DwD 11, Daenerys 2:159). She thinks that in order to retain her power, she must turn her back on her symbolic dragon children. Ironically, by denying her connection to the monstrous maternity of the dragons, and by attempting to situate herself within Meereen culture, she loses her agency. As a perpetually liminal figure straddling two worlds, she was presented with situations that, while complicated, often afforded her influence and allowed her to obtain her goals. When she attempts to shed her dual role and reside within a singular world, her identity as foreign nevertheless prevents this integration and forbids her attempt, because by the standards of the people, her identity, regardless of the dragons, is still that of an 'other.' Now, she is simply an 'other,' who is no longer a Mother of Dragons, and therefore no longer able to effectively act as *Mhysa*. The loss of her symbol that legitimized her rule and her identity as a mother is gone. She becomes simply a woman in need of a husband, which means she can no longer act.

As a result, she is forced to marry Hizdahr Zo Loraq. With her marriage to Hizdahr, who desires to kill her imprisoned dragons, not only does she completely sever her ties with her dragons, and thus her agency, but the tenuous grasp she has on protecting her children disappears as well. Now married, her role changes to that of intercessor and Hizdahr assumes rule. Her children remain safe only at the whim of her husband.

While the marriage initially seems to create the peace she so desperately desired, all the hard work she put in to change the conditions under which her children lived slowly erode, culminating in the reopening of the fighting pits she closed. The pits serve as her ultimate moment of her greatest failures as a mother. The children she strived so hard to protect, when she abandoned her dragons, die fighting on the sands of the pit, or revel in the savagery of the sport, displaying a blatant disregard for her desires and we are once again reminded of the pain of such a loss for Daenerys, whose maternity is tied directly with monstrosity and her dragons: “The monster mother must endure the death of her child and the realization of her failure to mother her son—to protect him” (Dockray-Miller 89).

It is at the fighting pits, in the moments of her deepest failure, when we are once again reminded of the transformative power of fire and blood and the deep link Daenerys’ maternity, agency and ability to act have with her dragons. Daenerys is at her lowest point, when her agency is all but gone. She has lost touch with her identity as Mother of Dragons completely and thus is no longer able to protect those who call her *Mhysa*. Quaithe reinforces the importance of her connection with the dragons when she appears to Daenerys after her flight from Droznak’s pit, “remember who you are, Daenerys’. The stars whispered in a woman’s voice. ‘The dragons know, do you?’” (DwD 71, Daenerys 10:936). In order for her to once again be able to protect her people, she must first reclaim her connection with her dragons.

Helping her to reclaim that identity, Drogon, her missing dragon, and the largest of her symbolic children, appears from out of the sky. Just as he did with the child that sent the dragons into chains, he appears as a shadow and flame. He returns to his mother in the moment of her greatest need and provides her with the impetus needed to reclaim her identity. With the pits in flames, people screaming and running for their lives, Daenerys sees her dragon not as a beast

ravaging the pits, but as her child in need of protection. When her husband orders the death of her child, the maternal instinct to protect her offspring overwhelms her. Daenerys rushes to Drogon's side trying to save him. The dragon is a beast of rage and conflict. He is the symbol of her rage, welling inside. He turns on her, barely able to refrain from killing her. But as his mother, Daenerys is able to do what no other could. She exerts her maternal influence and controls him, but not before he once again burns away her hair. In that moment of confusion, that moment where chaos reigned and there was nothing that existed but Daenerys and her dragon, she embraced her nature and her identity as Mother of Dragons. She is carried off for the last time in the series at this point. Once again, she disappears amidst fire and blood, her hair singed away. She becomes one with her dragon, so much that those who see her cannot be sure whether she is alive. Rumors abound regarding her safety.

When last we see Daenerys she is living monstrous existence, eating the leavings of her dragon offspring, slumbering in his shadow and trying to find a way to return to Meereen. But as she contemplates her return to Meereen, she realizes her mistakes, her husband's duplicity, the danger she has placed her children in and that, as Quaithe reminded her, she has lost her way. To regain her path, to once again find her true direction, she must discover that, "to go north, you must journey south. To reach the west, you must go east. To go forward you must go back, and to touch the light you must pass beneath the shadow" (SoS 26, Daenerys 3:375). Daenerys now understands that her role lies between the worlds, and that she must embrace this, and the monstrosity it brings, in order to achieve her goals. She has traveled back, back to her dragons, and she has loomed under the shadow of Drogon, and in the very last POV moment of her in the story, we see her covered in ash, and soot, just having finished a meal of charred and bloodied flesh with her dragon, greeted by the *khalasar* of Khal Jaquo: "Dany rose, wiped her hands on

her ragged undertunic, and went to stand beside her dragon” (DwD 71 Daenerys 10:943). Where the story will proceed from here is still undetermined, but in the construction of Daenerys’ character it is clear that any form of agency she has is tied with her dragons. Her role as mother and as *Mhysa* is tied to her dragons. Her success as a nurturer is tied to her dragons. And, as I will examine in the next chapter, her ability to step beyond the confines of maternal agency, and embrace any public authoritative power, is also directly connected with her identity as Mother of Dragons.

“Power lies only where men believe it lies” – Varys (Martin, CoK 7 Tyrion 2: 132).

CHAPTER IV

The Mother of Dragons: The Role of Maternity and Public Authority

In the Middle Ages power was often defined at the point of a sword. Typical public authority was most commonly linked with masculinity and male power: “Authority, defined as ‘recognized and legitimized power,’ was strictly reserved for males” (Bennett, *Power* 19). In a world ruled by patriarchy, it was the man—and the one with the most money or the biggest army—who drew respect. Women were often relegated to the secondary citizenship. The most important role a woman might obtain was that of a mother: “the medieval elite woman, whose ordained role in life was to be a wife and mother” (Shadis 335).⁴¹ As a mother a woman could carry on the line of her husband, thus insuring his legacy. Women, particularly those of noble or royal status, were often married to cement male dominated power structures. In this regard women served as peaceweavers, and often intercessors.⁴² Women in these positions understood the proprieties they carried with them, and, under the correct circumstances, found conditions where they could influence actions and outcomes: “female intercession was approved of as consistent with the patriarchal monarchy” (Bucholz and Levin xxv). It was expected that women inspire and influence responses to “exploit their intercession for their own ends—to win supporters, to create networks of mutual obligations, and . . . to shape popular opinion of themselves and the king” (Parsons 48). The medieval noblewoman or queen thus might achieve Erler and Kowaleski’s redefined power: agency in support of her king’s rule and by virtue of

⁴¹ For more on the role of a mother and the importance of her impact on society as a nurturer and protector see Chapter II of this work

⁴² The discussion of the role of women as peaceweavers and intercessors takes place in Chapter I of this work.

proximity to his rule. In their role as wives and mothers, peaceweavers and intercessors, women who achieved agency were still necessarily submissive to their male counterpart.

