

QUEENS, LADIES AND MOTHERS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *MACBETH* AND *GAME OF THRONES*

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Abstract

Women, since time immemorial has been regarded as a substandard individual whose destiny was decided by the men in her life, society and religion. Her roles were confined to the domestic space and predominantly controlled by her biological ability to rear children. Times have certainly changed for the better and women are stepping out their homes and into the world, taking up jobs that were once reserved for men. This paper aims to analyse how this change has affected writers in depicting their women characters. Through the methods of comparative analysis, the leading women characters of two major works namely *Macbeth* by Shakespeare and *Game of Thrones*, inspired by George R.R Martin's fantasy novels *A Song of Ice and Fire* are studied. They are put side by side and studied to see how their characterisation, by two men of two different ages have differed. This paper attempts to see if the day and age in which they lived have affected their perceptions about women, femininity and their roles in the society.

Introduction

Aristotle in a scholarly article opines that "man is by nature superior to the female and so the man should rule and the woman should be ruled" (Thomson). Leafing through the pages of history, one can find this attitude running strong in the minds of men, quite vividly in their various scholarly essays, stories, myths, songs and other compositions. This belief sprouted and took hold at the very dawn of human civilization which is the Cenozoic Era. When the first humans began to evolve till the Industrial revolution, the primary concern was the perpetuation of the human species. This was because living conditions were unimaginably tough, extending from predators to plagues. So "men who were endowed with greater physical strength and stamina hunted beasts, erected buildings, and plowed fields. Meanwhile the women folk stayed at home rearing kids and looking after the household" (Holliday). Naturally, "the male endurance value and physical strength translated directly to political power" (Holliday). And on the flip side women who were pregnant were taken away from the power domain.

Despite these gender roles which were the need of the hour, an important development which added fuel to the notion that a woman's place is at home was religion. Judaism and Christianity viewed women in a largely negative light. Women were considered vessels of sin, evil, weakness and dependence due to such religious propaganda.

Christianity which inherited many of its ideas from Judaism was the most important source about women for early modern Europeans. The story of Eve tempting Adam with the Forbidden Fruit and the resultant damnation set the tone of the nature of women. Weisner states religious men chose to view "Eve and by extension all women, as the source of evil and sin in the world" (15). An ideal woman "was the mother of many children, up working before sunrise to provide food. . .making no objections when her husband brought home concubines or a second wife, totally obedient and deferential" (Wiesner 15). A woman was expected to be mute and passive in a patriarchal society.

Outside the religious domain, Greek philosophers like Aristotle called woman an imperfect man. He questioned the very need of women's existence 'what are women for?' So woman was not fit to be a man's equal counterpart rather her only role was partaking in procreation (Wiesner 18). In the twelfth century there was an attempt "to bring together the teachings of Aristotle and those of early Christian writers, creating one grand philosophical system" says Merry E Weisner (18). This cemented the idea that her inferiority is inherent in her original creation.

Amidst these downgrading ideas, there were a few beacons of hope. Jesus Christ was hailed as a feminist since he considered both women and men equal even going so far as to bringing women into his fold of the disciples. However Jesus's ideas were quickly downplayed by his followers (Wiesner 16). Then secular literature provided a positive direction in viewing a woman. Wiesner comments "beginning in the twelfth century poetry and songs no longer celebrated simply the great military deeds of warriors and fighters but also their passion and respect for women....Thus even within the songs and poems women play a very passive role" (Wiesner 19).

Hence for the most part, a woman's inherent worth was challenged by the male chauvinistic society. She was confined within the domestic walls. She had to live out her life being servile and obedient to the whims and biddings of the male superiors. This predicament extended even in the lives of female royalty. "Female rulership in the form of queen consort, queen regent or dowager queen worked out fine in the Galfridian historiography but with female monarchy, complete political power to the ruling queen had yet to come" (So 16). But later England saw one of the finest rulers Queen Elizabeth 1, who ascended the throne at twenty five as a "survivor of scandal and danger and considered illegitimate by most Europeans" (Hanson). She proved her mettle in the face of many adversities and ruled England alone for nearly half a century. She was extremely fortunate to receive an education from the best tutors of the land. Yet the question whether her intellect and strength was recognised and celebrated remains. Roger Ascham one of her tutors wrote "her mind has no womanly weakness, her perseverance is equal to that of a man" (Hanson). Thus her individual strengths and abilities are always deemphasized on the basis of her gender.

This paper analyses how two authors across times namely William Shakespeare and George R.R Martin visualized their female characters set in olden times. By using the technique of comparative analysis, I aim to compare how two different men of two distinct ages conceptualized their female characters especially the women in 'power'. The analysis focuses on *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare and *Game of Thrones* a HBO television series based on Martin's fantasy novels *A Song of Ice and Fire*. This study attempts to analyse how differently or how similarly the creators have envisioned their women figures. In the words of Susan Bassnett "Comparative literature involves the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary and that it is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space" (Bassnett 1). Comparative literature analyses the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures.

"Comparison/Contrast (C/C) is one of the commonest approaches in literature and most disciplines and helps you to gain an understanding of a piece of literature", says Dr Anita Obermeier. When undertaking such a study, one must "consider the choices the character makes, his/her major physical and mental traits, what the character says about him/herself, what the character does, whether the character grows or remains the same"(Obermeier).

