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“I’m all that stands between them and chaos:” a monstrous way of ruling in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

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The article explores Tyrion Lannister’s rule in King’s Landing in the second volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire* books, *A Clash of Kings*. In the reception of ASOIAF and the TV show *Game of Thrones*, Tyrion was considered one of the best rulers, and the TV show ended by making him Hand to a king who delegated the greatest part of ruling to him. The analysis is based on Foucault’s notion of monstrosity in power, which is characterized by a monstrous conduct and includes the excess and potential abuse of power. The article argues that monstrosity in his rule reveals deeper layers in Tyrion’s personality, which is initially suggested to be defined by morality. The article also comes to the conclusion that his morality limits the scope of his monstrous methods, which eventually leads to his fall from power.

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Introduction

One of the most compelling features of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (ASOIAF) books is the way they present a richly detailed medieval fantasy world with a large-scale struggle for power with many different contestants for the throne, each with their own agendas and attitudes concerning power—without any definite indication of who will prove successful in the end. The article explores how Tyrion Lannister handles power and argues that despite its positive reception, Tyrion's rule in the second volume, *A Clash of Kings* is characterized by methods no less monstrous than those of his opponents. The article also draws the conclusion that morality is an essential component of Tyrion's complex personality and it limits the scope of his monstrosity, which leads to his fall from power.

The popularity of ASOIAF is largely attributed to the TV show *Game of Thrones* it inspired (Evans, 2019, p. 13). The novel sequence has not been finished yet, and there is no release date for the 6th and 7th volumes of the book. The last season of the TV show aired in Spring 2019, giving one possible ending to the story. The present paper focuses on the books with occasional references to the TV show. My choice for exploring Tyrion's character from the angle of monstrosity and power is justified by two reasons. First, Tyrion is named *monster* several times throughout the novels, so the text itself invites the approach from monster studies. His ascribed monstrosity has a profound impact on his way of thinking, which manifests itself in his relationship with power as well. Second, the TV show ended by giving him power over the fantasy kingdom, and it has been claimed that he is the one who eventually won the game of thrones (Savov, 2019). Even though the last two volumes have not been published yet, and so there is yet no indication that Tyrion would win in the books, the complexity of his rule suggests an interesting topic to study.

Tyrion's rule in the second volume, *A Clash of Kings* (featured in the second season of the TV show) had a remarkably positive reception. Indicative of his success is a poll opened in 2017 on goldderby.com (Sheehan, 2017) on finding the best ruler in *Game of Thrones*. Tyrion received the highest number of votes (the poll remained open after the publication of the accompanying article, so at the moment Tyrion has even more votes than the article suggests). This may be one of the reasons why the TV show also ended by giving Tyrion control over the kingdom—he did not become king, only the Hand of the King, but the last minutes of the final episode showed that the new king delegated the greatest part of the ruling to Tyrion. A computer analysis of the text of ASOIAF at Cornell University mapped the power relations between the characters and visualized it in a graph. This graph shows Tyrion as the most powerful character in the books (Blogs.cornell.edu, 2018), thus agreeing with the assessment of the fandom and the writers of the TV show.

When analysing Tyrion's relation to power, the present article relies on Foucault's notion of monstrosity. Foucault discussed the topic in great detail in his lectures on abnormal and alludes to it in his works on power (Foucault, 2001, 2003). The present paper follows the legal perspective he employs and defines monstrosity as a conduct in handling power, not as a concept associated with appearance. It also argues that monstrosity is present in Tyrion's rule. The analysis is based on the second volume, *A Clash of Kings* because even though Tyrion constantly influences those around him, this is the only time in the books that he is officially appointed to rule. Tyrion's rule in Meeren in the 6th season of the TV show was not included in the analysis because the way Tyrion is presented to the viewers took a radically different direction after the TV show diverged from the books in the 5th season. A recent article draws attention to these differences in the portrayal

of his character and anticipates that in the books Tyrion will turn a villain motivated by vengeance (Bryndenfish, 2019), which is exactly the opposite of how his storyline ended in the TV show.

