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## The Portrayal of Disability and the Quest for Identity in George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire

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### Abstract

This paper examines George R.R. Martin's series of epic fantasy sagas, **A Song of Ice and Fire** (henceforth Ice and Fire). The books are A Game of Thrones, A Clash of Kings, A Storm of Swords, A Feast for Crows, A Dance with Dragons, The Winds of Winter, and A Dream of Spring. The paper aims to investigate the depictions of ethical, cultural, and social issues of disabled characters by redefining their cognitive capabilities and physiques in different cultural contexts that represent various literary conventions. Henceforth, the paper explores the disabled characters' quest for identity and the ways in which Martin has thoroughly modified and recreated their image.

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The stereotype is that people with either physical or cognitive inferiority are emasculated or impotent, that having a disability is a sign of heavenly retribution, and that people with disabilities are outrageous or monstrous. These cultural fantasies all shaped the marginalisation of their identity. Therefore, the attention in this paper is paid explicitly to investigate how Martin's characters are portrayed, exposed, suffered, and excluded by their 'abled' society. In addition, the emphasis is on how these characters have survived and reacted to the typical image set by the dominant society despite their diverse impairments. However, considering the popularity of Martin's sagas and the fact that characters' choices for their disabilities can scarcely be episodic, this paper endeavours to reverse the negative attitudes of society and build positive attitudes towards these individuals.

**Keywords:** Disability, Identity, Marginalisation, Stereotype, A Song of Ice and Fire

#### المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث سلسلة روايات جورج آر.مارتن الخيالية: أغنية الجليد والنار (يشار إليها فيما يلي باسم اغنية الجليد والنار). الكتب هي لعبة العروش ، صراع الملوك ، عاصفة السيوف ، وليمة للغربان, ورقصة مع التنانين, رياح الشتاء, وحلم الربيع . تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على مختلف القضايا الأخلاقية والثقافية والاجتماعية التي تواجهها الشخصيات ذات الإعاقات الجسدية والعقلية وتستكشف قدراتها الجسدية والعقلية في سياقات ثقافية تمثل ممارسات أدبية مختلفة. وتتناول الدراسة القوالب النمطية التي تربط الإعاقة بعلامات الانتقام الإلهي وتصوير الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة كشخصيات مشوهة أو متوحشة. وتساهم هذه التمثيلات الثقافية والأدبية في تهميش هويتهم الثقافية في مجتمعاتهم. لذا تناقش هذه الدراسة كيفية تصوير هذه

الشخصيات من ذوي الإعاقة من خلال تسليط الضوء على معاناتهم وإقصائهم من قبل مجتمع "الأسوياء". علاوة على ذلك، تركز الدراسة على كيفية ارتباط هذه الشخصيات، على الرغم من أوجه القصور المختلفة التي تعاني منها، بالقوالب النمطية التي أنشأها المجتمع المهيمن ونجاتها منها. ونظرًا لشعبية قصة مارتن واختيار الشخصيات على أساس إعاقاتهم، تحاول هذه الدراسة عكس مواقف المجتمع السلبية وبناء مواقف إيجابية تجاه هؤلاء الأفراد.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإعاقة، الهوية، التهميش، الصورة النمطية، اغنية الجليد والنار

Abbreviations	Book Title
GOT	A Game of Thrones
ACOK	A Clash of Kings
ASOS	A Storm of Swords
AFFC	A Feast for Crows
ADWD	A Dance with Dragons
TWOW	The Winds of Winter
ADOS	A Dream of Spring

The Portrayal of Disability and the Quest for Identity in George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire

## 1. Introduction

One essential aspect of human diversity is disability. The way people with disabilities are portrayed in literature frequently challenges our preconceived ideas. These preconceptions may be positive or negative, but they nearly never line up with reality.

Disability is largely determined by society's negative viewpoint about it in literature, and when that impression is permitted to be presented to readers unrestrained, writers (intentionally or not) urge readers to uphold these damaging attitudes. We are able to begin establishing what phenomenal disability representation looks like by being critical of how it is now portrayed. In order to accomplish this, this paper examines how disability is portrayed in Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Considering the development of how individuals of diminutive size have been portrayed in twentieth-century Western literature.

The popularity of Martin's sagas is remarkable, not only for their distinctive combination of moral qualities from the Middle Ages and corruption and the egotistical characteristics of our own culture but also because they challenge the prevailing models of disability as individuals, who are agonised due to physical incapacity or cognitive problems; and thus they needed to be pitied. Therefore, the ubiquitous conceptualisation of disabled people as depressed, hopeless, and unfortunate remains a common "issue of representation and cultural stigma", (Mitchell & Snyder, 2011. p.x) and consequently, the potential for misrepresenting disability is an enormous subject in literature.

When characters with disabilities are employed in literature or media, they are frequently portrayed as "objects of amusement, derision, and fear". (Stuart, 2006, p. 100) This social and cultural relationship between marginalised characters and their biological inferiority imposed disability as simply being a part of a character's identity. Mitchell and Snyder explained, in their book *Narrative Prosthesis*:

Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse, that “disabled people have been historically refused a parallel power within their social institutions”, and while “literature often relies on disability’s transgressive potential, disabled people have been sequestered, excluded, exploited, and obliterated on the very basis of which their literary representation so often rests”.(Mitchell & Snyder, 2011, p. 8)

Disability is typically defined negatively by society in media and literature, and when this perception is presented to readers unconstrained, writers (intentionally or not) encourage readers to uphold these damaging attitudes. In literature, individuals with disabilities are frequently used to either reveal characters’ backgrounds by serving as a reason for their storytelling or they are exploited to the advantage of the characters. Additionally, it might set them apart in various respects to the point where the entire plot might make use of them by highlighting them as archetypes. They have suffered “the consequences of representational association with deviance and recalcitrant corporeal difference”.(Mitchell & Snyder, 2011, p. 8) Consequently, literary scholars argued that characters with all sorts of disabilities have significant roles in many important works in global literature. Henceforth, the stereotypical image of such characters has been epitomised repeatedly in such metaphorical terms as a central character or the hero, such as Shakespeare’s hunchbacked king, Richard III; Victor Hugo’s Quasimodo; Winston Groom’s Forrest Gump; Luke Skywalker’s amputated right hand; and Melville’s one-legged Captain Ahab. Stigmatising these figures as significant to disability representation has initially

established the basic levels of disability that “existed in canonical literary works”.(Mitchell & Snyder, 2011, p. 17) There have been a handful of studies tackling disabilities in literature. In his essay “Disability as Metaphor in Literature”, Leonard Kriege asserted that depictions of disability slipped dramatically short of accurate pictures of the human variety. He identified what he believed to be the two most widespread and pernicious images in the literary canon in his analysis of an adaptation of the coronation scene in Richard III:

“In the ascent, the red-caped figure crawls up the steps [to the throne], like some gigantic insect, to take that which he has cheated others of. Imposing its limitations to rob legitimacy, the broken body begs for compassion. In the history of Western literature, both before and after Shakespeare, there is little to be added to these two images, although there are a significant number of variations upon them. The cripple is threat and recipient of compassion, both to be damned and to be pitied—and frequently to be damned as he is pitied”.(Kriegel, 1988, p. 9)