Power Vs Frailty: A Comparative Reading of Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff

William Shakespeare, was a sixteenth century English poet, playwright and actor and the world's most pre-eminent dramatist. He has to his credit 154 sonnets, 37 plays and two narrative poems. No other playwright has been able to surpass Shakespeare in his observational skills and creative powers.

Downer and Riding in their study on Shakespeare, have come up with the observation that the playwright lived and perfected his craft in the golden age known as Elizabethan age. This age was just emerging from medieval barbarism into the sophistication of modern civilization. Hence his plays bear the characteristic features of the time like scenes of cruelties like violence and blood-shed and rampant belief in superstitions like ghosts. "His most productive years were between 1600 and 1608 called the Golden Age. He wrote his 10 great plays six of which are major tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*" (Downer and Riding 289)

Though Shakespeare was a product of his age he was never an annalist of his times. In other words he withheld his personal opinions regarding the numerous evils of his day and age. But this does not mean that

he never stood up for his fellow people. He just took a different path. Rather than voicing his take on a political or social issue, he was like a mirror that reflected back to the audience, how dire the situation was.

The objective of the study is the play *Macbeth* and how Shakespeare has fashioned the strongest, most monstrous female character of all time- Lady Macbeth and also how he included the ultimate model woman- Lady Macduff in the play. It must be remembered that Shakespeare wrote in a time, where women were taught that submissiveness to the male authority and a complete acquiescence are hallmarks of a woman. It was a dark time for women, since they were not educated and hence could not hope to achieve anything in their life, other than being housewives and mothers.

It is in this arena that Shakespeare comes in and brings about a complete turn- around, with his abominable, coercive, fearless, man-like woman character Lady Macbeth. And Lady Macbeth is not the only one. "Shakespeare, by using several female characters with powerful roles. . .went against the expectations for the time period. Women drive the plot because of the power Shakespeare gives them" (Wilson). In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth is endowed with such boldness and hunger for power that she basically clouds the man of the story Macbeth, at least in the first half of the play. Also the play calls into question, the correlation between being ambitious and having manly qualities.

Macbeth Shakespeare's shortest tragedy, is replete with gruesome scenes of cold-blooded murders and disorder. The play narrates the fate of an ambitious man Macbeth who attains the Scottish throne by means of treachery and pure violence. Macbeth was a celebrated war hero who unconsciously had the deep and dark desire to claim the throne for himself. He never acts upon it, which was until when the three witches prophesize "All hail, Macbeth. Thou shalt be King hereafter" (Shakespeare I.iii.51). Hearing this, the wheels of his dream start turning and with his wife's persuasion and a dose of courage, Macbeth commits the heinous act. This only aggravates him to secure the throne which leads to one murder after another. Ultimately he meets a tragic end, when he is slain at the hands of the noble Macduff.

In this action packed play, Lady Macbeth emerges as a daunting personality in her own right. The readers first get a glimpse of Lady Macbeth's personality in Act I Scene v, where she is reading a letter from Macbeth. This letter details Macbeth's meeting with the witches and the prophecies. Lady Macbeth's extremely domineering side takes hold. "Upon receiving her husband's letter . . ., she attempts to be like a man in order to exude the strength needed to gain additional status as royalty" (Davis). In the following moments she delivers one of the most compelling soliloquies, giving an insight into her true nature. Most importantly we understand what she thinks about her husband that he is "too full o'the milk of human kindness" (I.v.14). This would prevent him from killing the benevolent Duncan. What is interesting to note here is that nowhere in the letter does Macbeth hint at killing Duncan. Lady Macbeth joins the dots herself. She goes far and beyond in suggesting the remedies that would embolden her warrior husband. She realizes without her coercion, Macbeth would not lift a finger. Lady Macbeth says "Hie thee hither/ That I may pour my spirits in thine ear; /And chastise with the valour of my tongue/ All that impedes thee from the golden round" (I.v.22-25).

It is clear from her words, who is the boss of the house. Lady Macbeth comes off as a strongly male character, who doesn't hold back from saying what is on her mind. She is not afraid to dream big and is willing to go any length to achieve the same. This same soliloquy sets the gender roles in the play. Lady Macbeth who is biologically a female feels that her femininity is a grave hindrance in achieving her dreams and her power would be undermined. "unsex me here, /And fill me from the crown to the top-full /Of direst cruelty!"(I.v.39-41). She continues "Come to my woman's breasts, /And take my milk for gall" (I.v.45-46). A woman is ideally a symbol of life and nurturance. Also it is a woman's crowning glory to bear and nurture her children. Perhaps Lady Macbeth felt that this very quality would obstruct her plans. And thus she feels the need to strip off her feminine weak qualities and don more masculine stronger qualities. To wield power, Lady Macbeth feels that she must reject her biological gender. Lady Macbeth is definitely the more power hungry and tenacious than Macbeth.

Macbeth's dearest partner continues to stay by his side, and encourages him along the way. She advises him to "look like the innocent flower. But be the serpent under't"(I.v.63-64). This reveals Lady Macbeth's incredible acumen. Lady Macbeth is clearly the controlling partner. In his moments of doubt, Lady Macbeth enters like a storm blowing away all his apprehensions and even calls him a "coward" (I.vii.42). In her excited mood she utters quite shocking words: "I have given suck, and know /How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me: I would, while it was smiling in my face, /Have pluck'd my nipples from his boneless

gums, /And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn” (I.vii.54-58). Macbeth is severely chastised and she questions his manhood. The schemer in her comes to play and lays out the perfect plan to finish off Duncan. In the same scene Macbeth is taken aback by his wife’s viciousness and exclaims, “Bring forth men children only”(I.vii.72), it hints at Lady Macbeth’s masculine tendencies and that in turn would only create male children. This again downplays feminine qualities, which in the olden times was equated alone to fragility and weakness.