Evans demonstrates that in ASOIAF patriarchal violence is represented as monstrous—the Red Wedding is an example of this—whereas violence is presented in a more favourable light when it is used to create a more liveable world, such as Daenerys freeing the Unsullied (Evans, 2019, p. 57). Evans uses the term *monstrous* slightly differently from how it is used in this article—she relies heavily on Barbara Creed's concept of the “monstrous feminine”—but her conclusion that in Martin's fictional universe the use of violence in the service of gaining power is necessary and even accepted is similar to the findings of this article: that monstrosity is a necessity in the handling of power. Monstrosity, however, does not necessarily imply the use of violence—the key to Tyrion's power resides in his ability to influence others to reach his goals. Being “Hand of the King”, rather than occupying the throne, Tyrion reveals the entanglement of power with manipulation, which seems to fascinate today's readers and TV audiences.

Tyrion Lannister

Tyrion was born as the younger son into one of the noble families who fought for the throne, but his family rejected him. He is repeatedly described as deformed: he is short, his head is too big, his limbs are too short, his eyes are of different colours and his legs often cramp. Throughout the novel series, Tyrion is called many names; his byname is *Imp*, but *monster*, *dwarf*, and *demon monkey* are among the most frequently used terms as well. Other characters of ASOIAF tend to focus on the deeply disturbing ugliness of his appearance. The way Sansa Stark sees him is representative of this tendency: “Tyrion [...] looked as grotesque as Sansa remembered [...] With his bulging brow and mismatched eyes, he was still the ugliest man she had ever chanced to look upon” (Martin, 2003, p. 36). His sense of his own deformity is an integral part of his relationship to others and affects how he views his own position in the society of ASOIAF, making this ascribed monstrosity an essential part of his character.

The novel series introduces a quasi-medieval fantasy world with roughly corresponding social system and set of beliefs. The way Tyrion is treated in the fictional society is mostly informed by medieval European attitudes. In the Middle Ages it was generally believed that appearance reflected the inner essence, and anything unusual or ugly was seen as a sign of a monstrous character (Asma, 2009, p. 88). The following excerpt illustrates how strongly this rejection defines Tyrion's sense of himself and also shows that it is connected to how he experiences power:

It is real, all of it, he thought, the wars, the intrigues, the great bloody game, and me in the centre of it... me, the dwarf, the monster, the one they scorned and laughed at, but now I hold it all, the power, the city, the girl. This was what I was made for, and gods forgive me, but I do love it... (Martin, 2003, p. 333).

The passage narrates Tyrion's thoughts at the height of his power. His sense of his own monstrosity is connected to the rejection he experienced when he was “scorned and laughed at,” and it gives him gratification that now he has power over all those who insulted him. At the same time, he is enjoying it immensely and intends to keep it. “The intrigues” and “the great bloody game” are an integral part of how he uses his power: both are connected to the monstrous way he too is ready to embrace.

Monstrosity in the use of power

Monstrosity in all its different senses is intricately linked with power relations. In his lectures on the abnormal, Foucault approached monstrosity from a legal perspective, claiming that the existence of the monster could be regarded as a violation of both the laws of society and of nature (Foucault, 2003, pp. 55–56). As a consequence, the monstrous individual has always been associated with possible criminality, of which Foucault gives several examples (Foucault, 2003, p. 81). Tyrion's life also illustrates this tendency: he is falsely accused and put on trial twice in the novels. However, Nuzzo points out that in Foucault's concept, the true subversive potential of monstrosity is not simply the violation of the law because then its threat would be neutralized within a teleological scheme. Monstrosity also introduces an element of confusion which destabilizes the very worldview that inspired the law, and therefore subverts its functioning (Nuzzo, 2013, pp. 67–68). Foucault observes that in the modern age monstrosity became defined by behaviour: monstrous conduct breaks social order and its laws. The lack of interest in the peace and security of a community implies that monstrous conduct is the result of a monstrous morality (Nuzzo, 2013, p. 65). Foucault also connects monstrosity with power in a different way when he writes about Sade's *Juliette*, claiming that the monster is an individual with excessive power over all kinds of social power. This superpower turns political disagreement into monstrosity (Foucault, 2003, p. 101).