When speaking of a group with integration needs, it refers to a group of citizens who, due to their particularities, cannot develop in society in a normal way in the statistical sense of the word. Integration would be, then, that process through which an individual can come to exercise their duties and

rights with equal opportunities with respect to other citizens. The way that people with disabilities have been depicted in literature has shown them as fearful, despised, indistinct, or pitiful. Characters with disabilities have historically been utilised largely, if not exclusively, to arouse emotions such as pity, dread, or fury and frequently are villainised. The emphasis has changed in recent years from a person's disability to his/her ability. They should be honoured for their talents, not their limitations. However, in her essay "On Being a Cripple", Nancy Mairs, a writer and an activist for disability, highlights the issue of being disabled:

"In our society, anyone who deviates from the norm is expected to compensate. Like fat people, who are expected to be jolly, cripples must bear their lot meekly and cheerfully. A grumpy cripple isn't playing by the rules [...] . One way or the other then, I wind up feeling like Tiny Tim, peering over the edge of the table at the Christmas Goose, waving his crutch, piping God's blessing down upon us all. Except that I don't feel like playing Tiny Tim. I'd rather play Caliban, a most scurvy monster".(Mairs, 1997, p. 15)

In a literary narrative, Mairs uses two literary classics, Charles Dickens and Shakespeare, to describe the expectations of society, tensions, and delusions concerning those with disabilities, presenting an implicit critique of the

impacts that commonly read literature has on disability beliefs. The terms “normal” and “disabled”, together with victimised and monstrous, are regularly addressed in a way that equates to a comprehensive criticism of ableist discourse.

On the other hand, Herbert Blau argues that the representation of disability in literature “causes us to concede that we are all, at some warped level of the essentially human, impaired”.(Blau et al., 1982, p. 75) Mitchell and Snyder also argued that “scholars interrogated common stereotypes that pervaded the literary and film archives. Disability was viewed as a restrictive pattern of characterisation that usually sacrificed the humanity of protagonists and villains alike”.(Mitchell & Snyder, 2011, p. 17) They also claim that “Literary scholars promoted the idea that disabled characters [...] for example, played a visible role in several of the most important works in European and American literature”.(Mitchell & Snyder, 2011, p. 17)

Colin Barnes also surveys several classifications for people with disabilities. This list portrays disabled individual people as: “pitiable and pathetic, sinister and evil, burden, the object of ridicule, object of violence, and incapable of participating fully in communal life”.(Barnes, 1992, p. 36) In order to substantiate these categories and descriptions, Barnes provides numerous illustrations of negative disability images. However, it is emphasised throughout that these perspectives on disabled persons are not mutually exclusive and are frequently linked to one another:

“This is particularly the case with  
fictional characterisations. The



disabled person is evil, for example, is often combined with the disabled person as sexually degenerate. The point is that the overall view of disabled people is decidedly negative and a threat to the well-being of the non-disabled community”.(Barnes, 1992, p. 42)

Paul Longmore perceives that “among the most persistent is the association of disability with malevolence. Deformity of body symbolises deformity of soul. Physical handicaps are made the emblems of evil”.(Longmore, 2003, p. 133)

Up until very recently, this cultural backdrop was mirrored in all genres of writing, from stories for children to adult novels and plays. Any impairment typically turns a character into an evil individual or villain. Traditional children's stories frequently include Cyclops, giants, evil one-armed captains, and characters who may be easily distinguished as wicked simply by comparison to the beautiful “good” individuals.(Goldman, 1990, p. 33)

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that in a cultural depiction, “the physically disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity,” images of little people in the United States often provide an opportunity for able-bodied audiences to safely gaze at and contemplate physical difference rather than seeking out audience identification or empathy”.(Thomson, 2008, p. 6)

Thomson contends that when it comes to individuals with disabilities, mere observation transforms into a prolonged and intense gaze “sculpt[ing] the disabled subject into

agrotisque spectacle [...] framing [the] body as an icon of deviance”.(Thomson, 2008, p. 26)

### **1.1.Disability and the Quest for Identity**

Disability has been overlooked as an identity class, whereas the issues of other marginalised groups have received more attention. The majority of individual identity studies have their roots in psychology as researchers have worked to distinguish racial, gender, and other identities in order to comprehend internalised persecution and minority group orientation. As part of the habit of writing about disability, many scholars started the discussions by describing the variety of individuals who are disabled. Perhaps the relevance stems from the fact that numbers do not indicate identification or a collective group. Nevertheless, the central concern in the discourse around individuals with impairments is their identity. Disabled and identity encompass one’s self-perception and feelings of affiliation or togetherness with the disabled community.

People who are born with disabilities develop their disability identification from birth. They undergo instruction to portray the role of an individual with disabilities in society. An individual with an impairment will perpetually endure the social disapproval associated with their condition. The primary factor shaping these people’s social identities is their disability. The issues that were brought up have to do with defining the boundary between social and personal identity, balancing the need to fit in with the need to stand out, and deciding whether to define someone through the lens of stigma or as an example of a particular personality type. Only those who live with a disability are best able to

recognise the mark that their impairment leaves on their lives.

Human identity is developed during an individual's lifespan. Identities help individuals comprehend and interpret different and varied parts of their self-perceptions. For many individuals with disabilities, their impairment is a fundamental aspect of their identity. The concept of identity is frequently used in psychology to describe the self, individual expressions, and social groups to which individuals adhere. Persons with apparent impairments may be perceived differently by others due to their appearance, just as persons of colour may be perceived differently due to their race rather than their own characteristics. Individuals with disabilities frequently encounter impediments that are specific to themselves, just as individuals of colour have challenges that are specific to their race. In contrast to the pursuit of racial identity, individuals with disabilities who desire to communicate with others who have disabilities often have difficulty actively searching for these others, therefore laying the burden of locating those with disabilities on the individual. Identity is often shaped by the presence of others who belong to the same racial group and are either in close proximity or part of one's immediate family. This can be especially tough for those who do not live in a cohesive society.

Self-worth, pride, and awareness of prejudice are a few factors that Putnam Michelle suggests are relevant to political disability identity and disability activism. Although Putman also identified additional factors, these three seem to be the most pertinent in this case. Individuals with disabilities who possess a strong belief in their own self-

worth can perceive themselves as being of equal importance to individuals without limitations. Individuals with disabilities who possess a sense of pride are more inclined to assert their rights rather than conceal or reject them. (Putnam, 2005, pp. 190–192).

A comprehensive identity for individuals with disabilities should encompass pertinent disability-related details as well as their aspirations and goals. However, in literature, disability narratives are stories that authors tell about persons with disabilities and their lives and experiences, which could emphasise problems with disability identity. “Communal attachment, affirmation of disability, self-worth, pride, discrimination, and the acceptance of one’s life circumstances” are likely the six key themes surrounding disability identity:

1. Communal attachment refers to the value of a sense of belonging and of individuals who have disabilities engaging actively with peers because of shared experiences.
2. Affirmation of Disability: Having the same rights and obligations as other citizens, as well as being acknowledged and treated equally with everyone else in society.
3. Self-Worth is the capacity to perceive oneself as having the same value as people who have not encountered a disability.
4. Pride is the ability to accept one’s condition without hiding it or trying to hide it.
5. Discrimination is the knowledge and acceptance that persons with disabilities frequently suffer from prejudice, bigotry, and unjust treatment.