The play progresses and Lady Macbeth’s supremacy and control over her husband is brought to light. In Act II, Scene ii Lady Macbeth has prepared everything and carefully thought out how to murder the King. As she waits impatiently for Macbeth to return we get a glimpse of Lady Macbeth’s compassionate nature, though she always speaks boldly and fearlessly. She says “Had he not resembled My father as he slept. I had done’t” (II.ii.12-13). This reveals her somewhat human side. When Macbeth comes back after the deed, Lady Macbeth is his pillar of support, when usually it is the other way around. Lady Macbeth calms his nerves and even reprimands him for bringing the bloody daggers along with him. She orders him to take them back. But Macbeth was too shaken and would not hear of it. So she takes back the bloody daggers herself. She is driven with a singular goal in mind, that is power.

In Act II, Scene iii, the crime was discovered by the noble Macduff. Macbeth in a desperate attempt to display his loyalty to the king kills off the chamber guards claiming that his love drove him to do so. Sensing that Macbeth was arousing suspicion in everyone’s minds, Lady Macbeth feigns weakness and faints. It is interesting to note here that the person who felt that she should be devoid of all feminine qualities recourses to the same to save her husband. The husband and wife stand shoulder to shoulder to bring to fruition their dark desires. In Act III, Scene i, however we can see Macbeth starting to keep secrets from his beloved. He doesn’t divulge in her his plans to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. Lady Macbeth oblivious to this continues to offer support to Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth proves her loyalty to her husband in the Banquet Scene Act III, Scene iv, where she steps in and takes matters into her own hands. The banquet scene commences just after Banquo was murdered. All is well and pleasant as the feast commences. Then Macbeth loses complete control of himself when he sees the ghost of Banquo. Macbeth is extremely guilt ridden and blurts out things he should not have. Lady Macbeth rises to the occasion, and casually remarks that her husband is suffering from a momentary fit and he has been afflicted with this from his youth. Her quick thinking and the courage with which she deflected prodding questions is remarkable. But this occasion had such a strain on her mind, so much so that her mental composure starts to deteriorate.

This point also marks a change in both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Macbeth from this moment forward becomes a hardened criminal, while Lady Macbeth starts to weaken. Lady Macbeth has now become a person of little importance when once she was the most important person in his life. Instead he seeks out the witches to guide him. She is pushed into the shadows and the last time we see her, she is a completely deranged guilt ridden person in the sleep-walking scene, which is the first scene in act five. As we near the play’s climax, the power shifts.

Lady Macbeth is reduced to a figure that evokes pity from the readers. She finally realizes the consequences of her actions and awaits the darkness of hell. Even when Lady Macbeth commits suicide, we only hear of the news from Seyton. However, Macbeth remains unemotional and insensitive, cementing the fact that Lady Macbeth has truly once and for all, been pushed into oblivion.

Lady Macbeth is indeed a memorable character that Shakespeare created. Unlike the women of the time, Lady Macbeth was bold and outspoken and was not afraid. Yet she felt being a woman was a weakness which will prevent her from achieving her goals irrespective of those being moral or immoral and she was right in thinking so, since women were not allowed to do anything for themselves, but remain a servile animal to her husband. Lady Macbeth dared to dream and she dreamt big. Yet in her dreams she never saw herself on the throne, it was always her husband. Lady Macbeth’s desire for masculinity shows that being ambitious and domineering is somehow always attributed to males. Females can never be the above two. And if a woman reflects those characteristic she would be deemed cruel and witch like. However, “Lady Macbeth’s strength is empowering. Despite her tragic end she is still a rare example of a powerful woman in a time when women were largely powerless” (Kelly).

Another female character in the play is Lady Macduff. She is the wife of Lord Macduff, Thane of Fife and the mother of an unnamed son. Though Lady Macduff appears in only one scene which is Act IV, Scene ii, she plays a crucial role.

From her very short appearance, we can discern that she is a sensitive, passive and genuine person. The reason, Shakespeare designed her in such a way, was to highlight the nature of the fiend-queen Lady Macbeth. Lady Macduff's predicament evokes sympathy for herself and her son, who is at the mercy of the criminal Macbeth.

It is clear that Lady Macduff serves as a foil to Lady Macbeth. We see Lady Macduff absolutely horrified and aghast at her husband's sudden flight. Like a fish out of water she struggles to come to terms with it and she has lost all sense of direction. It is very evident that Lady Macduff does not wield any control over her husband. She moans and cries and rebukes her husband for leaving them without a word. She is not able to make him do and listen to what she wants. This is a clear contrast to the power couple Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. In the initial stages of the drama, Macbeth's actions were controlled by his wife.

Another contrast in their portrayal is that Lady Macduff is depicted as a motherly figure. She is well aware of the dangers of being alone and defenceless with her little child. She is high strung about her child's safety and her well-being she remarks "to leave his wife, to leave his babes" (IV.ii.7). According to Lady Macduff a husband's duty is first towards his family and then comes his job. Lady Macduff cannot grasp the highly noble reasons behind Lord Macduff's departure. She thinks it was unwise on his part to leave them astray.

