

## Creating villains from heroes and turning anti-heroes into paladins

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### Abstract

This paper is dedicated to talk about the elements of chivalry in the popular fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, written by George R.R. Martin, especially centering upon the distinctive features of the characters of Jaime Lannister and Brienne of Tarth. Throughout the novels, both of these characters go through a chain of events that embody their personalities, and thanks to the crossing of their paths, Jaime and Brienne become different persons. Among many alterations, this paper focuses mainly on the chivalric attributions in search of evidence for their existence. This pursuit of chivalry is evident since there is a problematic situation for these two characters; the former is seemingly a representative of a classical knight figure, but every new page of the novel displays us the devilish corruption occupying him. However, the latter, a total opposite of Jaime and a freak of nature for the unmerciful folks of the Seven Kingdoms, is still a much more appropriate knight than Jaime, even though Brienne is a woman, which is another uncommon characteristic for the traditional concept of knighthood. The intention of this paper is, thus, to seek for the presumptive aim of the author to create a case which is both a juxtaposition and contradiction. Martin converts the supposed hero into a villain-like character, and he makes a paladin out of the anti-hero of the story. Consequently, the obvious perception management carried out by the author collides with the prejudgment of the reader to demolish the readers' prejudices.

**Keywords:** *A Song of Ice and Fire*, fantasy fiction, chivalry, perception management.

## Kahramanlardan kötü adam yaratmak ve anti-kahramanları şövalyelere dönüştürmek

### Öz

Bu araştırma, George R.R. Martin tarafından yazılan *Buz ve Ateşin Şarkısı* serisindeki şövalyelik unsurlarını özellikle Jamie Lannister ve Tarth'lı Brienne'in öne çıkan karakterlerine odaklanarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Romanlarda bu iki karakter kendi kişiliklerini şekillendiren bir olaylar zinciri yaşarlar, ve yollarının kesişmesi sayesinde Jaime ve Brienne farklı insanlara dönüşürler. Çok sayıda değişimin arasında, bu araştırma şövalyelik unsurlarına odaklanıp onun varlığını aramaktadır. Böyle bir arayış bu iki karakterin içinde bulunduğu sorunlu durumdan kaynaklıdır; ilki klasik bir şövalye figürünü temsil ediyor gibi görünür ama kitabın her yeni sayfası bize içinde bulunduğu şeytani yozlaşmayı gösterir. Ama ikincisi ise Jaime'nin tam ziti, Yeni Krallık'ın acımasız insanlarının gözünde tam bir ucube ve bir kadın olmasına rağmen, ki bu da geleneksel şövalye figürüne aykırıdır,

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şövalyelik için Jaime'den çok daha uygundur. Bu sebepten, bu çalışmanın arayışı yazarın yarattığı hem birbirine paralel hem de zıtlık içindeki durumdur. Martin, bildiğimiz kahramanı kötü adamvari bir karaktere dönüştürürken hikayedeki anti-kahramandan da bir şövalye yaratmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, yazarın açıklıkla yürüttüğü algı yönetimi, okuyucunun önyargılarını yıkmak adına birbiriyle çarpışmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Buz ve Ateşin Şarkısı*, fantastik edebiyat, şövalyelik, algı yönetimi.

## 1. Introduction

George Martin adopts the method of tricking readers' perception, by which he subverts the typical character structures in fantasy novels, and provides the readers with the opportunity to disentangle themselves from their prejudgements. In addition, he creates a process in which both the characters and the readers' ideas on them develop. This technique can be clearly observed in George Martin's novel series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as exemplified in the personality of Jaime Lannister and Brienne of Tarth, who justify the argument put in this study.