But what about those women who must play the game of thrones without a male counterpart? What happened to those women who, through unique circumstances, found themselves in positions of public authority that did not account for a male dominated connection with public power? For these women, the ability to influence others and achieve agency was greatly increased. For these women the role as queen, sans king, was a complicated and difficult situation that required a very specific set of circumstances to become possible.

Although she was born shortly after the end of the late Middle Ages, the Historical Queen Elizabeth lived in a society that still bore many of the hallmark misogynistic and patriarchal trappings of the age that ended only a quarter century before her birth. Before Elizabeth I ascended to the throne there were myriad questions centered on her rulership simply because she was a woman: “the ambivalence centered directly on the conflict between her rule and her femininity. If a queen were confidently to demonstrate the attributes of power, she would not be acting in a womanly manner; yet womanly behavior would ill-fit a queen for the rigors of rule” (Levin 3). For women like Elizabeth I, maintaining a connection with the male-oriented ideal of public authority necessarily required a re-designation of the idea of power: “In the absence of a dominating male, the unusual combination of gender and royal authority gave these women an opportunity to redefine power and gender roles (as applied to royal women anyway) by exploiting the ambiguity involved in the status of being a female king” (Bucholz and Levin xvii).

Redefining power meant being identified as not only women, but men. They became creatures with two bodies—“if there are two images of a queen, one male and one female, then the male image is the one with power” (Levin 125)—which meant that these women, by virtue of

their position, defied gender norms. Women rulers able to secure public authority through this redefinition of power had a feminine (and therefore potentially weak and monstrous body) and a male public body politic. Such female rulers were not only “monstrously out of bounds ‘by nature’ (where ‘nature’ does not imply nature at all, but a defined set of assumptions and prescriptions by which medieval authorities defined women and their bodies)” (Miller 5), by virtue of simply being women, but also transgressors of gender boundaries. By assuming the expected male role of a king in the form of their body politic, they became “harbingers of category crisis” and potentially connected with the monstrosity that accompanies a lack of easy categorization.⁴³ These women were both king and queen. Whether or not they found success in their role was dependent on their ability to redefine the power dynamics through a successful administration of the body politic.

Queen Elizabeth I was clearly seen as a woman who “even without her queenly trappings . . . was the one who held power” (Levin 147) by virtue of her ability to present herself as both a capable ruler and a woman. Elizabeth was an ideal image of femininity. She was a figurative mother to her citizens and thus seen as a proper maternal image, but she was also unmarried and played up her connection with the Virgin Queen establishing herself as a virginal representation of proper Christian morality and chastity, “in time, many of her subjects did accept Elizabeth as a substitute for the Virgin Mary” (Levin 28). Further, Elizabeth understood that the more favorable representations of her feminine character must necessarily be offset by a regularly public body that was seen as “pure and virginal, and the incarnation of the sacred principle of male monarchy” (Levin 147). She was well aware that her nature as a woman made her personal (non-politic) body “potentially corrupt in a manifestly female way” (Levin 147). She masterfully

⁴³ See *Monster Theory* by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen for a full examination of his seven theses on monstrosity.

crafted her public image to help her, create a dominant soul for her country, one that Foucault might describe as “the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body” (29). This duality of Elizabeth’s rule, her ability to manage the heart of a king, but the body of a queen, was a hallmark of her successful rule. This is not to say that her rule was not challenged with rumors, innuendo, subterfuge, and repeated attempts to get her to marry; it was. Only that her ability to understand the circumstances that afforded her the right not just to gain agency, but actual authority allowed her to manipulate the situation in her favor.⁴⁴

The first of the circumstances that needed to occur for a woman of the Middle Ages (like Elizabeth) to rightfully claim public authority was that the rule of primogeniture must be followed.⁴⁵ Primogeniture, or the laws of succession, required that land and titles be passed down to the eldest surviving heir, with males taking precedence: “this corresponds to a strong medieval interest in genealogy, reflecting not only the nobility’s anxieties about their origins by which they legitimated their rule, but also the need to give everything a place in the Christian history of the world as recorded in the bible” (Karras 10). When there were no surviving male heirs, the rule of primogeniture, which was designed to ensure that the eldest male heir would inherit the royal titles, allowed for women to supersede men in legitimate claims to the throne, and public authority. Proper lineage legitimated the power of public authority for women who fell into the appropriate lines of succession. Men who otherwise might doubt a woman’s ability, or right, to rule were often more afraid of the uncertainty of a change in dynastic rulership, and would therefore support a queen. Many times these men supported the coronation of a female ruler in

⁴⁴ During her rule, no matter how successful she was, she was still always seen as a woman. There were no less than three significant cries for her to marry. Her marriage would have secured the dynastic line, and returned power to a more stable male control. Elizabeth understood her right rule depending on not being married, as she would need to cede power as soon as she married.

⁴⁵ Technically Elizabeth ruled slightly after the end of the Middle Ages, but her era was still marred by its patriarchal and misogynistic ideals.

anticipation of her marriage and a return to male rule; but nonetheless, the idea of the security that a continuation of the line provided sometimes triumphed over fears of gender performance. For a historical figure such as Elizabeth, who was the female daughter of a king, continuation of the line meant that it was expected that the responsibilities of rule would pass to her brother and she would be subject to his direction. The English parliament so feared a female ruler that in 1536 they declared both Elizabeth and her half-sister, Mary, illegitimate. Seven years later that proviso was removed and the two women were again restored to the line of succession, but at that time a male heir, Edward was in line to ascend to the throne and there was little concern over any real possibility that either woman would indeed someday rule. Yet in 1553, with the death of Edward, Mary became queen and the landscape of English politics transformed. Mary's reign was short and unsuccessful, but in 1558 Elizabeth became Queen of England. In an age when "the very existence of a woman ruler challenged traditionally held beliefs that the monarch as God's representative ought, by definition, to be male" (Levin 2), a queen created all sorts of problems. Yet, there were many who were more scared of a disruption in the legitimate line of succession than of a female ruler. Because of the expectations of continuing the lines of succession, and the fear of uncertainty created by its disruption, Elizabeth's claim to the throne was legitimized and secured her right to rule. Upon her ascension to the throne, her public authority was supported as a part of the laws of succession. Out of this volatile political landscape Elizabeth emerged as her country's leader.

