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### **Abstract**

This paper elaborates the power of Tyrion Lannister as an exceptional creation of George R. R. Martin who despite his overwhelming deformity of dwarfism and his environment that never let him forget this distortion, rose to greatness in life. Natural deformity or disability has always been a reason for discussion in the literary arena as it has traditionally been associated with ugliness, lack of virtues, and ill-manners. Martin has dismantled not only this stereotype through Tyrion, but also established a balance between traditional assumptions about disability and powers believed to have been reserved for the average or the normal human being. Martin has taken conventions and transformed it to powers in the Imp.

**Keywords:** Disability, deformity, A Song of Ice and Fire, Tyrion Lannister, A Game of Thrones

Belonging to the genre of the epic fantasy, R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* has great scope in portraying minute nuances of the psyche in the plethora of complex characters it presents. It explores the multidimensional aspects of the mind of a human being through the presentation of fire-throwing dragons and the undead Others, self-proclaimed kings and queens, raven and direwolves, bastards and cripples, traitors and friends, and the like. Thus as mentioned before, this epic fantasy series has incredibly laid out an all comprehensive approach to human behaviour and it can inarguably be said that it is indeed a song of 'Ice and Fire'. The contrasting terms and/or elements of ice and fire represent ideas of the various extremes of a human's psyche.

Throughout the existence of the fairy tale, or the fantasy story, as has been reiterated by R. R. Martin quite often, "the evil guys are ugly, the heroes strong and attractive.", says Charles Lambert in his article *A Tender Spot in My Heart: Disability in A Song of Ice and Fire*. He also mentions classic fairy tale writers like George MacDonald who have taken this convention of equating one's physical appearance with their persona to a whole other level in his works like *The Lost Princess*. A child, regardless of her very tender age, is automatically distorted physically because of her lack of humility. To quote more familiar instances, one can glance at classical examples of Cinderella and Rumpelstilskin. Cinderella is physically beautiful, and thus she is naturally endowed with the virtues of being patient and kind. Her patience is gradually rewarded with royalty as, quite ironically, only the noble of mind (and the physically attractive) can rise to the standards of royalty. Rumpelstilskin, a forest-dweller, on the other hand is naturally endowed with the vices of being wild, and monstrous. This brutal tradition of fantasy literature has affected the hearts of real people negatively. But as time passed, humans have developed the capacity to side with the excluded social rejects, or the 'underdogs', a term used by Brent Hartinger in his essay *A Different Kind of Other: The Role of Freaks and Outcasts in A Song of Ice and Fire*. Now, "At least on some level, most of us sympathise with those who are denied even the opportunity to prove their full worth. We recognize that's just not fair." (135)

Martin through his novel has been successful in breaking apart this stereotype and attaching moral importance and actions of significant positive consequence to his characters who possess some kind of 'deformity'. It would not be fair to attach the prefix 'physical' to the term deformity here as Martin includes in his novel something more than just apparent physical deformity. For example, the characters of Arya, Brienne of Tarth, a woman knight, and Varys the eunuch who are gender non-conformists, the plumpy Samwell Tarly, the crippled lord of Winterfell, Bran Stark, and of course Tyrion Lannister the Imp, to mention only a few.

Even though Martin hopes to demolish the idea of attaching disability to ugliness, he does not turn a blind eye to the overpowering physical deformity in their lives. Martin made sure that his characters would not attain emotional maturity and recognition until they had been put through the struggles

and traumas brought upon them by their respective deformities; without which many most loved characters would not have been born from *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Martin moulds these characters in fire to bring out the blinding shimmer of gold in them. They are put through extreme tests, battles, chaos, deception, humiliation, temptation and what not before making them rise to a position of so-far unimaginable power, and grace. This paper hopes to bring to light particularly one character that R. R. Martin uses in his novel to break away from this stereotype, the most beloved Imp, Tyrion Lannister of House Lannister, the true lion, as time proves him to be the bravest of them all.