Since the aforementioned novels are prominent examples of the fantasy genre, introducing their character stereotypes is of vital importance because in some cases, they might appear as largely exaggerated or caricatured. While dealing with a literary work of high fantasy, characters are more likely to be caricatured. They become the representatives of some certain values or virtues, and they even reach an allegorical level. In this context, the very first person to be mentioned is J.R.R. Tolkien, who is one of the most successful writers to inspire many to write fantasy. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* is an archetypal example of high fantasy, thus the characters in his book, like Gandalf and Aragorn, are supportive guides to the argument of stereotypical characters. Vike informs us about this as such:

High fantasy, on the other hand, is the term one would use for the story that takes place completely within a secondary, invented and fictional world, the "otherworld" as previously mentioned. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is a typical example of a work that would be placed under the designation of high fantasy (2019, p. 11).

However, the situation with *A Song of Ice and Fire* is completely different, for Martin is a writer whose works of fantasy are exact opposite of Tolkien's works although we know that Martin was influenced by him. During an interview with the magazine *Variety*, Martin stated that, "He made me love the form he created — epic fantasy. He redefined fantasy of everything that had been before" (Nissen, 2019). He accepted that Tolkien's epic trilogy format had an influence upon the creation of his *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Yet, the result of his influence on Martin, unlike Tolkien's own work, is a fantasy fiction that has a more realistic world with the real life characters. This attitude toward fantasy adopted by Martin demonstrates that this genre is not a total escape from realism, though some like W.R. Irwin claims it to be so. Fredericks uses Irwin's thoughts to support this claim as follows:

Significantly, there is general agreement among the critics that Fantasy constitutes what Irwin calls "the literature of the impossible." By this expression he means that the fictional worlds portrayed by the Fantasist take as their point of departure the deliberate violation of norms and facts we regard as essential to our conventional conception of "reality," in order to create an imaginary counter-structure or counter-norm (Irwin's term is "antireal") which can then be explored by the given Fantasy writer in any number of ways. Despite their commitments to various other formal definitions of Fantasy, the authorities certainly emphasize this "counter-reality... (1978, p. 37).

Despite these claims, some others see fantasy as a useful way of dealing with reality. James' own comment upon this argument is, "Fantasy, for Tolkien, was a way of getting closer to the important things of life than the realistic novel ever could" (2012, p. 93). This realistic attitude towards the genre results in alterations in its characteristics. Thanks to such kinds of alterations, one can find characters different from the typical ones in high fantasy.

In the light of fantasy genre, this study is an attempt to examine the series by Martin focusing upon his distinctive way of creating villains out of heroes and vice versa. Martin, while successfully employing elements of fantasy fiction just like Tolkien, he avoids totally complying with the established elements of this genre. The characters such as Jaime and Brienne are typical examples that indicate how Martin tricks the perception of his reader.

## 2. A man without honour and Brienne the Beauty

Before discussing the chivalric attributes of the characters, it is necessary to put an emphasis on the medievalized theme of the series. Although it is possible to find many other examples from all the books, this study remains in the boundaries of the first three books, the names of which are *A Game of Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings* and *A Storm of Swords*. This series mainly deals with the power struggle among the noble houses of The Seven Kingdoms placed in a continent called Westeros. The reason behind this struggle is their goal to take possession of The Iron Throne, which is located in the capital city named King's Landing, to have the authority over the other houses. The lords, whose families live in castles with them, rule these houses, and they have their bannermen in the regions nearby the castles. The bannermen are responsible for the aid during the time of war, or providing food and resources. Therefore, the ruling system working in this fantastic universe is feudalism as it was in the Middle Ages.

Following a similar vein with Tolkien, Martin makes use of medieval themes in his work of art. However, there exists a discrepancy alongside with the similarity. As stated in introduction, in Tolkien's world, it is much easier to find stereotypical characters including ones with chivalric qualities. James informs us about Tolkien's world:

Tolkien also, of course, celebrates the courage of the great men, such as Gandalf, and of professional warriors and leaders like Aragorn and Faramir and many others, not forgetting Eowyn, the woman who stood up against the Lord of the Nazg^ ul when men had failed. (2012, p. 92)

In a world filled with castles, swords, wars, lords and ladies, most chivalric elements are likely to come into view. Indeed, Martin's books also present heroic figures, courageous people and honorable warriors. Nevertheless, his books are simlutenously filled with the contrasting images of those traditional figures. Even so, there might be several reasons why the readers would be likely to remain in pursuit of pure chivalry.