The second condition necessary for a woman of the Middle Ages to assume authoritative power was a single status, ideally coupled with an appearance of chaste virginity, or at least the appearance of a sexual morality in line with the dominant ideology. Just as the intercessor accompanied the female role of peaceweaver and demanded a submissive relationship to the

dominant male monarch, the role of female monarch demanded its absence: “Marriage sharply divided the public power of the sexes. It dramatically expanded men’s access to power through landholding, legal competency and social action, and just as dramatically limited the access of women to the same activities” (Bennett, *Public* 23). Since the primary expected role of the medieval woman was as that of a wife and mother, when they filled the role of wife, it prevented them from crossing the gender barrier necessary to assume public authority. For a queen to remain the queen, and yet act in a manner typically consistent with kingly ideals, she must then remain unmarried.

The third condition for a queen to assume, or at least continue to maintain, public authority in the medieval period was a connection to an identity as a symbolic mother. The primary role of a woman was to be a wife and a mother. By fulfilling the role of wife, through being wed to her people rather than any dominant male figurehead, her maternity could also be accomplished by acting as a mother to her citizens. In this circumstance, as wife and mother to the nation rather than a male ruler, the queen was subordinate to no one specific, but yet could be connected intimately with all of her subjects. The connection to figurative maternity was integral in helping to establish the idea of female public authority.

If all three of these circumstances co-existed, then it was possible for a female ruler to redefine the role of public authority through her assumption of both a kingly and queenly form. In *The Song of Ice and Fire*, George R. R. Martin continues his appropriation of medieval ideals by helping to reinforce typical expectations of male dominated public authority. At the same time Martin establishes an environment where male public authority dominates, he also provides conditions where there is potential for his female characters to challenge that typical public authority. Of course, because of his appropriation of medieval power structures and hierarchies,

in order to challenge that male dominated authority, the women of his world must have the same conditions exist: proper rules of primogeniture, a single (and preferably chaste) status, and a figurative maternity. Throughout the series, several of the women are able to attain various levels of agency, but only Daenerys Targaryen is actually able to obtain any real form of political public authority, precisely because her rule, at least on occasion, meets all of these criteria.

Martin reinforces the strong connection between the first of these three criteria, rules of primogeniture, and the ability to obtain public authority, repeatedly. We see its importance highlighted in the failed attempt by Cersei Lannister to assume control of the Seven Kingdoms. Without legitimate succession, she is met with resounding resistance, both by circumstance and Martin's construction. When her husband dies (indirectly through her hands) succession falls to her son, Joffrey, just as she desired. In her role as queen she was able to use her ability as an intercessor to promote action. In this case, the action led to the death of her husband. When Joffrey dies, a victim of a clever assassination attempt, the rules of primogeniture pass the throne to her youngest son, Tommen. As a boy who has yet to reach the age of majority, he will therefore require a regent to support his rule. Because Cersei is not part of the legitimate line of succession, she must remain, even as queen regent, or queen dowager, an intercessor, urging action on the behalf of her younger son Tommen. But Cersei, is not content to fill her role. Despite that her successful navigation of this role has allowed her to accomplish some of her very lofty goals, after her son's death, she attempts to take a public authoritative power for herself. With Tommen as king, her actions defy both patriarchal and gender conventions when she assumes the role of actor without the necessary permission granted through legitimate succession. Martin's deep respect for the medieval tradition of succession is so entrenched in Westerosi society that those around her cannot abide her actions. Her uncle refuses to serve as

the Hand of a woman ruler. When she offers him the title of Hand of the King, his response is not what she desires:

‘so long as you name me regent as well as Hand and take yourself back to Casterly Rock.’ For half a heartbeat Cersei could only stare at him. “*I am the regent,*” she reminded him. ‘You were. Tywin did not intend that you continue in that role. He told me of his plans to send you back to the Rock and find a new husband for you.’ (FfC 8, Cersei:2 161)

Her Uncle Kevan’s response is a crystal clear reflection of both medieval ideals regarding the role of women in that culture and an example of how Martin’s construction of the world of Westeros reflects that culture. Cersei, as an unmarried and widowed queen who falls outside the lines of succession has no rights to action. Further, since the men in power who provided her access to her intercessory role are now either deceased or underage, when she tries to assume a male dominated mantle of power, her uncle reminds her of the proper place of a medieval woman: as a wife and a mother. Had Cersei been content to remain merely queen dowager, she may have continued her relationship with patriarchal power through her son Tommen, perhaps even urging and influencing him to actions that achieved her goals. But, because she openly defied all conventions and attempted to claim masculine power without the required trappings of the position, she instead found herself stripped of her titles and eventually imprisoned and humiliated.⁴⁶

In contrast to Cersei, whose only claim to agency is proximate, like Queen Elizabeth, Daenerys Targaryen (after her brother Viserys’ death) finds herself in a position where the rules of primogeniture will afford her public authority. With all the male heirs to the throne deceased,

⁴⁶ These crimes are not her only against patriarchal rule, or primogeniture. She is also guilty of an incestuous adultery. Technically, her children are not legitimate heirs, but bastard born, as a result of that monstrous liaison. However, the allegations that surround their births are yet to be officially proven. Still, her open defiance of the lines of succession are enough for her to be punished and used as an example for those who would defy the gender conventions of submissive intercession.

laws of succession actually create a situation, where as the *only* remaining Targaryen heir, Daenerys becomes the answer to legitimate ascension. She becomes, because of the laws of primogeniture, what many of those in the Seven Kingdoms see as the rightful heir, justifying not only her agency, but her potential for real public power. When an assassin tries to kill her as the last remaining Targaryen, and therefore the last legitimate threat to the current rule of Robert Baratheon, the importance of Daenerys' position and that of lineage is clearly reinforced: "The poisoned wine was leaking from the broken cask into the dirt" (GoT 55, Daenerys 6: 591). But, while Daenerys is the heir to the Westerosi throne, she is still just the *khaleesi* of the dothraki. It is not until the *khal* dies a short while later that she finds herself in the situation of having no male monarch in a position of proximate power, allowing her to assume the active role of a queen.