6. The acceptance of one's life circumstances, which can strengthen the significance of disability while fostering a positive disability identity, is known as personal meaning. (Putnam, 2005, pp. 190–194).

Nevertheless, the field of identity research is not new; it has been examined from other viewpoints such as psychology, postmodern literary frameworks, feminism, cultural studies, and corporate communication, among others. Contemporary disability studies have emerged as a burgeoning area of study within the critical realm of identity studies, shifting away from the pragmatic domains of healthcare, social services, and rehabilitation. The pursuit of identity studies may provide significant insights and make a meaningful contribution to the subject of disability studies. Both of these are academic tasks that include the methods of comparison and parallelism. The objective of identity studies is to understand and eradicate the social stigma linked to the subject status of disabled persons. The field of disability studies has examined the identity of individuals with disabilities in order to facilitate a more inclusive integration of impaired individuals into our society.

In order to effectively apply our critical abilities to the tasks of uncovering and reenvisioning disability, it is necessary to examine disability within the framework of identity. This examination should encompass not just those with disabilities but also the broader population. According to Simi Linton, the act of studying disability might be described as “a prism through which one can gain a broader understanding of society and human experience”. (Linton, 2010, p. 118) It expands our understanding of uniqueness and fairness, marginalised groups, cohesion, self-reliance,

interdependence, well-being, physical appeal, beauty, bodily wholeness, society, and concepts of progress and excellence in all cultural domains. An examination of identity in conjunction with disability studies yields what Eve Sedgwick terms as a “universalising view” of disability, which will substitute an often pervasive “minoritising view”. Such a viewpoint will portray disability as “an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum”.(Sedgwick, 2008, p. 1) Understanding the role of disability as both an identification category and cultural concept helps enhance our understanding of human existence, our social connections, and the sense of having a physical body.

Disability approves that identity is continually in flux. It serves as a reminder that the human being is, as Denise Riley states, “an unsteady mark, scarred in its long decay” (Denise, 1999, p. 224) Caroline Walker Bynum's extraordinary research on werewolf narratives uncovers the body's continuous process of change.(Bynum, 1999) Caring for her father's Alzheimer's condition for over twenty years motivated her to study how we may interpret individual identity as ongoing despite the fact that our minds and bodies can and do change radically, definitely throughout the years, and sometimes rather suddenly. Disability prompts us to consider what a continuous existence of our identities would entail if the body is always changing. We see our race, gender, or ethnic identities as being tied to reasonably secure biological qualities. Disability is a category of identity that is accessible to every person at any given moment, and it is unavoidable that we will all eventually be included inside it if we live long enough. The concept of disability highlights

the fundamental flexibility of identity. Disabilities undermine the highly valued cultural premise that the body acts as a reliable basis of identity. Moreover, it questions our assumptions about robust and enduring identities in a way that may emphasize the dynamic character of all identities. Steven E. Brown (2003), the founder of The Institute on Disability Culture, provided the following description of the disability and its association with culture:

“People with disabilities have forged a group identity. We share a common history of oppression and a common bond of resilience. We generate art, music, literature, and other expressions of our lives and our culture, infused from our experience of disability. Most importantly, we are proud of ourselves as people with disabilities. We claim our disabilities with pride as part of our identity [...] We are who we are: we are people with disabilities”.(Brown, 2003, pp. 80–81)

People are inspired to desire to be a member and be a part of an important thing when an effective portrayal is given. The world of the disabled was formerly thought to be amorphous and unclear. Disability was viewed, according to conventional psychological theories of the condition, as a defect that needed to be corrected. Nevertheless, there has been a movement towards adopting a social perspective on disability, which highlights the role of society in defining and providing assistance for individuals with disabilities. According to the social model of disability, individuals with

impairments experience social exclusion as a result of the discrimination they encounter.(Olkin & Pledger, 2003, p. 298).

Frequently, people with impairments claim they do not perceive themselves as impaired. Their phrases nevertheless serve to distance themselves from the identity category of people with disabilities, even though they frequently reject the word's literal meaning. Our culture creates significant barriers to self-identification as disabled and little benefits. The problem with such remarks is that they fail to question the repressive preconceptions that allow, among other things, the uncritical use of derogatory names for people with disabilities, such as crippled, unable, stupid, fool, and dimwit. Lack of non-oppressive means to comprehend or discuss disability contributes to the refusal to assert disability identity. Having no alternative, those with impairments, as well as their carers, avoid using the terminology associated with being crippled or deformed.

Disability is frequently portrayed in literature in a manner that excludes disabled individuals. Moreover, numerous cultures perceive disability as an issue that necessitates resolution. Historically, characters with impairments in literature have been portrayed utilising a variety of stereotypes. These stereotypes, which include criminal, evil and aggressive, pathetic and dependent, moral analogies, and others, contributed to how society perceives disability. However, removing such social issues has become a current phenomenon that has been improved through eliminating social barriers and discrimination against these individuals, as well as by dispelling preconceptions and altering attitudes. Both the importance of disability as an identity and



the characters' relationship to their impairment are constantly ignored. One of the reasons for this is that disabled characters are frequently employed as devices to the plot in literature. (Mitchell & Snyder, 2011, p. 222).

Character roles, descriptions of disability, and pictures represent a few of the most notable ways that these conceptions of disability are maintained in literature. Characters with disabilities often have more restricted responsibilities and are considered to be less crucial to the narrative than characters without disabilities. Research has shown that characters with impairments in children's novels are often assigned supporting roles rather than starring parts and rarely function as the narrators of their own narratives, even if they are the main characters. This tendency reinforces the negative social perception that individuals with disabilities are inherently inadequate and less valuable than those without impairments. Furthermore, it reinforces the notion that ability is the norm and that individuals who stray from it are considered inferior. Similarly, numerous individuals with impairments are depicted as incapable of resolving their own concerns or the core dilemmas of their stories.

Characters with impairments frequently need the assistance of a non-disabled character, or they play such little parts in the tale that they never help resolve the situation. This reinforces the notion that disabilities limit individuals' capabilities and portrays individuals with disabilities unfavourably. This reinforces and endorses antiquated stereotypes that depict those with disabilities as pitiable, powerless, or even onerous. All of these depictions are detrimental to the disability community. Stories, on the other

hand, can give more realistic and empowering viewpoints of disability when the main characters have disabilities and are portrayed as heroic, as opposed to helpless. Books that portray people with disabilities in this way challenge harmful cultural norms and give the disability community more influence.

Along with character responsibilities, the detailed descriptions of impairments can strongly affect how characters are received and how disabilities are portrayed in children's books as a whole. Some of the outdated and sometimes damaging descriptions of disability exclusively use a deficit-based perspective. Characters with impairments in these situations are almost entirely defined by what they “cannot” do because of their handicap. For instance, there are numerous depictions of autistic characters in which they struggle to converse or establish acquaintances. This solely deficit-focused strategy perpetuates negative social stereotypes about disabilities and is detrimental to the disability community. By drawing readers' attention to the characteristics of disability, which are strengths, texts might instead characterise disability more beneficially. The framing of disability as an insult for the character, a burden for their family, or an inspirational lesson for non-disabled characters are some other interpretations of disability that can perpetuate damaging ableist notions. Again, these overt representations of disability through fictional characters serve to reinforce critical stereotypes of the genuine disability community, so they should be avoided unless they can be given more context.