Lady Macduff is clearly not a woman of action. Even in the face of imminent danger she remains passive. The warning from the messenger to depart quickly with her children was loud and clear. Instead of kicking into action and saving herself and her child, she cries out helpless, "Whither should I fly?" (IV.ii.72). Powerless and vulnerable, she succumbs to her fate and dies a horrible death at the hands of the tyrant.

What ultimately leads to her downfall is her desire to restore the familial ties. Her statement "The most diminutive of birds, will fight/ Her young one in her nest, against the owl" (IV.ii.9-11) is directed towards her husband. "This criticism therefore separates Lady Macduff from Lady Macbeth because she calls for her husband to see reason and to choose moral actions, while Lady Macbeth's criticisms were meant to steer her husband to commit acts of treachery" (Marinoff and Schultz). Her final utterance "Why then, alas/ Do I put up that womanly defence/ To say I have done no harm?" (IV.ii.75-78) echoes the expectation of women to be "weak and powerless against ruthless forces" (Marinoff and Schultz).

"Lady Macduff represents the right way for a woman to behave is docile and focussed, and she cares only about her husband...and raising her children. These are noble concerns of course, but Lady Macbeth really has no character traits outside her family.... Lady Macduff is murdered in what is essentially a power play meant to upset Macduff. Ultimately she is just used as a prop in a political standoff...Hence a woman who goes after power will be punished. Alternatively if you are a proper woman you might just be killed by an enemy who wants to upset your husband" (Kelly).

In/glorious Womanhood: A Comparative Reading of Cersei Lannister and Lady Catelny.

People all over the globe are hooked to the thriller series *Game of Thrones*. The man behind this, George Raymond Richard Martin also known as George R.R Martin is an American novelist and short story writer in the fantasy, horror and science fiction genres and screenwriter. He shot to fame for his series of epic fantasy novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which was then adapted into the HBO television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-present) by David Benioff and D.B Weiss. In 2005, Lev Grossman of *Time* called Martin "the American Tolkien". *Game of Thrones* takes place on the fictional continents of Westeros and it mainly revolves around the battle for the Iron Throne, by different powerful families.

Game of Thrones has a vast array of characters ranging from powerful kings and queens to sex slaves, the young and innocent to the most vicious and cunning. Among them the most greedy, powerful and cruel characters, Cersei Lannister tops the list without debate. She is a woman with the golden dream of wielding power and authority in a man's world. But many a times she is often thwarted in her ambitious paths because of her gender. What makes this character highly endearing to the audience despite her sheer lack of kindness is that she is surprisingly the most human and relatable character in the series. "She's an ultra-rare female character, one who dares to be deeply flawed in almost every way imaginable but remain undeniably

human”(Placido).She is noble in her own ways, she is fearless, she is reckless, she is determined, she is poisonous, she is short sighted, she is a devoted mother, she is a woman, she is an individual. Sure, her very name make the viewers’ blood boil, she is a dynamic character nonetheless. As we accompany her, along her journey to secure power and love we understand the reasons behind her actions. We somehow grow to admire her fierceness of a lion and pity her in her in moments of weakness.

Cersei Lannister is the only daughter and eldest child of Lord Tywin Lannister of Casterly Rock and his wife, Lady Joanna Lannister. She is the twin of her younger brother, Ser Jamie Lannister. She also has a younger brother named Tyrion Lannister, a dwarf. Cersei despised him, because her mother had died while giving birth to him.

After Robert’s Rebellion, which marked the end of the Targaryen Dynasty and the start of the Baratheon Dynasty, Cersei married King Robert 1 Baratheon and became Queen of the Seven Kingdoms. She is the mother of Prince Joffrey, Princess Myrcella, and Prince Tommen of House Baratheon of King’s Landing.

However Cersei’s marriage to Robert was a loveless one. Their marriage was rather an arrangement to unite the two houses: House Baratheon and House Lannister. Cersei, as a young woman was overjoyed at this proposal. Robert was the most desirable young man. However this happiness was short lived. “It was the happiest moment of my life. Then that night he crawled on top of me stinking of wine . . . he whispered in my ear Lyanna.”(“You Win or You Die” 8:03). Lyanna Stark, the eldest sister of Lord Eddard Stark of Winterfell, was Robert’s love and they were betrothed to be married. But Lyanna was allegedly kidnapped, raped and killed. Robert still carried the memories of Lyanna in his heart. Hence Robert could never truly love and accept Cersei. He was never loyal to her. Cersei’s own words depict the rift in her marriage: “At first, just saying her name, even in private felt like I was breathing life back into her. I thought if I didn’t talk about her, she’d just fade away for you. When I realized that wasn’t going to happen I refused to ask out of spite . . . And eventually it became clear that my spite didn’t mean anything to you, as far as I could tell, you actually enjoyed it” (“The Wolf and the Lion” 44:07).

Cersei eventually grows cold and distant. She began an incestuous relationship with her twin brother Ser Jamie Lannister and gave birth to Jamie’s children. Cersei successfully passed them off as Robert’s blood, as the true heirs. Cersei despised her husband. The centre of her world was her children and Jamie and upholding the honour of her house. Cersei thus explodes the stereotypical role of a wife. And shockingly, she was the brain behind the murder of her husband and King. Cersei intoxicated Robert with wine thrice the potency and he died an “accidental” death while on a hunt.