While she is now capable of acting as a dynastic and rightful heir of the Dragon line, she is also a foreign princess in a foreign land, and therefore subject to foreign rules. The *khal's* death not only frees her to act, but complicates her situation, by endangering her to a society that sees widowed women as crones:

Dany did not want to go back to Vaes Dothrak and live the rest of her life among those terrible old women, yet she knew the knight spoke the truth. Drogo had been more than her sun-and-stars; he had been the shield that kept her safe." (GoT 65, Daenerys 8:708)

For Daenerys, who resides between two worlds, her very body is even more potentially monstrous and out of bounds than her female counterparts. She not only represents feminine monstrosity, but the monstrosity of the other, the monstrosity of the hybrid and the monstrosity of the category crisis. Therefore, in order for her connection to authority to be validated, so must her monstrosity.

This occurs with the birth of her dragons and her symbolic connection to maternity. The three dragons, who represent the iconic medieval image of public power, are also monsters. Their connection with Daenerys readily ties her to both power, and by virtue of her symbolic maternity, monstrosity.⁴⁷ The proximate physical, hammer and anvil type of power that the body of the dragons represent and their symbol as the hereditary image for house Targaryen, provide Daenerys a legitimacy to her claims of public authority in both the Dothraki and Westerosi cultures. The Dothraki respect the tangible physical force of the dragons' real power and the Westerosi respect their connection to the Targaryen line. Daenerys' connection with the dragons reinforces her place as legitimate heir to the Targaryen line of succession. The dragons themselves can also be readily connected to the idea of the medieval concept of the tricephalic monster. The three-headed dragons symbolize Daenerys' existence in multiple places: "the tricephalic monster, as we have communicated, also communicates the sense of 'being in every moment'" (Williams 133). The birth of the dragons derives from the death fires of Drogo, Rhaego and Mirri Maz Duur, implying through the crone's assertion that only "death can pay for life," that these three characters and their souls provide the life force needed to bring the dragons forth from their eggs. This connection implies the dragons existed in the souls of the cremated bodies both before they actually emerged from their eggs, and now remain as three living, breathing entities. The dragons therefore exist in both moments: past and present. Daenerys' connection with the dragons allows her to defy convention and exist in multiple cultures and multiple roles, albeit with a monstrous quality. Her existence defines her as something that is mother, ruler and monster, but by its very nature must not be any of these things: "the deformed

⁴⁷ For more discussion on Daenerys' connection to the dragons as a metaphorical mother, and the monstrosity contained therein see Chapter II of this work. For an outline of the dragon's importance in medieval tradition as a symbol of monstrosity and power see note 10 in Chapter II.

must reinforce form; the monster must be and must not be at the same time” (Williams 133). Yet while Daenerys might not be the biological mother of the dragons, the text makes clear her maternal connection to them:

Dany hungered and thirsted with the rest of them. The milk in her breasts dried up, her nipples cracked and bled, and the flesh fell away from her day by day until she was lean and hard as a stick, yet it was her dragons she feared for. (CoK 13, Daenerys 1:190)⁴⁸

By residing on the Dothraki Sea she has no immediate connection to the lands of her heredity (Westeros) and therefore no real rights of rule, yet laws of succession make her a queen. She is monstrous by her connection to the dragons as a mother, but by her physical make-up and outwardly beautiful and innocent appearance, she is the image of a medieval maiden.

Simultaneously then, just as her dragons were eggs and alive, but yet unborn, and Drogo, Rhaego and Mirri Maz Duur were burned in the flames of the funeral pyre, yet reborn as the dragons, Daenerys occupies three roles of mother, ruler and monster, but at the same time, resides cleanly within none of them. Each of her roles are dependent on her connection with the dragons, not only as symbols of monstrosity, but like their tricephalic representation, also masculinity and power. As a woman who is monster, mother and ruler, and whose body politic is now represented in masculine terms (as a hereditarily legitimated ruler and via her connection with the dragons), when the fires of the funeral pyre burn away her role as an intercessor, like Queen Elizabeth, she is able to assume a role of public authority. The dragons serve as the vehicle through which she is able to convince two diverse cultures of her authority. So long as she remains connected to the dragons, and the symbolic maternity they represent, she is able to assume the role of authoritative figure and influence others.

⁴⁸ This quote also appears in Chapter II, during a more detailed discussion of Daenerys’ connection with the dragons and maternity.

Martin's appropriation of the conditions necessary for a woman to assume the mantle of public authority continues in his representation of the role of marriage and sexual chastity, or spiritual cleanliness, and female authority. Once again, we can turn an eye toward Queen Elizabeth for a historical example of how marriage and sexual propriety influence the ability of a woman to obtain public authority. Queen Elizabeth I came to her role through legitimate laws of succession, but many who supported her thought that she would marry and thus restore the male line of succession, by transferring her role from queen to wife: "unmarried, Elizabeth, avoided the role of wife and the risk of being perceived as the inferior partner in the marriage relationship" (Levin 65). To many of those in the court, a female monarch was merely a short-term, stop gap solution: "Everyone expected she would marry and solve the problem of being a woman ruler by turning the governance over to her husband" (Levin 3). Yet in each case, she declined.⁴⁹ And it is readily believed that, at least part of her ability to successfully manipulate both the conditions of her betrothal and the influence of her councilors allowed her to remain single and thus in the position of public authority: "Marriage to anyone would have robbed Elizabeth of power and have been potentially divisive... her success as a monarch was inextricably women into her refusal to wed" (Levin 8). Elizabeth was a profoundly adept politician working within the confines of her own people, and schooled in the arts of courtly behavior through years of having to survive its dangerous liaisons under her father's and then sister's rule. While she ruffled some feathers, and was forever burdened by this expectation, she