The most common depictions of disability in literary works adhere to a set of presumptions that are probably held by most readers in literature. They suggest or imply that:

- Disability is a condition of scarcity, squalor, and desire. The term itself implies that disability is a loss of social and personal identity in addition to being a divergence from the norm.
- Outside of a specific set of narrative frameworks and psychological assumptions, disabled people become illegible.
- Disability is an undesirable state of reliance on others. The disabled are judged on how much they a) triumph over their condition, despite their limited abilities.
- To make the distinction between the able and disabled people obvious, disability is presented as unusual and extraordinary.

When it comes to literary representations of people with disabilities, the second and fourth criteria are perhaps the most common. Narratives about people with disabilities often portray their impaired mental and physical capacities as intrinsically flawed or immoral. Under all conditions, a deficiency exists, which is the inability of the damaged individual to achieve their maximum capability. Disabled individuals have the ability to evoke a strong and often conflicting emotional reaction from able-bodied others, ranging from admiration to pity, scorn to curiosity, simply by appearing on stage.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson discusses the inevitable convergence of the identity regarding disabled people: “[An] aspect of subject formation that disability confirms is that identity is always in transition. Disability serves as a

reminder that the body, as Denise Riley proclaims, ‘an unsteady mark, scarred in its long decay’ and that “to stress the necessity of liberty and independence on a social level is to preserve an unsustainable fantasy in the context of an interdependent and fragile society.(Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 7) It is impossible (and perhaps inappropriate) to define the concept of a single identity for people with impairments. Rather, disability as an identity is frequently a personal creation, a deliberate endeavour to make sense of oneself in the environment. A recent survey of the literature yielded six primary areas for organising the concept of identity for people with impairments. There are sub-categories within each of these categories (socially ascribed, disempowering, overcompensating, identities that shift focus away from disability, empowerment, complicated, and common identity). These categories are not intended to limit the possibilities of disability identification but rather to make sense of the literature on the subject that is currently available.

According to Riddell, Baron, and Wilson, societal labels and ascriptions frequently limit the range of identities available to people with disabilities. The authors point out that these decisions inevitably have an impact on the future goals and life decisions of people with impairments.(Riddell et al., 2001, pp. 60–63) In an era of lifelong and continual learning, the authors noticed that such a limited sense of identity is particularly common among people with learning difficulties. This stigma may be brought on by societal taboos around disability that openly despise or disregard “imperfection, failure to control the body, vulnerability to vulnerability, pain, and death.”(Barnes et al., 2001, p. 516)

The negative portrayals of people with disabilities in the media frequently serve to promote such anxieties and taboos. The chance for self-discovery of identity is limited when identity is assigned in literature. Characters with disabilities have historically been utilised largely, if not exclusively, to arouse emotions such as pity, dread, or wrath.

## **1.2. Disability in A Song of Ice and Fire:**

The way that persons with disabilities are treated in society is directly related to the negative writing about disabilities, including stereotypes, prejudices, and hate speech. Reading literature gives one a glimpse into the stories about disabilities that have persisted throughout history and in various cultures.

However, the Disability Rights movement has fought for societal transformations away from these historically discriminatory practices and exclusionary belief systems during the previous several decades. Literature, which has the capacity to enhance knowledge, understanding, and respect of this diverse population, is one tool that can assist in bringing about this change. Readers who have comparable experiences with their own disabilities might find themselves represented and empowered when literature, like other kinds of media, contains positive and diverse portrayals of persons with disabilities. Simultaneously, readers without disabilities can get a piece of knowledge and admiration for situations and groups to which they would not otherwise have access or form relationships. These individual developments can positively impact the daily lives and ideas of readers. These modest ideological shifts in favour of inclusivity have the potential to grow over time

and affect more aspects of society. As a result, these literary portrayals have the power to uplift all readers and have long-lasting benefits for significant social change.

Unconscious cultural perceptions of disability also affect how disabilities are portrayed in and understood in literature. Like anything else, literature cannot be created in a cultural vacuum. Just as a reader's understanding will affect how they perceive the work, an author's awareness of disability will unavoidably influence how they depict the disability community. It follows that writers who subscribe to the medical model of disability would also probably use this model to depict their impaired characters; this is true whether or not the writer is aware of their own prejudices or preconceptions. Therefore, readers must understand these prejudices and how to spot them when they're reading. It's also critical to actively seek out writers who have firsthand knowledge of disabilities because they will be the most trustworthy sources for their own narratives. Readers can be ready to identify and evaluate their literary representations of disability when they are aware of these cultural perspectives and depictions of the condition.

Character roles, descriptions of impairment, and visuals are some of the most obvious ways that literature perpetuates these conceptions of disability. There are not many conventional roles for characters with disabilities. More often than not, individuals with disabilities need the assistance of a character without a disability, or they play such small parts in the narrative that they never contribute to resolving the crisis. This furthers the idea that disabilities restrict people's potential and portray the disability community as weak. This reinforces and legitimises

historical stereotypes that suggest individuals with disabilities ought to be viewed as pathetic, defenceless, or even burdensome. These depictions are all harmful to the community of people with disabilities. Stories where the main characters are disabled but are portrayed as heroic rather than helpless, on the other hand, can present more realistic and positive views of disability. These kinds of books that include disabled characters undermine harmful social stereotypes and strengthen the voice of the disabled community.

Disability is a common theme in literature from all eras and genres, which can help us go past preconceptions in the modern world, whether in the narratives of medieval saints, the romanticism of the nineteenth-century literary works, modernist obsessions with eugenics, or current preoccupations with mental health. Disability frequently appears in these tales in a manner similar to that of Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Martin was awarded the Visionary Award at the Media Access Awards ceremony in 2013 due to *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The plot of his sagas was recognised to promote awareness of the disability experience and accessibility for people with disabilities. For those who are unfamiliar with the saga, it takes place in an imaginary setting that is evidently medieval and contains a few sparsely placed magical elements. The major conflict centres on a struggle between many aristocratic families for control of one of the world's continents. In each chapter, there are battles and swords, majestic castles, ferocious speeches with impeccable language, and courageous deeds. Martin deviates from the traditional literary treatment of disability.

Martin's sagas views disability as a difference rather than a deficit. It is not regarded as a tragedy that must be overcome or a catastrophe to be feared. The best modern writing about disability demonstrates that such variance is frequently unremarkable and commonplace. Life with a disability is just one among many.

However, Martin's disabled characters are not only employed as plot devices; disability is included as an identity. He accomplishes this by avoiding clichéd representations of disabled characters. They are regarded as complicated individuals with distinct strengths, flaws, and personalities. Through their actions and the viewpoints of other characters, the disabled characters' position in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is clearly portrayed, enabling readers to empathize with them. Martin uses compelling imagery to offer a precise portrayal of the difficulties linked to impairments. The author deviates from the conventional portrayal of persons with impairments in literary works. The disabled characters in his work are not only marginalized to advance the plot; their impairment is fully intertwined with their own existence. He accomplishes this by refraining from giving his characters with disabilities stereotypical representations. They are characterised as complicated individuals with distinct personalities, strengths, and distinctive identities. Characters with disabilities must look after themselves because nobody else would. They are compelled to circumvent and operate within their set constraints. *A Song of Ice and Fire* has several clichéd depictions, yet Bran Stark's presence of superhuman abilities is a prevalent literary convention.— exhibiting superhuman abilities, like Bran Stark does, is a prevalent



literary device—Martin largely breaks down the stereotypes of disability, elevating the way characters with disabilities are portrayed in literature. (Massie & Mayer, 2014, p. 58).