First, a knight must be a 'man'. It means that if a character is to have chivalric attributes, that character must be male. In this sense, chivalry is directly associated with manhood. In the definition of chivalry, Stableford's explanation supports the argument: "Chivalry was a code of honor supposedly observed by Christian knights, whose formalization adapted a Germanic rite of passage; it became a central myth of feudalism..." (2005, p. 74).

This perception creates a prejudgement for the readers of fantasy fiction to expect a knight to be a male. In fact, his story is appropriate to have elements of chivalry thanks to its setting that is in conformity

with the conventional characteristics of this genre. As stated above, it has medieval and feudal elements; therefore, including heroic men with honour seems inevitable. Nonetheless, concerning the character typification, Martin chooses a different path by playing upon the character development, namely creating paradoxical characters, as well as our perception.

To be able to understand the contrast, which is the essence of this paper, it is necessary to look at the preliminary images of the given characters, Jaime Lannister and Brienne of Tarth, in the beginning of the series. Jaime is the bright son of House Lannister, one of the seven important houses in Westeros, and he is a very handsome man with golden hair, which is a characteristic of his descent. Since his childhood, Jaime had always been a natural-born sword fighter, and he proved his worth and valour during a tournament organized when he was the thirteen-year-old squire of Lord Sumner Crakehall. After two years of serving the same Lord and getting courtly confirmation on several occasions, Jaime gained his knighthood. Becoming a knight would bring him the responsibility of ruling Casterly Rock, the castle where House Lannister resides. When the right time came, he was also supposed to get married in order to satisfy the expectations of that period society. However, the first unvirtuous act of Jaime came into view; Jaime had a twin sister named Cersei, and they had an incestuous relationship, which was against the moral values of the period. To be able to remain close to his sister, Jaime chose to stay in King's Landing and became a member of the Kingsguard, who are the special knights with white cloaks responsible for protecting the king. Jamison informs us about this organization:

Originally, they consisted of the finest knights in Westeros, and they are expected to uphold the ideals of chivalry and to demonstrate unflinching loyalty to king. In the present tense of Martin's novels, however, the Kingsguard is composed of some knights of questionable morality and lineage who are selected simply because the Lannisters find them loyal (2018, p. 94).

To become a Kingsguard means renouncing your family heritage and not being able to marry and start a family. This starting point of his story is contradictory in itself. It is a fact that Jaime is the youngest Kingsguard in history, and at first, some might think that his family name, his talent and his honorable service brought him that title. Nonetheless, the readers know that it is a way of continuing his unvirtuous relationship. Jaime's life is full of such contradictions although he always looks like a perfect figure. In the early sections of the book, Martin depicts Jaime as follows:

Ser Jaime Lannister was twin to Queen Cersei; tall and golden, with flashing green eyes and a smile that cut like a knife. He wore crimson silk, high black boots, a black satin cloak. On the breast of his tunic, the lion of his House was embroidered in gold thread, roaring its defiance. They called him the Lion of Lannister to his face and whispered "Kingslayer" behind his back. Jon found it hard to look away from him. *This is what a king should look like*, he thought to himself as the man passed. (1996, p. 42)