⁴⁹ Declined, demurred or delayed, the three main attempts to marry her off each met with the same conclusion, refusal. Her first betrothal to the Archduke Charles I ended ostensibly over religious differences, leading Charles to end the courtship and seek marriage elsewhere; the second courtship to the Duke of Anjou once again derailed due to religious issues and a confrontation with Catherine DeMedici; and the third, to Francis, Duke of Alencon, was doomed probably before it began. Her age and concerns over fertility were major concerns. Some speculate that these marriages never happened because of her rumored attachment to Robert Dudley, but more probably it was simply her exceptional understanding of the necessity of remaining single coupled with convenient and timely circumstances that allowed her to manipulate the end of each courtship.

was able to deftly avoid any real permanent marriage entanglements until she literally outgrew the issue. Once she was no longer of viable child-bearing age, the idea of marriage became less prominent in her rule. For her, the worst of it was innuendo, rumor and poorly conceived attempts to implant suspicion regarding the line of succession: “however effective a ruler Elizabeth in particular might be, the fact that she was a woman was insurmountable—and thus in part cause of the longing for the king that was manifest in the belief of Edward VI’s survival” (Levin 91). Should the presumed dead king return to life and his existence be verified under God, it would have thrown Elizabeth’s claim to the throne out, as the rules of primogeniture would have legitimized him instead of her. Several times during Elizabeth’s reign imposters presented themselves as claimants to the throne, including young Edward Featherstone, who actually claimed to be Edward VI, and was eventually executed for impersonating a royal person.⁵⁰ None of the spurious claims were ever able to erode Elizabeth’s supremacy, partially due to their circumstantial nature, but more likely because of her adroit management of her role as public authority, which helped to curb any real enthusiasm for these rumors, and quell the bitter taste of rejection when she repeatedly spurned her noble suitors. Elizabeth’s image as a queen remained intact by virtue of her unmarried status and retained its prominence because of her connection to her sexual identity as a proxy for the Virgin Mary.

The medieval idea of a chaste woman was an ideal that the bodies of women were naturally prone to monstrosity. In order for a woman to remain appealing, she needed to do her best to refrain from sexual promiscuity by concealing the sexual identity that lay beneath appropriate attire and action: “the orifices and internal material of the female body are abject: they must be hidden in order for men to find the female body attractive; but they also pose a

⁵⁰ For more information on the various attempts to promote alternatives to Elizabeth’s legitimacy and the specific incident with Edward Featherstone see *The Heart and Stomach of a King* by Carole Levin.

threat to the soundness of the male body” (Miller 35). As Sarah Miller mentions, when a woman acted in a way that openly displayed a sexuality that failed to preserve maternal chastity and spiritual cleanliness, she became threatening to the expected functioning of a male-dominated society. As an unmarried queen, Elizabeth’s sexual chastity and an identity associated with virginity helped her maintain control. In fact, her identification with the Virgin Mary helped secure a position beloved by her subjects.

Daenerys Targaryen is likewise loved by many of her subjects, so much so that she is referred to after her conquest of Yunkai as *Mhysa*, or simply “mother” in Old Ghiscari. Like Queen Elizabeth, she both comes to her position of public authority through legitimate succession and maintains her position only so long as she remains unmarried. Daenerys’ connection with her dragons provided her the necessary vessel for gaining power and authority. But once in power, as with historical queens, the expectations still remained that she would eventually marry and provide an heir: “The Shavepate had offered to set aside his wife for her, but the notion made her shudder. Hizdahr at least knew how to smile” (DwD 3, Daenerys 1:41). The Shavepate is one of the queen’s closest councilors, and Hizdahr the head of one of the city’s most prominent families. Both Daenerys’ own council and those outside the walls of her court desire a male rule. It appears almost everyone around her would feel more comfortable with the traditional methods of patriarchal control secured through marriage. Many believe—and council—that by marrying, Daenerys will be able to end the struggles that plague her fledgling rule, implying that a woman is incapable of doing the same.

The city of Meereen is besieged from land by the forces of Yunkai and its allies, from the sea by Quartheen naval vessels and from within by the rebellious Sons of the Harpy. Daenerys faces challenges to her rule from all sides, and finds herself doubting every decision she makes.

Like Elizabeth and other queens of the Middle Ages, she wields public authority. Like many of her historical counterparts, she faces obstacles to her rule. Unlike Elizabeth, however, her connection to power is challenged by geography. Where Elizabeth is a naturalized citizen of England, Daenerys' claim to legitimate rule is in Westeros, not Mereen. In Mereen, she is merely a usurper, much like Robert was in Westeros. Thus, her claim to rule through proper lines of primogeniture are tenuous because in Mereen she has no legitimate line of succession placing her on the throne there. Her public authority in Mereen, then, does not fulfill the necessary first condition of female public authority, but rather relies on her proximity to the physical threat presented by her ever-intimidating dragons. This drives further pressure for her to marry a local member of a noble house to secure the missing rights of proper lineage, "a king could change that. A highborn king of pure Ghiscari blood could reconcile the city to your rule. Elsewise, I fear, your reign must end as it began, in blood and fire" (DwD 23, Daenerys 4:295). We once again see the importance of proper lineage reinforced and the potential consequences of failure to abide by the traditions of primogeniture. For Daenerys the pressure to marry is therefore compounded by the need to insure the lines of succession beyond her own, which lie thousands of leagues away. Instead her claims to legitimacy rely on the fantastical image of her dragons and the awe inspiring fear they present to a foreign nation.⁵¹

Whether a queen was successful or not often relied on not only her skillful manipulation of statecraft, but also on her ability to diminish her identity as a woman, while still embracing symbolic maternity. For Daenerys, just as her claims of legitimacy are complicated by her existence between two cultures and her resulting identification as a monstrous persona that transgresses boundaries, so too is her identity as a chaste sexual figure. She clearly cannot

⁵¹ Such a situation would have proven excruciatingly difficult to a male conqueror as Machiavelli points out in the *Prince*. For Daenerys the difficulty of the situation is compounded.