Readers may reflect more on being human or experience astonishment, panic, deviations, or sympathy when viewing disability through this lens, but these feelings are ultimately perceived as universal problems rather than being unique to people with disabilities. As a result, the societal processes that marginalise and exclude persons with disabilities can be reflected in and reinforced through the sagas. However, the reader is confronted with the complexities of disability in the sagas. The Martin model encompasses a wide range of disability representations, including physical, intellectual, inherited, and acquired.

The epic story of *A Song of Ice and Fire* incorporates the theme of impairment in two significant and contrasting manners: willingly and unwillingly. During her training, Arya is consistently presented with the chance to restore her vision and return to her previous existence. In every situation, she declines, understanding that her impairment is a momentary sacrifice for a good purpose. In contrast, Maester Aemon's blindness is a result of natural causes. Although the saga does not explicitly credit his astuteness to his lack of sight, the program aims to emphasise the irony of a blind individual being able to see the actual essence of individuals in his vicinity. Bran, Arya's younger brother, also inherits his impairment unintentionally, and his attitude towards disability differs significantly from that of his sister, maybe due to his age. Thus, characters with a disability could be categorised as those who acquired disability by accident, illness, or bad luck, such as Jamie, the Hound,

Theon/Reek, Beric, Illyn Payne, Khal Drago, as well as others who have lifelong impairments such as Hodor, Tyrion, Shireen, Lysa, Seylse. Characters with a genetic disorder (Tyrion Lannister suffers from skeletal dwarfism while Hodor has a speech defect) and characters who grow into disability (Bran Stark has partial paralysis after being knocked from a tower, while Jaime Lannister loses a hand) are included. All of these characters defy expectations that typically apply to people with disabilities. Martin has offered a fresh viewpoint on the disabled by avoiding stereotypical representations. They are not antagonists in the books; rather, the reader comes to like them as heroes.

In order to investigate the way disability is represented and the characters' search for their identity in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the analysis begins by breaking down the saga based on several characters. The analysis provides an overview of the role, disability, and placement of each character in the books. This narrative discourse will primarily describe how the characters' disabilities affect them.

### **1.2.1. Jaime Lannister and Bran (Brandon) Stark**

(George R. R., 1996, p. 85) In the first book, entitled *A Game of Thrones*, of the saga, Brandon Stark, son of "King of the North", is a prince of Winterfell who resides in "The North". At the beginning of the series, Bran is a seven-year-old and is not crippled. But scaling Winterfell's walls is something he enjoys doing, which is what causes his disability. However, tragedy strikes Bran when one day, while climbing a tower in Winterfell, he witnesses Queen Cersei Lannister, wife of King Robert Baratheon or "Lord of the Seven Kingdoms", having intercourse with her twin brother

Jaime Lannister. Jaime “gave Bran a shove. Screaming, Bran went backwards out the window into empty air. There was nothing to grab on to. The courtyard rushed up to meet him” (GOT, p.85). As declared by Jaime, he pushed Bran out of a window to keep their incest a secret from being discovered, “The things I do for love” (GOT, p.85). Bran is comatose but manages to survive. Jaime heads back to King’s Landing after departing from Winterfell.

Following his descent, he ultimately regains consciousness from a state of coma and is notified that he will permanently lose the ability to ambulate. He has many further alternatives for transportation after this. He is transported either in a wheelbarrow-style cart, carried by his servant Hodor, or on a horse that has been specially adapted to handle his disability. He uncovers the queen’s spouse, Cersei Lannister, and her fraternal twin, Jaime, engaging in an intimate act while climbing a tower at Winterfell. Bran is in a state of coma, yet he is able to live.

As a character, Bran has a significant connection to death and experiences that are close to death. Throughout the books, there are extended periods when it is believed that Bran is dead or close to dying. However, he finally recovers and undergoes several instances of resurrection within the plot. When Jaime forcefully expels Bran from the tower, the readers expect his death. At that point, Bran is essentially indistinguishable from being dead. Only in later chapters and episodes does Bran appear to be unconscious. However, Bran's loved ones and close family members are worried about his survival since his life is precariously balanced... As Jon Snow faces his stepmother, Catelyn Stark, to bid farewell to his half-brother Bran, who is wounded and

comatose, before departing for the Night's Watch, Snow provides an account of Bran's condition from his own perspective:

“She was holding one of his hands. It looked like a claw. This was not the Bran he remembered. The flesh had all gone from him. His skin stretched tight over bones like sticks. Under the blanket, his legs bent in ways that made Jon sick. His eyes were sunken deep into black pits; open, but they saw nothing. The fall had shrunken him somehow. He looked half a leaf, as if the first strong wind would carry him off to his grave” (GOT, p.94).

Bran’s state and the responses of others around him provide a gripping and thought-provoking insight into the expansive and complex domains of profound philosophical ideas, such as death and personhood, revealing intriguing depths of human life. As Bran struggles with his unconsciousness, his situation becomes a powerful catalyst for deep reflection, urging the readers to explore the complicated maze of existence and confront the intricacies of the decisions they make in order to create a meaningful life.

Although there may be arguments suggesting that Bran’s disability warrants considering euthanasia, Tedesco strongly asserts that such thinking may fail to see the many possibilities for a lively and meaningful life that Bran may still embrace. Tedesco strongly argues that although Bran’s inability to engage in his cherished climbing activity may be a significant challenge, it does not decrease his potential to

enjoy a satisfying life filled with meaningful interactions and connections. This extraordinary perspective invites us to delve into the vast tapestry of human existence, peeling back the layers of our understanding and challenging our preconceived notions about what it means to live truly. (Tedesco, 2012, p. 100).

Bran's perspective on people's disabilities undergoes a significant shift compared to his previous understanding of the books. As an example, the Hound has referred to him as a cripple, a term that is universally acknowledged. The phrase "cripple" is often used in many novels, thrones, and screenplays, with Jaime in particular regularly using the epithet "idiot kid". Once again, the meanings of this word may be examined from several perspectives. However, when we choose a sociocultural study of the magnitude of his controversy, it is sufficient to state that its phrases and names possess a very straightforward quality. The terms "cripple" and "idiot boy" contribute to the establishment of an ableist society in Martin's Saga, since they together convey to Bran that he is now a disabled individual whose status has diminished compared to before. His identity has been transformed into a socioeconomic identity. His identity has been transformed into a socioeconomic identity. Both characters confront society's views and the stigma associated with their disability.

The first chapter after the prologue of A Game of Thrones is narrated from Bran's perspective. At the age of seven, he receives a permission to accompany his father and siblings on a quest to exact revenge on the Night's Watch deserter—the protagonist of the prologue—who had previously escaped punishment. Bran receives a warning from his half-

brother, Jon Snow, advising him not to avert his gaze during the execution of their father, Eddard Stark. After displaying his brave actions, Bran is subsequently commended by Jon. Shortly on, they stumble upon the lifeless female direwolf, and their father grants them permission to adopt her offspring. In the upcoming chapter, narrated from Catelyn Stark's perspective, Eddard reminds his wife that she would have experienced a feeling of satisfaction at Bran's behaviour during the execution. Catelyn responds by expressing her admiration for him.