These ideas are especially useful for the analysis of ASOIAF because the novel series features many contestants to the throne who all use power to make the law, tailoring it to their own needs. ASOIAF invites the readers to judge the methods of each contestant, while showing the advantages and disadvantages (sometimes failures) of each approach. Relying on Foucault, *monstrosity* in this article primarily refers to a conduct in the course of ruling over the fantasy kingdom of ASOIAF. It entails an excessive power, which is not restricted by the laws of society and which therefore includes the potential for the abuse of this power. Monstrosity in this sense is independent from how a person looks, and Martin's novels seem to revel in the various forms it takes in the world of Westeros and, above all, in Tyrion's hands.

Tyrion among the Lannisters

George R. R. Martin is famous for portraying complex characters, and Tyrion is definitely one of them. One of the most striking aspects of his presentation is that he is introduced to the reader in opposition to the other members of his family. The first volume indicates that the story revolves around two noble families among whom the Starks are the protagonists and the Lannisters are the villains—with the exception of Tyrion—whereas the later volumes reveal deeper layers in the personalities of the members of both families, complicating the question of who the villains are. This kind of introduction puts Tyrion's morality into the foreground as opposed to the immorality of his father and his siblings.

The political reputation of the Lannister family is expressed in the song *The Rains of Castamere* which tells the story of how House Reyne was obliterated when they opposed Tyrion's family. The song emphasises the ruthlessness with which the Lannisters deal with their enemies. A later example of this is the infamous Red Wedding, organized by Tyrion's father, Tywin. The Red Wedding is an important twist in the plot: when Tywin's enemies, the Starks assembled at a wedding, the hosts suddenly turned against them and massacred them on Tywin's orders. Tywin violated the laws of the country and also of the common people for whom the law of hospitality was sacred. Yet, as he held the

power as Hand of the King, he suffered no legal punishment for ordering the massacre. His action was immoral and his use of power monstrous.

This ruthlessness appears in the Lannisters' actions early on in the novels, with the exception of Tyrion, who shows signs of empathy besides pure self-interest. In a memorable scene, Tyrion's brother, Jaime attempts to murder a young boy when he learns an incriminating secret about him. Jaime breaks both the law and a social norm when he uses violence over the boy. The following discussion takes place between Jaime and Tyrion when the boy lies unconscious and it is yet uncertain whether he will survive:

“Even if the boy does live, he will be a cripple. Worse than a cripple. A grotesque. Give me a good clean death.”

Tyrion replied with a shrug that accentuated the twist of his shoulders. “Speaking for the grotesques,” he said, “I beg to differ [...] I hope the boy does wake. I would be most interested to hear what he might have to say.”

His brother's smile curdled like sour milk. “Tyrion, my sweet brother,” he said darkly, “there are times when you give me cause to wonder whose side you are on” (Martin, 2011, p. 87).

The difference of opinions between Tyrion and Jaime highlights their different moralities. Jaime is ready to kill just to protect his secret, whereas Tyrion is hoping that Jaime's victim will be given the opportunity to tell what happened, even if it conflicts with Jaime's interests. Later in the novel, Tyrion helps the boy process the trauma of becoming crippled by designing for him a special saddle which enables him to ride a horse. “I have a tender spot in my heart for cripples and bastards and broken things” (Martin, 2011, p. 237)—he confesses when asked to justify his kindness. Brent Hartinger states that in the world of ASOIAF, there is a connection between morality and being an outcast. Those who do not conform to social norms are more sympathetic to the plight of others and this gives them moral character, making them better people than those who are in power in the fantasy kingdom (Hartinger, 2012). The first volume of ASOIAF establishes Tyrion's marginalized position together with his moral superiority over the rest of his family.

Tyrion's morality and monstrosity have also been examined by Emily Parise. She differentiates between internal and outward monstrosity based on Shakespeare's *Richard III* and ASOIAF, arguing that the text of ASOIAF condemns the internal monstrosity of Tyrion's sister, Cersei and accepts the outward monstrosity of Tyrion. Parise also calls attention to the morality of Tyrion's actions and claims that in ASOIAF the beautiful queen is the monster and Tyrion—who has a monstrous body—is the ideal knight (Parise, 2018, p. 1, 9). Yet the later volumes question the morality of Tyrion's actions, and one crucial aspect of this is how he uses power once he has it.