identify as a virginal figure, since she has carried a child. She has an even more substantial claim to symbolic maternity than Elizabeth in her role as *Mhysa*, its vicarious connection with monstrosity through her dragons makes her less easily received as a spiritual replacement for a virginal mother. Further, because Daenerys actually succumbs to sexual desires, the rumors and innuendo that surround her are less easily dismissed than the same scurrilous attacks centered on Elizabeth.⁵² Proving her viability as a chaste female ruler and a virginal mother is more difficult for Daenerys for many reasons. First, she is not chaste, and actually engages in sexual acts with Daario Naharis for no other reason than enjoyment. She clearly understands that he is unsuitable as a suitor and cannot ever assume any sort of mantle of power, and does her best to keep their activities clandestine. But, the reality of their existence still provides an impetus to the rumors that she is not a virginal figurative *Mhysa*, but simply a woman who cannot control her desires: “She loved the feel of him beneath her fingers. She loved her to run her fingers through his hair, to knead the ache from his calves after a long day in the saddle, to cup his cock and feel it harden against her palm” (DwD 43, Daenerys 7:565). By virtue of her connection with sexual liaisons outside of both marriage and the need for reproduction, Daenerys once again finds the idea of female monstrosity reinforced through her failure to comply with convention.⁵³ How a woman behaved “—a woman’s comportment—her acts of piety, gestures, modest dress, observable obedience to fathers” was supposed to reinforce her place within a Christian dominated, patriarchal landscape (Karras 64). Although Daenerys resides in an exotic land, which is not

⁵² Elizabeth was continuously interconnected with Robert Dudley, but despite persistent rumors, no evidence was ever really substantiated that they engaged in anything more than an intimate personal friendship. When Elizabeth was dying she did ask that “Dudley be made the protector of the realm, but that his man servant should be given a large salary, which does suggest that there were aspects of her relationship with Dudley that she did not want exposed” (Levin 74). For more information on this relationship see Levin’s work *Heart and Stomach of a King*, particularly chapter 4, *Wanton and Whore*.

⁵³ For Daenerys, who is presumed barren, any sexual activity is pleasure based, which complicates her sexual identity beyond simple typical chaste representations of an ideal medieval woman.

dominated by Christian ideals, it nevertheless has ideals of propriety that Daenerys must comply with. Her extra marital affairs fall outside of those boundaries, “Brown Ben Plumm, the captain of the Second Sons had put it more succinctly. ‘Man wants to be the king o’ the rabbits, he best wear a pair of floppy ears’” (DwD 3, Daenerys 1:37). What is interesting about this is that there is not only an understanding of the role that must be preserved by those in power if they want to be able to maintain power, but that the role of a ruler is necessarily male. Even though Brown Ben is speaking to Daenerys he refers to her body politic in male terms, meaning that the public authority identified with rulership must be male. Daenerys is able to transcend that rule through her connection with the tricephalic imagery of the dragons that identifies her with the monstrous male image, and her connection to the proper lineage, but when she endangers that role by engaging in a sexual practice that defies the proper traditional of a single woman, it endangers her authority. This is not to say that Daenerys is not able to maintain her rule, or that had she better been able to manage the rigors of rule that she might have maintained her authority. It does further reinforce that her connections to authority are defined by her relationship with her dragons more than anything else, because of her identity as a monstrous entity: “But then she thought of Drogon far away and the dragons in the pit. *There is blood on my hands too, and on my heart. We are not so different Dario and I, We are both monsters*” (DwD 23, Daenerys 4:305). Daenerys sees herself as sitting outside the lines of traditional behavior, going so far as to identify herself with a sellsword. At this point, while she sees herself in terms of the ‘other’ she does not see the necessary connection between this and her ability to rule.

Unlike the highly successful Elizabeth, who was able to shrug off all suitors and dismiss attempts to relegate her to a wife, Daenerys finds herself unable to manage the stress. Daenerys struggles between her role as Mother of Dragons and *Mhysa* eventually leads to her to make a

decision that destroys her public authority. When a young child dies, possibly at the hands of her largest dragon Drogon, she decides to have them locked up. At the time of the child's death she has lost her connection with her dragons to the point that she no longer sees herself as the Mother of Dragons, but as *Mhysa* first.⁵⁴ This loss of identity changes how Daenerys views marriage. Unlike Elizabeth who clearly understood the loss of marriage would relegate her to a role as an intercessor and force her to relinquish public authority, Daenerys, who seeks to protect her figurative children more than anything constantly entertains the thought of marriage and eventually sees it as the only viable solution to her problems of rule. She falls victim to the traditional patriarchal view that a woman must be first a wife and a mother and then a submissive intercessor, not a ruler. She loses touch with the source of her power when she imprisons her dragons. Their imprisonment and her subsequent thoughts serve as a metaphorical sister to the performance of her rule. *"What will happen when they grow too large for the pit? Will they turn on one another with flame and claw? Will they grow wan and weak, with withered flanks and shrunken wings? Will their fires go out before the end?"* (DwD 11, Daenerys 2:159). As her dragons fail so does her rule and her identity. When the dragons are no longer a publically visible image of power, her city further descends into anarchy and begins to tear itself apart with flame and claw. Her tenuous grasp on the rule of the city grows wan and weak, eventually withering, forcing her to marry Hizdahr Zo Loraq, which shrinks the wings of her freedom to act as a queenly ruler and forces her to fit into the role of intercessor. The Sons of the Harpy increase their attacks, killing nine of those close to her, the sell swords sworn to her, save the Storm Crows, under her lover Daario Naharis, betray her and change sides. The dragons no longer provide the image of power needed for her to maintain the authority to control the loyalty of men

⁵⁴ See chapter II for a more detailed analysis of the struggle between the two roles and how the corresponding loss of identity as mother of dragons actually leads to her inability to fulfill the role of *Mhysa*.

attracted to that image. The conflict between her desire to protect those that call her *Mhysa* and her public authoritative role, as the Mother of Dragons ends with her marriage to Loraq. Her floppy hat becomes one of her husband's choosing.

Immediately after the two marry we see signs of her subordination. The threats of war momentarily cease, the attacks from inside the city by the Harpy end, and those that barricade her harbors appear to be leaving. But, her ultimate goal of protecting her children fails. Her husband reopens the fighting pits and slave markets she fought so hard to prevent, "*they have opened a slave market within sight of my walls*" (DwD50, Daenerys 8:662). Her husband has allowed things to occur she never would have, and as a now married queen, she can no longer act against him, but only urge action through less direct means.