Cersei is a horrible wife. But she is the most loving and devoted mother. The problem is she loves and cares for her children only. Her affection for them, is to a fault. She continually dotes on Joffrey, knowingly turning a blind eye to his psychopathic sadistic tendencies and remaining quite when he orders a large scale massacre of Robert’s bastards. “You never love anything in the world, the way you love your first child. Doesn’t matter what they do”(“The First of His Name” 4:30). Cersei’s justification for solely loving her children is her feeling that “The more people you love, the weaker you are. . . Love no one but your children. On that front a mother has no choice. (“A Man Without Honor” 30:53), which she states in episode 7 of season 2.

During the Battle of the Blackwater, Cersei’s over protective and motherly side comes into vogue. Tyrion, the acting Hand of the King was leading the battle along with Joffrey an inexperienced young boy. Cersei fearing for her son’s life captures Tyrion’s lover or so she thought and blackmails him in episode 8 of season 2. Cersei tells Tyrion, “Don’t worry she will be treated gently enough. Unless Joffrey’s hurt and then every wound, he suffers she’ll suffer too” (“The Prince of Winterfell” 29:11). Cersei even orders Lancel, her cousin fighting in the war to bring back Joffrey to his chamber. When all hope is lost Cersei proceeds to poison Tommen, her youngest son to save him from a gruesome death. This act of hers can seem heartless but she was only trying to protect her son. However in the nick of time, Lord Tywin along with the Tyrells defeated Stannis’s army who challenged the Iron Throne and the battle was won. Her intentions to kill her child were purely sincere springing forth from a mother’s aching heart.

It is clear that Cersei is an adoring and tender hearted mother. But as Tyrion tells Cersei in episode 1 of season 2, “You love your children. It’s your one redeeming quality” (“The North Remembers 9:10). It is her only redeeming quality. Cersei the Queen is highly cruel, cunning, manipulative and fearless. She is always plotting to bring her enemies to their graves to ensure her family’s survival against all dangers. Nothing ever flusters the Queen Regent.

When Lord Eddard Stark, the Hand of King Robert, confronts Cersei about her children's lineage, she stands her ground and tells to his face that she indeed loved her brother. Ned vainly proceeds to threaten her that he will reveal the truth to Robert and that his wrath would destroy her. Cersei response was as follows: "And what of my wrath, Lord Stark? . . . When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die. There is no middle ground" ("You Win or You Die" 8:39).

This is the Queen's mantra. And her slogan is "Everyone who is not us is an enemy" ("Lord Snow 10:21). The men can try to intimidate the Queen, but she wields terror. She challenges Lord Stark, that if faced with danger she would not hesitate to retaliate with equal or more force. It was a warning to Eddard to not meddle in her business. When he did, he was arrested for treason and branded a traitor to the crown and subsequently beheaded.

Another one of her most celebrated scenes is in which she asserts herself as the dominating and all powerful figure in the series is episode 1 of season 2 "The North Remembers". In the scene Cersei, seeks the favour of Lord Peter Baelish, a member of the royal court to locate Arya Stark, Lord Eddard's daughter who has escaped. Baelish passes a taunting remark about her relationship with Jamie, implying that he would use this bit of knowledge against her and that is his power. What ensues after this is one of the key moments that display Cersei's absolute power and control. She orders: "Seize him. [Cersei's guards seize Baelish.] Cut his throat. [A guard holds a knife to Baelish's neck.] Stop. Wait. I've changed my mind. Let him go. [The guards let Baelish go.] Step back three paces. Turn around. Close your Eyes. [The guards do as Cersei says]. [To Baelish] Power is power" ("The North Remembers" 30:53-31:05).

In addition to being the most daunting character she is also the most manipulative. She controls all the strings, making people do what she wants them to do, all the while her puppets are oblivious to her dark ulterior motives. After Eddard's arrest, Cersei manipulates the young and naïve Sansa, his eldest daughter, sweetly calling her little dove to sign the letter confirming her father's treasons. Cersei, claimed that signing the letter would save her father's life but her aim was to prevent an uprising against her son Joffrey, the King, who ascended the throne after Robert's death.

Though a stalwart sovereign, her capabilities are often undermined because of her gender. Her upbringing, her treatment from her father, her standing in her married life and as the wife of the King, all testify that she was treated differently, denied countless opportunities and rendered a subordinate. Cersei's desire to be a man is revealed in the statement she makes in episode 9 of season 2, "I should have been born a man. I'd rather face a thousand swords than be shut up inside with this flock of frightened hens" ("Blackwater 28:00). Even as a child Cersei was trained to be a wife. Cersei recounts "I was taught to smile sing and please. . . And I was sold to some stranger like a horse to be ridden whenever he desired" ("Blackwater" 33:13). During the Battle of Blackwater, Cersei's conversations with Sansa reveal the injustices done to a woman, a mere object to be sold and traded and used for pleasure. That is the women would be brutally raped if King's Landing is sacked.