Multiple characters serve as guides for Bran, helping him come to terms with his physical impairments and develop his newfound psychic talents. Through their assistance and expertise, he ultimately fulfils his predetermined fate by travelling on a journey beyond the Wall to assume the role of the Three-Eyed Crow/Raven. Among these persons is Old Nan, an aged servant whose stories of the White Walkers and the Children of the Forest are frequently dismissed as a legend by the rest but deeply intrigued Bran and are consistently referenced by him. Hodor, who is the great-grandson of Old Nan, becomes an essential ally to Bran. He acts as Bran's mode of transportation and ultimately transports him to the cave of the Three-Eyed Crow/Raven located beyond the Wall. In a heroic act, Hodor sacrifices his life to protect Bran and his companions from the Night King's attack on the cave. Bran's direwolf Summer has great significance as Bran acquires the ability to warg into the wolf and assume control over its body. He may have many experiences in this role, but Bran first believes that he is

simply having dreams about being a wolf when these greendreams start (Harrison, 2018, p. 37).<sup>1</sup>

His warging capability manifested shortly after his accident, triggered by the trauma of unleashing his gift. Warging empowers Bran to physically inhabit the body of an animal, effectively allowing him to transcend his physical limitations. Despite this newfound ability, there remains a lingering hope within him that he may ultimately regain the use of his legs. However, as the saga continues, it becomes clear that Bran's disability is not just a physical limitation but also a source of great power and wisdom; it becomes increasingly evident that this aspiration is unattainable. By coming to terms with the irreversibility of his disability, Bran redirects his energy towards honing his distinctive talents. It seems rather predictable that Bran is finally coronated as the first chosen king of the Six Kingdoms. Bran, a member of the Stark family, is significant in the early volumes of *A Song of Ice and Fire* since the novels primarily revolve around the Stark family.

Jamie, on the other hand, is intertwined with the storyline of handicap, which occurs early on in *A Storm of Swords*. Jaime Lannister's character at the beginning is mostly characterised by his exceptional skill in sword fighting and his complex bond with his sister. Jaime not only has exceptional fighting abilities, but it also forms an integral aspect of his personal character. Aside from his closest acquaintances, only a select few are aware of Jaime's true identity beyond being an exceptionally competent knight

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<sup>1</sup> 'Warging' is a skill by Martin that lets someone experience the world through animals, forming strong bonds and gaining deep understanding of nature and behaviour.

responsible for the demise of the former king. Consequently, when Jaime's adversaries sever his dominant hand wielding the sword, he must adapt and establish a new sense of identity. Jaime asserts that his identity as a knight is primarily defined by his sword hand, stating, "I was that hand." (Martin, 2017, p. 353) As he starts to come to terms with his defeat, he must also rethink his understanding of Jaime Lannister's identity. Previously, he had always seen himself as a male counterpart to his sister - possessing strength, charm, and a focus on his own interests. The disdain and social disapproval he faces after the amputation of his hand enables him to establish a stronger connection with his brother, Tyrion.

The amputation of Jaime's hand serves as the crucial turning point in his narrative trajectory. While it may be easy to conclude that Jaime's previous actions justify such a punishment, his character growth over the series contradicts this viewpoint. Prior to this occurrence, we are aware that he is culpable of homicide, the killing of a monarch, engaging in sexual relations with close relatives, and displaying overall brutality. His defeat instils in him a sense of humility. Throughout season three, Jaime gradually becomes more emotionally vulnerable and begins to exhibit benevolent behaviour towards his fellow traveller, Brienne. At a certain juncture, he goes to the extent of endangering his own life in order to save her. It is evident that he has a real fondness for Tyrion, making him maybe the only one who truly adores him. Jaime views his right hand as a representation of the things he has to give up in order to improve himself: his combat skills, his manliness, and his self-centeredness.



However, upon closer examination using a metaphorical analysis, it becomes evident that Jaime has not gone completely beyond the societal norms that dictate his behaviour despite the changes he has undergone. When Jaime's amputated limb is shown, he is depicted as damaged and vulnerable, but there is sincerity to his feelings that was before unseen. Upon his arrival at home, he is promptly equipped with a sophisticated prosthesis and urged to behave as if he is still the same person he was before. In order for Jaime to be seen as “normal,” both he and his society must acknowledge his prosthesis as a satisfactory substitute for his hand, reinstating his status as the prevailing standard and subsequently increasing his attractiveness. Jaime, on the other hand, adamantly refuses to accomplish this, arguing that a hook would be a more pragmatic choice compared to handmade gold. The prosthesis is unwieldy and burdensome, which hampers its effectiveness as a tool. It operates well but mostly serves as a status symbol, guaranteeing that despite Jaime’s diminished social standing based on his skills, he still has the advantages of riches and political influence. Jaime acknowledges that having a hook or no prosthesis at all would make his life physically more convenient, but it would also create social challenges. Jaime’s choice to wear a prestigious prosthetic limb highlights his preference for conforming to societal norms rather than embracing a crippled identity.

### **1.2.2. Tyrion Lannister**

Tyrion Lannister is the dwarf offspring of Tywin Lannister, a prosperous and driven nobleman who unrelentingly advances his family’s objectives. His father blames him for the death of his mother. At the beginning of the saga, he is

portrayed as a charming rogue who indulges in alcohol and prostitutes. Yet, he also exhibits a deep affection for literature and possesses a sharp intellect. He is an entitled offspring who harbours both contempt and a desire for his father's affection and approval. Throughout the saga, he undergoes a transformation and emerges as a true leader, surpassing even the king (who is his nephew) that he serves. He strives to attain personal authority and uphold the honour of his family. He frequently indulges in excessive drinking but never conforms to the caricature of a bitter freak who drowns his sorrows.

Tyrion Lannister possesses a unique personality because of his dwarfism and the number of individuals with this condition in the saga is limited. Others consistently refer to Tyrion as "imp" or "dwarf" in his vicinity. Furthermore, he is regarded as a grotesque being and is subjected to ostracism, being shunned by society and excluded from participating in social activities. His disability has a direct impact on his speaking abilities. Adjacent, others observe and interact with him in a manner that directly associates his dwarfism with his humanity. He is consistently perceived as a monster, as though it is his sole identity. Throughout the saga, it is evident that individuals not only hold a negative opinion of him but also actually attempt to cause his demise. Consequently, they fail to recognise the true essence of Tyrion, disregarding his exceptional physical and cerebral capabilities. He can also be regarded as highly intellectual, astute, and clever. His expertise in the domains of politics, ethics, and morals is unquestionable, evident via his astute techniques, persuasive speeches, and strong commitment to human rights. He not only manages to survive against all

expectations but also prospers, ultimately becoming one of the most influential figures in both Westeros and Essos. Nevertheless, it is evident that others within his immediate circle are attempting to assassinate him solely due to his disability, which they perceive as abhorrent and dehumanising, as they fail to acknowledge his personhood. Tyrion's condition exemplifies the way society treats individuals with impairments. The portrayal of his character defies stereotypes and brings attention to the injustices experienced by people with impairments. However, the saga highlights Tyrion's intellectual acumen and cleverness, so exemplifying the potential of individuals with impairments. Nevertheless, the saga also emphasises the obstacles and prejudice that Tyrion encounters as a result of his impairment. Tyrion's astuteness and cleverness frequently function as a means for him to manoeuvre through the discriminatory society in which he resides. His astute decision-making and articulate speech enable him to outsmart anyone who underestimates his abilities. His astute problem-solving skills and articulate speech enable him to outwit anyone who underestimates him, regardless of his physical constraints.