Daenerys' loss of public authority at the assumption of power by Loraq and its connection with the dragons is reinforced a few pages later when she meets up with the betrayer, Brown Ben Plumm. When she asks why he betrayed her, he replies calmly,

‘my boys didn't care to die, that's all, and when I told them you couldn't unleash them dragons against the Yunkishmen, well'
You saw me as defeated, Dany thought, and who am I to say to you were wrong?
 (DwD 50, Daenerys 8:665)

Without them, she lacks any symbolic connection with her lineage. When she marries Loraq, she loses her status as an unmarried queen and she return to submissive intercessor and wife: "Let him reopen the fighting pits if he wishes. I want no part of it" (DwD 36, Daenerys 6:479). It appears she has accepted the idea of her transition to her new role—or perhaps her old role—of intercessor, understanding that now that she is married there is little she can do as Hizdahr is the dominant regent: "that was a king's right and a king's duty" (DwD 50, Daenerys, 8:662). She even seems (at first) to be pleased with the results, since it gets the peace she so desperately desired and it obtains the safety of her figurative children (at the cost of her symbolic children).

She has acquiesced to nothing. The loss of the symbols of her power and her fear for the lives of those she protects, “a queen belongs not to herself, but to her people” (DwD 30, Daenerys 5:406) has forced her to abandon her identity as Mother of Dragons. This forced her submission to the role of intercessor. Her role as intercessor when she was wife of Khal Drogo provided her with the ability to influence his actions and those of the people around her because she was identified with the privileged idea of medieval maternity as the mother of ‘the stallion who mounts the world.’ When she marries Hizdahr Zo Loraq, however, the circumstances differ in significant ways. Daenerys is not a physical mother, in fact, cannot be. She has imprisoned the symbols of her monstrous maternity—her dragons—but also through this action the symbols of her maternal potential for agency and public authority. Her connection to those that call her *Mhysa* is strained as her husband reopens the fighting pits and allows the slave markets to function outside the city walls. This time when she assumes the mantle of queen, her connection with intercession is partial at best. Her influence is almost non-existent. Her precarious position as intercessor once again, results from her marriage. When she marries, the required status of being single disappears, and with it her public authority

The third condition for a queen to assume, or at least continue to maintain public authority, in the medieval period was an identity as a symbolic mother. A medieval queen could fulfill the primary expectations of being a wife and mother through symbolic representation. She could be wife to her people and mother to her subjects. . For Queen Elizabeth I there is a strong connection with her identity as a figurative mother and her ability to rule for such a long time, “presenting herself as one whose great strength came in the love she had, almost suggesting an all-loving mother, and implying this was the key to her successful reign” (Levin 146). Her love

for her people coupled with her legitimate claim to the throne and her chaste, virginal image made her the epitome of queenly virtue.

For Daenerys Targaryen things are not quite so simple. Her legitimacy to the rule of Mereen is challenged by virtue of geography, her sexually chaste identity is challenged by her real improprieties, and her role as a figurative mother is challenged by the loss of her dragons, which are the symbol of maternity that allowed her to achieve the figurative status in the first place. Daenerys shares behavioral traits with other successful ruling queens in believing it is important for her to belong to her people, and for her to make decisions that place her own happiness beneath the well-being of the country, but her confusion over her dual roles as a mother complicate the issue. When she fails to remember her identity as the Mother of Dragons and all that it embodies, she ultimately fails in everything else she identifies with.

This failure is punished with a very visible and intimate assassination attempt on her body in the setting of the ultimate symbol of her failure: the fighting pits. She vehemently fought against the re-opening of the pits from the moment of her arrival in Mereen. The moment her acquaintance with the dragons eroded and forced her to marry, her loss of maternity, forced her loss of influence. Her desires are completely disregarded and the pits re-opened. It is a very stark and brutal reminder of the connection between her dragons and her ability to achieve her goals. Momentarily she wins a pyrrhic victory when she gets Hizdahr to acquiesce to preventing lions from attacking a trio of dwarves with wooden swords. He appears angry, but allows it. Perhaps, because this form of queenly intercession follows the guidelines of acceptable behavior, in that it is associated with merciful action, it works. But, more likely, Hizdahr, who it appears is behind her assassination attempt, or at the very least aware of it, knows she will be gone soon. Allowing her a brief degree of satisfaction costs him nothing.

More telling is the assassination attempt itself. While Daenerys is forced to watch the brutality—“the boar buried its snout in Barsena’s belly and began rooting out her entrails,” (DwD 52, Daenerys 9:696)—her husband, the source of her limited ability to influence others as an intercessor, encourages her to eat of the poisoned honeyed locusts: “‘those are very tasty,’ advised Hizdahr. ‘You ought to try a few yourself, my love. They are rolled in a spice before the honey, so they are sweet and hot at once’” (DwD 9, Daenerys 9:691). Instead Fat Belwas, literally her strongest remaining supporter from those who favor her succession to the Westerosi throne, eats all of the locusts and nearly dies. His consumption of the locusts and ensuing collapse is symbolic of the collapse of her hopes of retaining the Westerosi throne and the evaporation of her current agency. Without the dragons, she loses the support of those who desire to help place her on the throne. In one day of bloody fighting her failures as a mother incapable of producing an heir, incapable of protecting and nurturing her children, and incapable of acting as an intercessor are put on stage for all to see. Her agency is destroyed.