But despite such constricting forces, Cersei manages to always have her way. Cersei is an adept schemer, orchestrating some of the most devious plans that will take her to her desired goal. Cersei's crowning achievement was the assault on the Tyrell family. Ser Loras Tyrell, puts forth a marriage proposal between his sister Margarey and King Joffrey, which he heartily accepts. Margarey was as cunning and shrewd as Cersei. Cersei had finally met her match. Margarey had Joffrey completely under her spell. However during the wedding feast, Joffrey is poisoned and dies. Tommen now was the heir to the throne and he was crowned the King. This meant that Margarey will be the wife of Tommen. Determined to save her youngest child, Cersei undertakes one of her boldest moves. Cersei revived the Faith Militant the once dominant religion of the realm, putting them back to power. The fanatical faction called Sparrows aligned with Queen Dowager Cersei Lannister. She used them against the Tyrells. She fed news about the homosexual inclinations about Ser Loras and Margarey's role in his relationships. The Sparrows immediately arrested the two. Thus Cersei strikes again and was successful in foiling the marriage of her son and even her own marriage to Ser Loras which was once again the plan of her father. But her sweet victory was short lived. As much as she was a ruthless schemer she lacked in foresight.

This was one of Cersei's grave shortcomings. She was too short sighted and egotistical which prevented her from accurately analysing the consequences of her actions. She was successful in entrapping the Tyrells, but miscalculated the ability of the high Sparrows. They grew so much in power and authority that eventually they turn against the Queen herself. Cersei eventually was arrested on the crimes of regicide,

incest and murder. She was jailed and tortured. Eventually she had to confess to her incestuous relations with her cousin Lancel, though she vehemently continued to deny all other charges against her. This finally resulted in her infamous Walk of Atonement which takes place in episode 10 of season 5.

This brings us to the juncture to admire Cersei's unparalleled tenacity and mental strength. There were countless instances in her life which tested her strength of character. The first was the deaths of her children, which was prophesied by Maggy, a fortune teller. Joffrey was poisoned at his own wedding, followed by the murder of her daughter and finally the suicide of Tommen. Interspersed with these tragedies was her own Walk of Shame. Her head was shaved, she was stripped naked and made to walk from her jail to the castle. Along the way the commoners laughed and jeered at her, they demean her and spits and throws faeces at her. Beyond all this humiliating experiences she had one thing in mind and that was her child Tommen. She reaches the castle, bleeding and crying but her spirits never broken.

After this disgracing incident which brought the regal queen down on her knees we see her rise above and beyond. She comes back with such might and force which literally blew all her enemies up sky high. She destroyed the High Sept of Baelor where she was supposed to have her trial, with wild fire. Thus she wiped out everyone who dared to double cross, the queen. Cersei was fixated with one single thing again and that was sitting on the Iron Throne and be the ruler of the Seven Kingdoms. Not Queen Mother, Dowager Queen or Queen Regent but rather be crowned as Queen Cersei, Ruler and Protector of the Realm. The season closes with Cersei sitting regally on the Iron Throne and ruling the kingdom.

Another central character of the series is Lady Catelyn Stark, wife of Lord Eddard Stark, Warden of the North. Together they have five children Robb, Sansa, Arya, Bran and Rickon. Catelyn was born into House Tully and was the elder sister of Lysa and Edmure Tully. The very word mother, calls to mind the image of Catelyn Stark, who was a true and devoted mother, fiercely protective of her children. Catelyn was also the loyal and beloved wife of Lord Eddard Stark also known as Ned, the Lord of Winterfell. They had a very loving marriage. However a point of friction in their otherwise enviable relationship was Jon Snow. Jon Snow was Ned Stark's bastard son. She has severe disregard for Jon Snow. Otherwise Lady Stark is a strong, kind, generous and an honourable woman.

"Catelyn was a woman who was both dutiful and complex, in many ways she fitted the expectations of her house and their words 'Family, Duty, Honour', but she often found herself at odds with these words. She was a loving mother and her maternal disposition influenced much of what she did" ("Catelyn Stark").

Catelyn adored and loved her husband and children. Their perfect family life was shattered with the arrival of the royal party from King's Landing. Robert's previous Hand Jon Arryn had died and wanted Ned to take up the job. She was immensely worried for Ned's life. She begs and pleads with him but Ned's decision to accept the job as the Hand of Robert was final. Then a disaster strikes, when her son Bran who was an expert climber falls off a tower and falls into a deep coma. She is struck with double grief first at the comatose state of her son and at the departure of her husband to a nest of murderers. Ned tries to justify his actions calling it his duty and he was bound by oath. Catelyn replies to this "That's what men always say when honour calls. That's what you tell your families, tell yourselves" ("The Kingsroad" 17:10). Catelyn is emotionally so weak and frightened she cries out "I can't do it Ned. I really can't" (The Kingsroad 17:35). Her husband offers support and reassures that "You can. You must" (The Kingsroad 17:42). And Ned leaves. Catelyn sits, night and day by the bedside of her son, praying and hoping he would wake up. One night, Catelyn was left all alone with her son and a man breaks in and tries to kill Bran. This incident marks Catelyn as a fearless mother who protects her children with her life. She stops him with her bare hands, hurting herself in the process. But in the nick of time, Bran's direwolf mauls the intruder, saving her and Bran. After this, Catelyn investigates the tower from which Bran fell and up in the chamber she finds a single lock of golden hair. Catelyn now certain that there is foul play gathers together her most trusted men. "I don't think Bran fell from the tower. I think he was thrown" (The Kingsroad.34:16). She is resolute and bold and decides she will ride to Kings Landing by herself to warn her husband.