This is the first appropriate example in the novel that hints at what kind of hypocrisy suited to Jaime. This depiction is from a scene where all the royal people, including the King, visit Winterfell, the castle of House Stark. Considering that it is a royal visit, it comes as no surprise that Jaime looks as such. However, beyond the physical appearance of Jaime, whom Jon compares to a king, one striking point is the nickname given to him. Jaime is the Kingslayer for everyone because of an obvious reason: He killed the previous king whom he took an oath to protect. The previous king from House Targaryen was Aerys, whom people also know as 'the Mad King' because of the fact that his actions could be attributed to a mad person. The story evolved into a point where several houses, including Lannisters and Starks, started a rebellion against the Throne. During that rebellion, Jaime stuck his sword to the back of the King, and because of this assassination, he earned his nickname. Kingslayer is not the only nickname he got because of this treachery; people also call him 'Oathbreaker' and 'a man without honour'. When the

author informs us that Brandon, a Stark child, admires Jaime, Brandon recalls his brother Robb's warnings as well: "Ser Jaime Lannister looked more like the knights in the stories, and he was of the Kingsguard too, but Robb said he had killed the old mad king and shouldn't count anymore" (Martin, 1996, p. 65). Neither his title nor his family's strength prevents him from being perceived as a corrupted figure.

Another contradictive example is from the time when Ned Stark saw Jaime in the throne room during the rebellion. At the time of the incident through which Jaime had earned his notorious nickname, Kingslayer, Ned's description of him shows us the perfect appearance of Jaime,

Aerys was dead on the floor, drowned in his own blood. His dragon skulls stared down from the walls. Lannister's men were everywhere. Jaime wore the White cloak of the Kingsguard over his golden armor. I can see him still. Even his sword was gilded. He was seated on the Iron Throne, high above his knights, wearing a helm fashioned in the shape of a lion's head. How he glittered! (Martin, 1996, p. 97).

Even a simple-minded man like Ned Stark admires the figure he saw. Yet again, among the things Ned mentions, there is information about a dead king and our perfect figure sitting on the Iron Throne. Killing the king that you swore to protect and sitting on his position afterwards are not acts that can be knightly or honorable.

The author indeed plays with our perception at the very beginning of the first novel. On the walls of Winterfell, Bran Stark, the little son of Ned, unintentionally discovers the incestuous intercourse between Jaime and his twin sister, Queen Cersei. To make matters worse, seeing that the child knows their secret now, Jaime throws him out of the castle window, and he cripples the boy for the rest of the story. Before pushing Bran out of the window, Jaime says, "The things I do for love" (1996, 71). His reference to love, considering that he is a knight, can be connected to the courtly love; however, crippling a little boy for your love is far away from being courteous. However, the twins do not see their incestuous relationship as unholy. In King's Landing, when Ned Stark asks Queen Cersei about her affair with Jaime, her reply throws light on the manner,

And Jaime and I are more than brother and sister. We are one person in two bodies. We shared a womb together. He came into this world holding my foot, our old maester said. When he is in me, I feel ... whole (Martin, 1996, p. 405).

All the given examples from the first book are the events that dismantle any reader's prejudgement of Jaime. It is an overturn because reading about his evil deeds and acts make us not get affected by his impressive appearance. This is not, however, the only way Martin plays with the perception of his readers. For the early books of the series, Jaime joins the story as a villainous character with devilish corruption embodied within his character. The second strike from Martin comes later in the story when Jaime's path crosses with Brienne, whom we see as the paladin of the story. Paladin is widely accepted as a very brave knight or a person with a strong commitment, both of which apply to Brienne.

Brienne gets involved in the story in the second book, *A Clash of Kings* as the victor of a melee fight in front of Renly Baratheon, who claims himself to be the rightful king after the death of the previous king, his elder brother Robert. Upon winning the fight, Renly offers her whatever she decides as long as it lies in his power, and what she demands immediately portends the core of her personality:

"Your Grace," Brienne answered, "I ask the honor of a place among your Rainbow Guard. I would be one of your seven, and pledge my life to yours, to go where you go, ride at your side, and keep you safe from all hurt and harm" (Martin, 1999, p. 259).