Portrayed by Peter Dinklage in the famous HBO television series, Tyrion Lannister is one of the most complex characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire* who was quick to find way into the hearts of millions of viewers and readers around the world. His character is outstanding because of the very rare (in fantasy fiction), yet strong association between a disability like dwarfism and amazing intelligence and witty quips.

To add some context, Tyrion was the youngest son of lord Tywin of house Lannister. He was accused of killing his own mother the day he was born, even though his mother dying of childbirth could never have been his fault. He was looked down on with contempt, especially by his own father who would have treated him quite differently if he were something like his handsome brother Jaime Lannister. Lord Tywin describes him as, "...an ill-made, spiteful creature full of envy, lust and low cunning." (Martin, *A Storm of Swords*, 65)

Martin chooses to first introduce Tyrion Lannister from the point of view of Jon Snow, the Stark bastard of Winterfell. In *A Game of Thrones*, a young and handsome Jon Snow, whose perception can be equated with the society's common perception of disability, sees Tyrion thus:

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 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 of hair so blond it seemed white. Jon watched him with fascination. (57)

Martin gives a generalised idea of how a dwarf is perceived in common society. His description of Tyrion is put across to his readers in such a way that it immediately calls to their face a slight frown and an association with brutish behaviour.

Tyrion Lannister is a mere freak as perceived by Jon Snow in the above mentioned paragraph, and usually throughout history, characters like him are the objects of scorn and pity, but as the plot progresses the readers witness his calling to rise to greatness. This pattern of an organic 'critique of ableist<sup>1</sup> discourse' (Massie and Mayer, 46) was introduced into fantasy literature in the late twentieth century, but it was brought straight upfront with *A Song of Ice and Fire*, by introducing a 'hero' who is deformed 'by nature' and is different from previous 'outsiders' in literary works, like Frodo who is the only one who can wear the ring without succumbing to its evil clutches and the Pevensie children whom Aslan himself summons to rescue Narnia from eternal doom.

Here one should notice the fact that Martin's intention is far from just evoking sympathy or empathy in the minds of readers for the Imp for his deformity, and exhibiting him as a deeply misunderstood persona of pure virtue. Instead, Martin has portrayed him as a human being like any other who immerses himself in the knowledge of books, uses witty and clever remarks in his speech, who is interested in history and politics and is looking for a relationship that is something more than just sexual, but also as one who dreams of dragons, stumbles and sweats in the face of tumult, and loses himself in hedonistic pleasures of wine and sex.

In the mediaeval times, dwarfs were usually jesters in court or clowns who existed for mere entertainment. Being Martin's best creation, in Tyrion, the readers experience an evolution of this archetype. Tyrion is a clever, bookish fellow who does not hesitate to make crude and impactful remarks when the situation demands. After alluding to Jon Snow as a bastard, he tells him the following: "Did I offend you? Lannister said. 'Sorry dwarfs don't have to be tactful. Generations of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term ablesit refers to 'treating people unfairly because they have a disability.'

capering fools in motley have won me the right to dress badly and say any damn thing that comes into my head.” One sees in Tyrion a mixture of these archetypes and characteristics, making him Martin’s marvellous and most importantly, malleable creation. He strikes an amazing balance between, say for instance, the contrasting elements of ice and fire. This malleability in Tyrion’s character is beautifully explored in Tyrion Lannister: A Fulcrum of Balance in George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*” by Patricia Monk. Thus to conclude, it can rightly be said that *A Song of Ice and Fire* can be perceived as the story of Tyrion Lannister the Imp. As mentioned in the beginning of the article, Tyrion is moulded in fire by Martin. He acquires an ability to see better from other struggling shoes. His strife, waddling across life at the knee-level of others, without a view of the horizon, has brought him to a maturity that enables him to advise Jon Snow thus: “never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armour yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you.” (Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 57)

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