Tyrion is not a contestant to the throne, yet he is still fighting for power as counsellor and Hand to the ruler, and in the second volume, he rules as Hand to his sister's son, King Joffrey. This period of official power for Tyrion is relatively short compared to the overall length of the story, and it is strongly tainted by people's quasi-medieval reaction to his appearance. And yet, it is here that Tyrion assumes the role of the hero and makes it his purpose to defend his community from the “dark powers” threatening it:

“Don't you see the jest, Lord Varys?” Tyrion waved a hand at the shuttered windows, at all the sleeping city. “Storm's End is fallen and Stannis is coming with fire and steel and the gods alone know what dark powers, and the good folk

don't have Jaime to protect them, nor Robert nor Renly nor Rhaegar nor their precious Knight of Flowers.

"Only me, the one they hate." He laughed again. "The dwarf, the evil counselor, the twisted little monkey demon. I'm all that stands between them and chaos" (Martin, 2003, p. 474).

The people Tyrion mentions—Jaime, Robert, Renly, Rhaegar, and the Knight of Flowers—are all great fighters, but they are not in the capital at this time. It is up to Tyrion to defend the city, and he must use his own power for that. He reflects on the irony of his position as an outcast among the very people he wishes to save. But he manages to use this abject position as a source of strength, which raises him not just above the sleeping citizens, but above the renowned warriors he evokes. The irony has another layer in the passage as well: Tyrion as a ruler defends the city from the dark powers and the chaos the attacking Stannis would bring (which entails a new and powerful religion characterized by human sacrifice)—yet his own rule is monstrous as well, and the confusion it brings destabilizes the very system that he is protecting (Nuzzo, 2013, pp. 67–68).

Tyrion's rule in King's Landing

Tyrion gains power almost by accident—his father was appointed to the position of Hand to the ruler, but he was too busy, and Tyrion's older brother, Jaime was unavailable at the time. His father decides that Tyrion should rule instead because there is no one else left to do the job, not because he considers Tyrion's talents. Tyrion loses this position at the end of the second volume when his father suddenly arrives and takes it from him regardless of his achievements.

Power in ASOIAF does not necessarily mean military strength or domination. Erlor and Kowaleski define public authority in the traditional view of power as *right by might*, meaning that whoever has the biggest army or the most money is the most powerful. In his thesis, Schroeder points out that power in ASOIAF is more complex than that and the ability to influence people, make decisions and achieve personal goals are also forms of power. He gives the example of King Robert who is a great warrior and the king in the first volume, yet has little influence on what happens in his kingdom (Schroeder, 2016, p. 11). Katelyn Forbish agrees with this view and relies on feminist literary criticism when she claims that power is a capacity or ability to effect change in oneself or others (Forbish, 2019, p. 12). In line with these approaches, it is also clear that despite Tyrion's deformity and lack of physical strength, he is capable of exerting great power.

ASOIAF consciously reflects on the different views of power maintained by different characters. Perhaps the most well-known scene in connection with this is the riddle Varys poses to Tyrion in the second volume. The riddle illustrates what Foucault also states: that power comes into existence only when it is exercised, otherwise it is only a field of available possibilities (Foucault, 2001, p. 340). In short, there are four people in a room: a king, a priest, a rich man, and a common swordsman. Each of the first three orders the swordsman to kill the others, and the question is who will live and who will die. The riddle demonstrates that power can take many forms, and we cannot take it for granted which one will manifest itself in a specific situation. Varys answers his own riddle with the following words: "power resides where men believe it resides [...] a shadow on the wall [...] and oftentimes a very small man can cast a very large shadow" (Martin, 2003, p. 97). Varys indicates what Schroeder and Forbish also highlight: that even though Tyrion lacks the traditional resources of power, he has the potential to become powerful because power is not an essence that can be possessed, but an effect of projection.

He who can manipulate other people's beliefs can seize power for himself.