Rainbow Guard is no different from Kingsguard, a member of which is Jaime Lannister. Both groups serve as the personal guards of kings. As it is clear in the name of the book, there are many who claim themselves to be the rightful heir to the throne from different regions of Westeros. Thus, each supposed king should have their own group of protectors, and Brienne declares her wish to be one of those people. Her declaration is an indication of how she approaches this duty. It is precisely an honor for her, and she intends to dedicate her life for this glorious cause. The same duty is a source of boredom for Jaime, and as stated before, Jaime accepted to be a Kingsguard only to stay in the capital out of his desire to enjoy the adjacency to his sister.

Brienne's wish is completely chivalrous and noble, but the suitability of her intention with respect to the conditions and the perceptions of Westeros folks, it is rather questionable.

Brienne herself aspires to live up to chivalric ideals even though, as a woman, she is a most unconventional knight. Regardless of Brienne's determination to maintain personal honor and in spite of her visions of glorified visions of chivalry, the institution of knighthood in Westeros, including the once highly regarded Kingsguard, is in decline (Jamison, 2018, p. 84).

Even, the presence of a man like Jaime in Kingsguard matches up with Jamison's claim. Brienne endeavors much to stay pure in a defiled world. The corruption and evilness of people in Westeros can also be observed right after the passage of Brienne's fight. Following this incident, Catelyn learns that people call her Brienne the Beauty to mock her because of her physical appearance. When she observes what is happening, her inner voice welcomes the reader.

Beauty, they called her . . . mocking. The hair beneath the visor was a squirrel's nest of dirty straw, and her face . . . Brienne's eyes were large and very blue, a young girl's eyes, trusting and guileless, but the rest . . . her features were broad and coarse, her teeth prominent and crooked, her mouth too wide, her lips so plump they seemed swollen. A thousand freckles speckled her cheeks and brow, and her nose had been broken more than once. Pity filled Catelyn's heart. *Is there any creature on earth as unfortunate as an ugly woman?* (Martin, 1999, p. 259).

Learning about people's opinion with her is one of the staunch supporters of our argument, for these last two quotations include the reasons why there is a problematic situation about chivalry in this story and universe. As it should be, a knight in armor becomes the champion in a melee fight, and quite virtuously, that knight dedicates everything to the King, yet the knight is not a man but a woman and she is not a glamorous figure. Brienne has everything that Jaime does not; however, she lacks the petty features that Jaime has. Jamison comments upon her appearance:

Similarly, Brienne of Tarth fails to meet the standards of knighthood because of her gender although she excels as one of Martin's worthiest and most virtuous pseudo-knights. She also fails to meet the standards of beauty expected of noble women. Manly and unattractive, Brienne feels that her unconventional looks are an embarrassment to her family. Certainly, they have prevented her father from arranging a suitable marriage for her (2018, p. 79).

At first glance, these two characters look like the two opposite poles, but Martin is not an author who gives his readers simple and easy to comprehend characters. Thus, our earlier views are doomed to be proven false. As a result, it is not a surprise for an anti-hero like Brienne to carry the features of an ideal hero. In addition, Jaime Lannister is also a character undertaking different stages of vicissitude. At the beginning, we witness him turn into a villain, yet at another point, he plays the paladin role. Consequently, it is hard for the reader to categorize him either as a hero or as a villain.

Jaime's unchivalrous acts still exist, but the notorious event of his sword-hand's being chopped off in the third book of the series, *A Storm of Swords*, opens the way of redemption for him. While having an

interview with Gilmore from *The Rolling Stone*, Martin talks about Jaime's abject condition. "One of the things I wanted to explore with Jaime, and with so many of the characters, is the whole issue of redemption" (2014). His own comments upon the character support us not to judge him directly. In the same interview, Martin keeps referring to him:

Our society is full of people who have fallen in one way or another, and what do we do with these people? How many good acts make up for a bad act? If you're a Nazi war criminal and then spend the next 40 years doing good deeds and feeding the hungry, does that make up for being a concentration-camp guard? I don't know the answer, but these are questions worth thinking about. I want there to be a possibility of redemption for us, because *we all* do terrible things. We should be able to be forgiven. Because if there is no possibility of redemption, what's the answer then? (Gilmore, 2014)