This highlights Catelyn's quick thinking, deductive reasoning, her strength, boldness and intelligence. However she makes a fatal flaw when she arrests Tyrion Lannister who was innocent for the attempted murder of her son on the grounds that the dagger used to kill Bran belonged to him. Back in Kings Landing, Eddard is arrested, tried and beheaded. Robb, her eldest son immediately plans a rebellion against the Lannisters, to which Catelyn offers her full support. Moreover her two daughters Sansa and Arya are in King's Landing, which increased their stakes. She says to Robb "Our best hope, our only hope is that you

can defeat them [Lannisters] in the field” (The Pointy End 40:58). She also issues a warning to Robb, “If you lose, your father dies. Your sisters die. We die” (The Pointy End 41:19). Catelyn emerges as a strategist, an advisor and moral support to her son Robb, during dire times. She cleverly points out that in order to win back Riverrun, her father’s place, they must cross the Green Fork at The Twins. But to gain access to the bridge Catelyn goes to negotiate with the highly unreliable Lord Walder Frey. She comes back with permission but at a cost. Robb is to marry one of his daughters and Arya one of his sons. Robb reluctantly agrees to those terms. Robb thus wins his first victory and captures Jamie Lannister and holds him prisoner. But soon, their happiness turns to sorrow when word of Ned’s execution reach their camp. Catelyn walks stoically showing no emotions of despair before the men. But once in the privacy of the woods she completely breaks down to the point that she is hyperventilating. But once again, she is forced to push aside her feelings and fears and be the pillar of support for her grieving son to lean on. In extreme anguish, Robb makes a bold statement that he will kill all the Lannisters. Yet again Catelyn becomes the voice of reason and placates him saying, “My boy. They have your sisters. We have to get the girls back. And then we will kill them all” (“Fire And Blood” 7:03).

Catelyn is wise in the matters of men and a gifted negotiator. Robb sends his mother to the Stormlands where Renly Baratheon, the brother of the late king is planning to take the Iron Throne, to forge an alliance. In the Stormlands Peter Baelish the man who betrayed Ned also arrives. Catelyn is enraged but is faced with a dilemma at a proposition he puts forward. The Lannisters are willing to release her daughters in return of Jamie. Catelyn is still doubtful, but she can’t turn away from it either. Baelish then presents before her the bones and remains of Ned to be buried at Winterfell. She looks at the bones with pain, but shuts the box with a look of resolve on her face.

Catelyn is a peace loving woman. She presses Renly to make amends with his brother Stannis. However in a dark turn of events, Renly is murdered in front of their eye by a magical entity. His guards wrongly accuse Brienne of Tarth the newly appointed guard for murdering Renly. Catelyn drags Brienne and flee together. Brienne praises Catelyn’ “You have courage. Not battle courage perhaps...A woman’s kind of courage” (The Ghost of Harrenhal 37:8). Meanwhile, Robb grows fond of a woman healer named Talisa and he soon falls in love with her forgetting his promise to marry one of Frey’s daughters. A mother knows a child’s heart and she tells Robb “I wish that you are free to follow your heart. . .You are promised to another” (The Old Gods and the New” 40:21) .

Catelyn out of despair, frees Jamie and appoints Brienne to take him safely to King’s Landing. This action of hers elicits very aggressive responses from both her son and Lord Karstark, whose son was killed by Jamie. Robb says “You betrayed me” (The Prince of Winterfell 10:10). Lord Karstark accuses her of treason but she had her own reasons. She tells him “Killing Jamie Lannister would not bring life for your children. But returning him to Kings Landing may bring for mine” (Prince of Winterfell 10:54). Robb however is angered and assigns guards at her door. Following this Robb decides to get married to Talisa. Catelyn tries her level best to counsel him and issues a final word of caution “Treat your oaths recklessly and your people will do the same” (“Valar Morghulis” 17:21). But Robb marries Talisa anyway.

In the third season we see a side of Catelyn never seen before. She hates the sight her husband’s bastard son Jon snow and she never hides it. But in a conversation with Talisa she reveals that when the baby was brought home she prayed to the gods to take him away. Soon after he came down with the pox and was battling for life. She immediately regrets her wish and prayer. “I knew I was the worst woman who ever lived. A murderer” (“Dark Wings, Dark Words” 22:13). Her maternal instincts override her jealousy and she diligently prays that the baby be well again. She promises “I’ll be a mother to him” (“Dark Wings, Dark Words” 22:44). But she couldn’t keep the promise. This shows that Catelyn is a human susceptible to flaws. But the one great virtue is that she is self- reproachful and makes an attempt to amend her mistakes. Now to please the betrayed Lord Frey, his proposal to marry off one of his daughters to Edmure Tully, Catelyn’s brother was accepted.

Then follows the most crucial episode “The Rains of Castamere”, which is the ninth episode of season three. Robb finally understands the wisdom in his mother’s warnings and advices and explicitly asks for guidance for the future battles. Catelyn is visibly touched and replies “Show them how it feels to lose what they love” (The Rains of Castamere 3:38). They meet with Walder Frey and Edmure is wed to Rosalin one of his daughters. The jovial mood soon turns ominous when the band starts to play “The Rains of Castamere” which is a song that recounts the destruction of an entire house by the Lannisters. The tune

foreshadows a similar fate for the Starks. Catelyn is frightened and quickly realizes that they have been trapped. She tries to warn Robb but it is too late. Lothar, Frey's son kills the pregnant Talisa. Archers shoot Robb multiple times and he falls to the floor in shock. One of the bows hit Catelyn too. Catelyn determined to save her child, drags one of Frey's wife's, Joyeuse and holds a knife to her throat and threatens to kill her. She cries out, "Lord Walder! Lord Walder. Enough. Let it end! Please ! He is my son! My first son! Let him go and I swear we will forget this....We will take no vengeance" ("The Rains of Castamere" 45:40).