Tyrion's first chapter in the second volume ends with the declaration of his intentions: "So what will you do, m'lord, now that you're the Hand of the King?" Shae asked him [...] "Something Cersei will never expect, [...] I'll do... justice" (Martin, 2003, p. 51). This declaration indicates two things: first, that he plans to use his power to follow a policy that is different from his sister's, and second, this policy is that of justice. Just like in his conflict with Jaime in the first volume, Tyrion is the one whose actions are dictated by ethical considerations; and he plans to serve justice to those Cersei wronged. Uniquely among the Lannisters, he puts the interests of the realm before the short-term interests of his family. His declared aim is a moral one, and to follow it through, he is willing to fight his sister.

He is the Hand of the King, but as the king is underage, the feudal laws of ASOIAF state that he effectively rules the kingdom and his subjects have to obey him. On the surface, this grants him the "superpower" that Foucault regards as a constituent of monstrosity. However, his power is not without constraints. The following excerpt raises the question of how much authority Tyrion actually holds:

His sister laughed. "Don't threaten me, little man. Do you think Father's letter keeps you safe? A piece of paper. Eddard Stark had a piece of paper too, for all the good it did him."

Eddard Stark did not have the City Watch, Tyrion thought, nor my clansmen, nor the sellswords that Bronn has hired. I do. Or so he hoped. Trusting in Varys, in Ser Jacelyn Bywater, in Bronn. Lord Stark had probably had his delusions as well (Martin, 2003, p. 234).

Lord Eddard Stark was the Hand of the King before Tyrion, and he was murdered, as were the previous three Hands before him. Clearly, Tyrion cannot take his subjects' obedience for granted; he needs to establish his own power in the kingdom. Emig claims that there are three forms of power available in ASOIAF: military power, money, and bloodlines (Emig, 2014, p. 90). Tyrion is rich and he is a member of the ruling family, so he is already in possession of two of the three. He initially lacks military power, but he is quick to remedy the situation: by the time he arrives at the capital to assume the position, he has a group of fighters with him and later he makes sure to hire sellswords or mercenaries. At the start of his rule, he has all three sources of power to rely on—but he still depends on his father's authorizing letter and on his sister's acceptance of his authority, both of which will be withdrawn by the end of the volume.

Speaking of how power relations are established, Foucault gives two examples as possible courses of action: the use of violence and the obtaining of consent (Foucault, 2001, p. 340). These are similar to Pablo Iglesias' idea of hard and soft power that determine the power relations in ASOIAF. Hard power is military strength that coerces, whereas soft power is the ability to influence others (Ramón Ruiz, 2009). This distinction can be connected to the definitions of power by Forbish and Schroeder who also emphasised that power does not consist of brute force alone.

Tyrion relies on both hard and soft power in a monstrous way. As it has already been indicated based on Foucault's ideas, monstrosity as a conduct in ruling is characterized by an excess of power not restricted by the social laws, and it includes the possibility of the abuse of power as well. Tyrion's conduct shows many signs of monstrosity throughout his rule. With regards to hard power, he relies on a group of warriors who serve him. They belong to the mountain clans who have a radically different culture and lifestyle from what is practised in the capital—which

is the source of many humorous scenes—and the common people regard them as barbarians. He also pays a sellsword, Bronn to serve both as his bodyguard and his soldier, and encourages him to hire more sellswords for him. He fills the City Watch with new recruits, replaces their commander with a man who is loyal to him, and exiles the former commander without trial. When he arrests a member of the council, instead of a legal procedure, he has him attacked by his clansmen in his room at night, and after Tyrion interrogates him, he has him thrown into the dungeon. His use of hard power is monstrous because he uses it against the members of the court, and disregards the laws of the country. His aim is justice, but in the administration of justice he abuses the power that he has.

He also relies on his military strength when he only needs to make threats or make a show of his power. An example is when a knight of the Kingsguard objects to Tyrion lecturing Joffrey: “I am not threatening the king, ser, I am educating my nephew. Bronn, Timett, the next time Ser Boros opens his mouth, kill him.” The dwarf smiled. “Now that was a threat, ser. See the difference?” (Martin, 2003, p. 358). In this scene, Tyrion makes it a point that he has the power to have the knight executed for offending him. This execution would go against the law that Tyrion is supposed to uphold, so mentioning it as a likely possibility is monstrous.