If we give an ear to the words of Martin, it is crucial to focus on and deepen the hand-chopping event. It is not just losing a hand for Jaime, but he loses his sword-hand, which is the part of his body that brought him the success at melee fighting and opened the way for him to be a Kingsguard. By virtue of his talents with the sword, he was always arrogant and self-confident. With his hand gone, his mental health deteriorates and he loses his will to live. When Brienne asks him what he is doing, Jaime answers that he is dying, and he says what else he can do but die (Martin, 2002, p. 343-344). Brienne always tries to convince Jaime to hold on to life and helps him regain his mental state. These efforts finally lead Jaime to enter the way of being a decent man. On several occasions, he attempts to save Brienne from horrible actions. Once she is exposed to a rape attack, Jaime dissuades the rapists via using his family name and strength. At another time, he fights a bear with a wooden sword risking his own life to rescue her.

Furthermore, Jaime's approach to his position as a Kingsguard changes after the incident. When he returns to King's Landing and takes responsibility of contributing to The White Book, which contains the history of the Kingsguard, Jaime says it is his duty now (Martin, 2002, p. 913-914). Just like Brienne, he acquires a sense of mission. Through his redemptive journey, he comes closer to be a more convenient knight. His redemption also involves his confession to Brienne about his murdering the Mad King. The event has always been seen as a wicked act, but Jaime's explanation changes the ideas of both Brienne and the readers. While having a bath with Brienne, he narrates her the story of rebellion in detail. He explains that the king's sanity was completely lost and he intended to burn the city. He says he slew Aerys before he could find someone else to carry his message to the pyromancers (2002, 419).

None of these performances of Jaime, however, makes him a good person in the eyes of many characters. Catelyn Stark, for instance, shares her thoughts about him clearly, when Jaime asks her why he should fear death. "Your crimes will have earned you a place of torment in the deepest of the seven hells, if the gods are just" (1999, 595). Still, she sends him to King's Landing to have her captive daughters back since she trusts Brienne, who swore an oath to devote her life to Lady Stark after the assassination of Brienne's beloved King Renly. From the point of view of an honorable lady, Jaime is the wicked one and Brienne is the paladin, and her perspective never changes, unlike ours. The reasons lying behind this are the lack of intimacy toward the character and her personal hate towards the man that crippled her son. She does not have the opportunity to empathize with him, but Brienne does. This quest of theirs, during which Jaime loses his hand and Brienne nearly gets raped, teaches both of them to learn from each other and therefore contributes to their development. This development is a tool for the author to manipulate our perspective, as well. Jamison gives a further illustration of this;

Characters like Jaime may commit heinous, unchivalrous acts, but may also be offered opportunities for redemption, and characters who are not knights at all may demonstrate chivalric virtue. Thus, Martin's readers learn not to judge characters by their initial appearances; good and evil characters are not always as they initially may appear. (2018, p. 16)

### 3. Conclusion

In brief, subverting the idealized and traditional figures, Martin creates many unconventional characters like Brienne and Jaime. Again, Jamison underlines the situation when he mentions the unusual characters.

Each of these characters is blatantly nontraditional. They either lack the good looks and behaviours requisite of the nobility or some other aspects of chivalry. In a major departure from medieval romance, Martin rejects the Notion that the hero must be male, handsome, good looking, or wealthy (2018, p. 69).

Therefore, it is not a coincidence to find the roles of the characters unstable and transitional. In a moment of trouble, a hero may turn into a villain and anti-heroes can easily become the paladins. This fluidity offers an eccentric reading process in which the readers are forced to overthrow their preconceived opinions, which are also presented to them by the author in advance. In other words, the author deliberately furnishes the first pages with the usual elements of the given period; and then, he debunks the images of his own creation in order to build the place where he intends to put his reader in ideationally.

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