Notwithstanding his physical limitations, Tyrion continually demonstrates his prowess as a powerful strategist. His exceptional intelligence and astute sense of humour allow him to outsmart his adversaries and successfully handle intricate political circumstances. His exceptional capacity for critical thinking and ability to foresee the actions of others distinguishes him as a captivating figure.

Furthermore, his profound understanding of politics and adeptness in outwitting his opponents have also played a

substantial role in his achievements. The tendency of him to outwit his opponents frequently astonishes those who undervalue him. His ability to bounce back from adversity and his high level of intellect have enabled him to successfully overcome these obstacles and become a multi-dimensional and captivating character. Nevertheless, he continues to encounter discrimination and prejudice from his family and society because of his physical impairment. Tyrion's character is best exemplified by Jon Snow when the Lannisters visit the Kingdom of the North at the outset of the first book, *A Game of Thrones*:

“Then he saw the other one, waddling along half-hidden by his brother’s side. Tyrion Lannister, the youngest of Lord Tywin’s brood and by far the ugliest. All that the gods had given to Cersei and Jaime, they had denied Tyrion. He was a dwarf, half his brother’s height, struggling to keep pace on stunted legs. His head was too large for his body, with a brute’s squashed-in face beneath a swollen shelf of brow. One green eye and one black one peered out from under a lank fall of hair so blond it seemed white. Jon watched him with fascination” (GOT, p.51).

In *A Storm of Swords*, Ch. 68, Tyrion’s trial is an excellent example of publicly expressing prejudice and incapacity. The trial brings the Lannisters’ turbulent family history to a devastating finale. Because of his diminutive stature and the

fact that he lost his mother when he was young, Tyrion—the youngest son of Lord Tywin Lannister and a brother to Jaime and Cersei—has endured discrimination throughout his life. Society and his family hold him responsible for his physical deformities, yet when healthy boys die during delivery, the deaths of their mothers are mourned but never blamed on the kid. Tyrion only has a brotherly bond with Jamie, whereas his father and sister both despise him. His brother gave Tyrion a prostitute, and his father forces her to sell herself to the guards for silver as Tyrion watches. This hurts Tyrion's first love, a wound that never gets better. The latter is hiding behind his money, power, and prominent position within the Lannister family while he shows signs of developing an addiction to prostitutes and drink. As he serves on the tiny council and battles his haughty nephew Joffrey throughout his short reign, he prepares himself academically and politically at King's Landing and Casterly Rock. The unstable and erratic Joffrey makes a lot of enemies before he is killed at his wedding reception. Even though Tyrion is thought to have poisoned his nephew Joffrey, it turns out that Olenna Tyrell, a rival noblewoman, wanted to prevent Margaery, her granddaughter, from marrying "a monster" named Joffrey. Tywin, his father, constantly puts him down due to his illness and his mother's tragic death during delivery, which he hates deeply.

Tywin articulates his inclination to transport Tyrion to the ocean and permit the waves to engulf him. He refers to Tyrion using derogatory terms like a “short-sighted fool” and “a small, malicious being filled with jealousy, desire, and deceitful intelligence”. Despite Tywin’s persistent reminders of Tyrion’s socially despised attributes, Tyrion

consistently demonstrates brilliance, compassion, loyalty, bravery, and wit. Importantly, his empathy also encompasses the Starks, who are his relatives by marriage. However, Tyrion has always been accused of having a tiny stature. His own father takes advantage of the opportunity to rule over him. It quickly grows clear that the spectacle is nothing more than a show trial. Tyrion observes that the presiding judge, his father, and his chief accuser, Cersei, have wanted him dead for longer than anyone else and that another judge, Mace Tyrell, will go along with anything Tywin says. Shae, the prostitute, deceitfully testifies:

“They plotted it together,” she said, this girl he’d loved. “The Imp and Lady Sansa plotted it after the Young Wolf died. Sansa wanted revenge for her brother and Tyrion meant to have the throne. He was going to kill his sister next, and then his own lord father. (ASOS, p.125)

Finally, Tyrion bursts at the unfairness, insulting the entire court in the process: “I saved you all, Tyrion thought. I saved this vile city and all your worthless lives”.(Martin, 2017, p. 131) Tyrion’s loyalty to his father (and, to a lesser extent, House Lannister) is shattered:

“Guilty”, “so guilty. Is that what you wanted to hear?”, [...] “Nothing of the sort,” [said Tyrion]. “Of Joffrey’s death I am innocent. I am guilty of a more monstrous crime.” He took a step toward his father. “I was born. I lived. I am guilty of being a dwarf, I

confess it. And no matter how many times my good father forgave me, I have persisted in my infamy”. (ASOS, p.131)

With this comment, he deliberately claims “disability” for himself, positions himself as a target of discrimination, and so exposes social prejudice. He also confronts the audience's point of view, as well as the discriminatory behaviour of today's society. One of the accusers must pay for this, which surprises the crowd. Tyrion’s brother Jamie helps him escape before he is executed as a disruptive force in society. He breaks into his father Tywin’s chambers while he is still heading to the boat and finds him with the Shae, “You shot me. The father sneers, You are not my son” [...] “I have always been your son!” (ASOS, p.145). Tyrion uses a crossbow on the privy and kills him.

### **1.2.3. Arya Stark**

A Song of Ice and Fire utilises the literary device of the blind seer archetype through the character of Arya Stark, a young orphan girl who escapes the persecution of the Lannisters. Arya engages in rigorous training to reconstruct her identity and acquire expertise as an assassin. During this process, she develops the ability to rely on her remaining skills in exchange for her visual impairment. Arya embraces her blindness as an essential sacrifice in her quest to acquire the mystical powers possessed by the “faceless” assassins. In the fifth instalment of the series, A Dance with Dragons, Arya faces several potential “disabilities” while undergoing her training at the Temple of the Many-Faced God. These include being punished by losing her sight as a consequence

of taking it upon herself to deliver death. However, her training suggests that further challenges are awaiting her:

“We took your eyes and gave them back. Next we will take your ears, and you will walk in silence. You will give us your legs and crawl. You will be no one’s daughter, no one’s wife, no one’s mother. Your name will be a lie, and the very face you wear will not be your own. will be a lie, and the very face you wear will not be your own”.(Martin, 2011, p. 837)

Part of her training is to be blind, and her vision rapidly diminishes, and she emits a distressing cry, “she is given a potion that temporarily renders her blind.”(Jacoby, 2012, p. 247)

Arya, despite her blindness, assumes the identity of “Beth” (ADWD, p.45), an impoverished girl. She roams through the streets of Braavos, soliciting money and eavesdropping for fragments of information. She improves her skills in deception and discerning falsehoods from others.