Yet just when it seems that nothing but the end can come of the day at the pits, her largest dragon emerges from the sky and lays waste to the pits. In a storm of fire and blood he savages the fighters, those of her children who oppose him, those of her husband’s who oppose him, anything foolish enough to oppose him. Drogon, the dragon, is the very image of power. He is a monster, he is a dragon and he is Daenerys’ symbolic child. He is a representative symbol of her public authority and he has come to reclaim it. By choosing to ignore her ties to the dragons Daenerys paralyzed her ability to earn agency. But when she renews her connection with the dragons and embraces the monstrosity of their role, by leaping astride the dragon, she literally embraces the monster that is her child, her lineage and her source of agency and power. As she flies away, she revels in her defiance of convention. In that moment the dragon is the realization

of the tricephalic monster, as he is all things and none. He exists as a monster, the symbol of her power, a surrogate sexual partner and her child. She embraces the monstrosity: “Dany could feel the heat of him between her thighs. Her heart felt as if were about to burst. *Yes, she thought, yes, now, now, do it, do it take me, take me, fly!*” (DwD 52, Daenerys 9:699). In that moment, she becomes one with the dragon and is able to transcend the boundaries between her existences. His taking flight is a breaking of the chains that bound both her dragons in the pits and the chains of her role within the marriage and as an intercessor. Drogon tears down the walls of her imprisoning roles with fire and blood and spreads his wings to take her aloft, above the fray, apart from the world, as she has always been, but above it. In the wake of her dragon there is a path of destruction. Just as when Daenerys walked into the funeral fires of her dead son and husband, and emerged cleansed, Daenerys walks into the fires of Drogon’s attack on the pits and emerges cleansed. Just as her role as intercessor was burned away before, it is burned away once more. She leaves Meereen behind and enters a journey of monstrous existence living off the remnants of her dragon offspring’s dinner and relishing her freedom

Back in Meereen her other two dragons are freed. They once again emerge as symbols of her monstrosity and her power. They perch atop the city’s pyramids, representing her potential for dominance to rule atop the city. She is not there to take control of the situation as the maternal figure, so chaos ensues, but nonetheless, the appearance of the Drogon in the pits coincides with a renewed faith in Daenerys and her ability to perform as a public authoritative figure. With his reappearance she is once again associated with the masculine and monstrous symbol of iconic male dominance that allowed her to operate as a ruler in the patriarchal order. Those who support her rise up and overthrow her husband. They strive to keep the city together in her absence. Outside the walls, fear of what might occur if the dragons go unchecked forces

action on the part of the besiegers. It is a scene of chaos and a struggle for power. Each of the three heads of the dragon is acting independently, without the guidance of their mother and so, in a display of the importance of maternal influence, the city of Mereen descends into an abyss of chaos. As the series ends its current story with Mereen in a state of flux, it is difficult to assess exactly where this examination of the dragons and their relationship to Daenerys will ultimately lead, but it is possible to assume based on textual evidence that the dragons require her presence and that with it, her rule will be re-established.

What is certain is that the clear link between her dragons and her potential power is reinforced. With the emergence of her dragons from prison, Fat Belwas emerges from his sick bed, weakened and strained (just as her goal of reclaiming the Westerosi throne) but nevertheless very much alive.

Daenerys ends her last POV scene amidst the dothraki seas, appearing her most monstrous with Drogon behind her and in the presence of the dothraki, people who both gave her the first glimpse of agency, and the people who first revered her power and the relationship with the dragons. She is once again baptized by fire and emerged in the presence of dragons. It is not unreasonable to assume that those dothraki who once again see this power, will choose to respect both the monstrous nature of the relationship, and the maternal role of Daenerys as Mother of Dragons. Daenerys remembered who she is and reclaimed her role as mother of dragons.

Up to this point in the series Martin has continued to appropriate medieval tropes and conventions for appropriate female behavior. At times he has even appeared to reinforce those conventions through the construction of his world and the women that reside within it. It might even be easy to assume (as some critics do) that his intentionally patriarchal and misogynistic world is merely another in a long line of fantasy epics that hardly does justice to the capability of

the women that exist within its borders. It is clear, however, that in his construction of Daenerys that his depiction of convention is more than simply an attempt to reinforce stereotypes. By establishing a world that clearly does not appreciate the value of women and their influence as it should and then finding ways for his female characters, particularly Daenerys, to consistently emerge from the fires of their struggle with influence and personal agency, he is doing something far more complicated: he is challenging the presence of traditional patriarchal rule by highlighting its inadequacies and then showing how, in spite of the daunting opposition, on occasion his women can rise above the fray and succeed, where even the men around could not.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

George Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* series is an amalgamation of historical fiction, medieval convention and fantasy tropes. He utilizes elements from each of these genres in an attempt to create a world where, as Damian Walter notes, "the secondary worlds of fantasy provide a lens that can bring to sharp focus truths that the chaos of modern life obscures" (Walter). The lens of medievalism that Martin uses to represent the chaos of the modern world might shine with the spectacular light of brutal patriarchal misogynistic realism. But the questions he raises about power, personal agency and influence, particularly for women, are more deeply entrenched in our own world than we might like to believe.

We keep coming back to the same kinds of questions about morality and politics and the potential supernatural connections in the world and some of the ways we think about the world in what can or can't happen, might not be as reliable as we think they are. The world might be a more connected, more interesting, more enchanted place than we might want to think. (Bryant)

William S. Burroughs once said, "artists to my mind are the real architects of change. And not the political legislators who implement change after the fact" (Burroughs). Martin's sometimes ruthless treatment of his characters illustrates the realities of a world where struggle exists, even when we do not want it to and forces us to take a look at the conditions that drive such a cultural environment. By illuminating the darker side of reality, perhaps Martin's work, if it does not engender change, might at least drive discourse that could lead to change.

Martin's appropriation of medieval traits, even those that so blatantly recreate the seedier side of reality, is neither a new convention, nor a particularly original one. Through the blatant construction of a world that is both patriarchal and grim he actually attempts to deconstruct that world, and highlight its flaws. Stephen Greenblatt comments on a similar appropriation of unflattering worldly accoutrements by a far more iconic author, as he constructed a world with

similar intentions, “the closer Shakespeare seems to a source, the more faithfully he reproduces it on stage, the more devastating and decisive his transformation of it” (609).

Ultimately, whether we choose to accept that Martin is attempting to transform the world he appropriates from, or merely disregard that notion as idealistic, his work, even at its most basic, has created a conversation by critics, readers, bloggers and fans regarding its potential for interpretation. The struggle to uncover the meaning of his works is precisely the point of all novels. As Mikhail Bakhtin tells us, “The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite it is open, in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal in ever newer ways to mean” (685). Therefore the very discussion around Martin’s work, even the discussion that is hyper-critical or dismissive, can, if part of an ongoing discourse help draw connections and meanings to our own world and own beliefs, and perhaps then allow us to construct a more empathetic view of our own reality.

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