She even offers herself up as a hostage. But Lord Frey would not hear of it and shows no mercy. Robb is stabbed through the heart and falls dead. Mad with grief at the death of her firstborn son, Catelyn kills Walder's wife in retaliation before Balck Walder cuts Catelyn's throat. Even in her last moments she keeps her promise.

Cersei and Lady Catelyn are two central female characters that have garnered immense love and respect for who they are. Cersei's blood curdling actions makes her hateful yet she is simply a woman who tries to achieve what she feels is rightfully hers. Catelyn though a role model woman, wife and mother, she stands out by being assertive and exerting power, where men fail to. Both women bend the gender roles and emerge as strong, decisive and ambitious individuals equally capable to wield power, plan battle strategies and pass orders. Cersei and Lady Stark though polar opposites represent a new age woman who enjoys equal freedom and respect as her male counterparts. The series treat them as raw individuals with their personals triumphs and tribulations, weaknesses and strengths. But is their power as a ruler of their clan ever undermined because of their gender, if there is such an instance they always retaliate proving that they are equals with their lords.

Conclusion

In the characterization of Lady Macbeth by Shakespeare and Queen Cersei Lannister by Martin there are some clear parallels. Both the queens are power hungry, ambitious, cruel and manipulative. But their ambition is often tied with villainy. "Ambition is... a villainous characteristic for women, and not men. An ambitious man is the hero; an ambitious woman is a villain or a trial to be overcome" (Kathleen). Both the works have such similar clear overtones. "They are both queens of a usurper. . . .They both motivate the men in their lives by saying they aren't man enough. They both long for freedom of masculinity" (Dinwiddie and Wilcox). "Ambition is stereotypically considered a masculine trait...It's very much a common literary convention...that for a woman to have the power of a man, she must reject her femininity" (Kathleen). And both Lady Macbeth and Cersei Lannister wish they were men to hold authority.

The stark difference between them is however is the power and freedom that is vested in those characters by the authors, that is the agency enjoyed by these characters. Lady Macbeth is entirely dependent upon her husband's actions. Macbeth is the one who murders Duncan. Macbeth is the one who takes care of Macduff's family and Banquo's" (Dinwiddie and Wilcox). Lady Macbeth is thus pushed into a secondary position. Cersei though initially had to obey her husband's, then her son's and her father's decisions often has her own way. Martin has given Cersei the chance to control her own destiny and she successfully carves a niche for herself. She firmly establishes her power and absolute authority in the Kingdom. She dreams, she schemes, she achieves. Compared to Lady Macbeth, Cersei dreamt for herself while Lady Macbeth projected her dreams onto her husband. Additionally, Lady Macbeth is mentally a lot weaker than Cersei. Cersei is endowed with a stronger mental fortitude than Lady Macbeth.

Another point of difference is their relationship with motherhood or femininity. "Lady Macbeth cuts off all emotional connection to her motherhood as a way of reclaiming power. Cersei on the other hand, could be said to have done all these terrible things for her children's sake" (Kathleen).

Both Lady Macduff and Lady Catelyn Stark represent the ideal wife and mother. But Lady Stark unlike Lady Macduff is not passive. Rather she is bold, resolute and assertive as situation demands. Even in her last moments Lady Stark was fearless.

Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth is indeed a powerful character yet he seemed inconsiderate towards her. Also the power that he vested in Lady Macbeth was a passive one. She was not able to achieve anything with the power. Lady Macduff on the other hand fits into the mould of the ideal woman, however fell victim to the murderous Macbeth.

Martin's characterisation of Cersei and Lady Catelyn follows a different arc. "Martin's women are more three dimensional....They include the beautiful and manipulative Cersei Lannister played by Lena Headey,

who would defend her children and family to the death; Lady Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley), a strong mother, devoted wife and a shrewd political strategist” (Salter).

Shakespeare’s plays are a testimony of women possessing an undying ambition, as in the case of Lady Macbeth, but often the societal constraints of his time leads to a contradictory perception of women. This often ends disastrously for the woman, whether ambitious or not. Martin who belongs to the 20th century can write up women characters with more autonomy and freedom and intelligence since the outlook on women has changed considerably. The notion that an ambitious woman is to be subdued and disciplined by the men of the society has changed drastically. At present, women are encouraged to come out of their domestic and passive shells and conquer the world with their intelligence and talents. Also they now enjoy the power to control their narratives, to make their own stories and be the role models for young girls. The world has changed to accommodate these women, giving them freedom, education and the agency to do what they desire and dream to do. Martin’s women characters are nod to this positive change. Women are no longer subpar human beings, incapable of doing anything for themselves nor does it elicit violent reactions when a woman steps out of the stereotypical gender roles. They are treated as individuals, with equal cerebral and physical capacity as the males and the world has grown to respect women for who they are and who they want to be.

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