#### **1.2.4. Little Shireen**

Princess Shireen Baratheon, a little girl in Martin’s story, serves as a prominent illustration of the “poor little thing” archetype due to her disfigurement caused by a typically deadly illness. She had greyscale as an infant, resulting in scarring on the left side of her face. Despite being typically regarded as a certain demise, Stannis showed unwavering determination and sought the assistance of healers from both sides of the Narrow Sea to attempt to heal her (Evans &



Potter, 2018, p. 48).<sup>2</sup> Through their collective efforts, they ultimately achieved success, resulting in lifelong scarring on the left side of her face. Shireen’s facial deformities serve to emphasise the disparity between the tangible and emotional consequences of her condition. She is the object of her mother’s contempt and receives minimal attention from her father. Despite making numerous appearances throughout the series, she is never given the chance to fully develop as an independent character. Indeed, her diverse interactions with other characters elucidate their personalities and motivations more so than her own. The individuals who demonstrate sympathy towards Shireen are seen as virtuous, but those who harbour resentment against her or exploit her solely for their own benefit are shown as malevolent. When Shireen is ultimately immolated as an offering, unafraid of depicting graphic deaths, the primarily focuses on the countenances of Shireen’s parents rather than Shireen herself. The significance lies in their varied responses to her demise rather than the demise itself.

Shireen’s multiple appearances in the saga emphasise how her infirmity has a purpose in the story. The readers found her death to be extremely disturbing, even if they had limited knowledge of Shireen, who was portrayed as an innocent character with a disfigured face. Indeed, it is precisely that state of innocence that elicited such intense reactions to the scene.

Unbeknownst to Shireen, her father is requesting her to commit self-sacrifice. He informs her that if an individual

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<sup>2</sup> “Greyscale” is a highly dangerous and typically catastrophic illness that can cause the flesh to become rigid and lifeless, while the skin becomes brittle, peeling, and resembling stone to the touch.

possesses self-awareness and remains loyal to their actual nature, they are obligated to fulfil their predetermined fate, regardless of their personal aversion towards it. Shireen, displaying her affectionate nature, conveys her willingness to assist her father and pledges to do everything within her capacity, unaware of his hidden motives. Shireen tenderly embraces her father as Stannis requests his daughter's forgiveness:

“Stannis: Sometimes a person has to choose. Sometimes the world forces his hand. If a man knows... what he is... and remains true to himself... the choice is no choice at all. He must fulfil his destiny...and become who he is meant to be. However much he may hate it.

Shireen: It's alright father.

Stannis: You don't even know what I'm talking about.

Shireen: It doesn't matter. I want to help you. Is there any way I can help?

Stannis: Yes, there is.

Shireen: Good, I want to. I'm Princess Shireen of the House Baratheon and I'm your daughter.” (ADWD, p.86)

Afterwards, Shireen is escorted and tied to a pyre, where she is presented as an offering to the Lord of Light by Melisandre, who carries out the deed without experiencing any remorse. Amidst the raging inferno, she fervently beseeches her mother and father for help. Selyse rushes to assist her daughter but is restrained by Baratheon soldiers. She collapses to the ground, witnessing her daughter's

demise in the inferno, as Stannis averts his gaze with tears welling in his eyes.

Shireen's act of sacrifice enables her father's troops to advance, as the employment of blood magic seems to have effectively caused the snow to melt. Nevertheless, the appalling act of a little girl's sacrifice has caused numerous Baratheon soldiers and all of his hired soldiers to abandon their posts. At the same time, Selyse takes her own life, and Melisandre escapes upon receiving the information. Despite this, Stannis persists in advancing towards Winterfell, but his army is decisively vanquished by the Boltons. An angry Brienne of Tarth, his morale shattered by his defeat and the unnecessary loss that was excessively costly, ultimately slays Stannis.

### **1.2.5. Hodor**

In the books, Hodor is portrayed as a character who is only capable of uttering what we once believed to be his name. However, Martin emphasises that Hodor possesses the ability to comprehend human language, execute intricate commands, and display appropriate emotional responses. This is also reflected in the TV show of the saga: The actor portraying Hodor dedicated a significant amount of effort to perfecting the pronunciation of a single word, with the intention of conveying several emotions. The situation is that he is regarded merely as a physical entity to be commanded and controlled.

The character Hodor also exemplifies the "poor little thing" archetype. He has an atypical size, potentially due to gigantism, and displays signs of an intellectual handicap. His verbal communication is limited to a single word: Hodor.

Hodor's portrayal in the books is a particularly challenging instance of representing disability, as he serves as a literal substitute for Bran's missing limb. Hodor not only transports Bran but also provides a vessel for him to inhabit through magical means, such as warging in the saga. This extraordinary power might be inferred to be enabled solely by Hodor's infirmity. The combination of Hodor's physical prowess and Bran's intellectual capacity results in the creation of a fully functional being, diminishing their individual humanity.

Throughout the saga, the prosthetic and comedic role of Hodor's physical capability and intellectual impairment is of little importance. Hodor facilitates the pragmatic advancement of the narrative since he physically empowers Bran to navigate through the plot. In this manner, Hodor might be readily substituted with a horse, and a modified saddle, similar to the one Tyrion presents to Bran in the initial season. In addition, he bestows Bran with vigour, a quality that Bran forcefully appropriates from Hodor when he enters his body without permission through warging. Hodor's role as a subject of sympathy and compassion, or as a tool to be exploited by others who consider themselves more cognitively advanced, serves as a concerning representation of the challenges faced by those with intellectual disabilities (Rapley, 2004, p. 200). Despite receiving sympathetic treatment from the narrative, Hodor is ultimately subjected to scorn or ridicule by the majority of the novel's characters.

The whole significance of Hodor's role as a method of narration is only fully understood at the conclusion of the book when it becomes apparent that Bran unintentionally

caused Hodor's infirmity and potentially his death. The portrayal of Hodor is particularly concerning due to his status as crippled characters. This allows the writers to manipulate the audience's emotions by replacing true empathy with shallow sympathy. The saga can employ a sad history or depict a young, innocent character who is culturally oppressed by his deformities as a means to evoke emotion without delving into the intricacies of the actual experience. The utilisation of trope-heavy shortcuts with characters like Hodor is particularly concerning, considering that Martin has demonstrated their ability to create intricate and praiseworthy emotional storylines for characters with disabilities, as seen in characters like Tyrion.

## **2. Conclusion**

Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* has received great acclaim for its subtle and empathetic depiction of the distinct obstacles encountered by individuals with disabilities. The saga has the ability to amplify the voices of an oppressed community by scrutinising the narrow standards and societal institutions. It is valuable and impactful work that serves to not only raise awareness but also to provide a clear understanding of this marginalised demographic. However, the saga features a diverse cast of characters with varying physical attributes and unique skill sets. These characters with disabilities play significant roles in Martin's saga, as the author uses their marginalised status to criticise disability issues. Martin examines the intricate connections between disability and identity by presenting a variety of well-developed characters, so illuminating the wide array of experiences within this community. His writing not only

confronts and questions prevailing beliefs and misunderstandings about disability but also honours and exalts the fortitude, adaptability, and autonomy of challenged individuals. By integrating disability as a fundamental element of his narrative, Martin emphasises the significance of representation and inclusiveness in literature, motivating readers to empathise, acquire knowledge, and value the complex and diverse experiences of individuals with disabilities.

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