Soft power is the ability to influence others without resorting to violence, and this is Tyrion’s real talent. Evans also emphasizes that political skill, persuasion, and negotiation are Tyrion’s currency (Evans, 2019, p. 188). In scholarly debates on ASOIAF, it is emphasized that Tyrion’s deformity puts him in a position that he can use to his advantage. His empathy helps him understand others and this gives him moral character (Hartinger, 2012), which manifests itself in acts like designing a saddle for the crippled boy. Larrington observes that it also gives Tyrion extraordinary insight and helps him to predict others’ actions and adapt to nearly any circumstances (Forbish, 2019, p. 56), which makes him skilled in manipulating others for his own ends. This enables him to rely on soft power more successfully.

Emig points out that in the capital spying and bribery are integral parts of court politics (Emig, 2014, p. 91). Tyrion also adopts these methods: he pays people to spy on his sister, while being aware that he is also being spied upon.

Well, let her enjoy her plots. She was much sweeter when she thought she was outwitting him. The Kettleblacks would charm her, take her coin, and promise her anything she asked, and why not, when Bronn was matching every copper penny, coin for coin? [...] It amused Tyrion no end (Martin, 2003, p. 432).

Tyrion does not simply imitate his sister in her methods, but goes even further and bribes her sister’s spies. He makes sure that he is the one who receives reliable information, whereas his sister is deceived, and so he outwits Cersei. With this, he not only contributes to the monstrosity in court politics, but also takes it to the next level. When planning his actions, he already considers the monstrosity practiced by his sister and acts accordingly. This way, monstrosity becomes a constant feature of ruling. His own attitude towards this procedure is amusement; he enjoys it and intends to continue it this way.

Cersei has an incestuous relationship with her cousin Lancel. Tyrion uses this knowledge to blackmail Lancel to spy on his sister:

“Would you have me keep the truth from the king?”

“For my father’s sake! I’ll leave the city, it will be as if it never happened! I swear, I will end it...”

It was hard not to laugh. “I think not.”

Now the lad looked lost. “My lord?”

“You heard me. [...] Stay close to her side, keep her trust, pleasure her as often as she requires it. No one need ever know... so long as you keep faith with me. I want to know what Cersei is doing. Where she goes, who she sees, what they talk of, what plans she is hatching. All. And you will be the one to tell me, won’t you?”

“Yes, my lord.” Lancel spoke without a moment’s hesitation.

[...] Tyrion allowed himself a moment to feel sorry for the boy. Another fool, and a weakling as well, but he does not deserve what Cersei and I are doing to him. It was a kindness that his uncle Kevan had two other sons; this one was unlikely to live out the year (Martin, 2003, p. 328).

Tyrion uses a similar method to the one in the previous passage. He learns that his sister breaks the law by having a relationship with their cousin, and he encourages this relationship—and so this breach of the law—in order to use Lancel to spy on her. This way he adds his own monstrosity to his sister’s. He has no reservations about using his monstrous methods on his own cousin. Tyrion is aware of how questionable his actions are, and even feels sorry for Lancel, yet he continues in his ways. This attitude is in stark contrast to his display of empathy towards the crippled boy in the first volume. Just like in the previous passage, he enjoys using his power monstrously. He has to keep from laughing when Lancel believes that he wants to put an end to his affair.

Gaining knowledge on those around him and using this knowledge suits Tyrion’s talents. He is extremely clever and consciously cultivates his mind to compensate for his lack of physical strength. In an ingenious trick, he deceives the other council members: he seemingly discusses with them his plans confidentially, but in truth he tells each of them a different version of the plan to learn who reports to his sister in the Council. These methods are monstrous because even though there are no laws against blackmail, spying, bribery, and deceit mentioned in ASOIAF, they still break social norms, and may be considered illegal by the reader. According to Elizabeth Wawrzyniak, the world of ASOIAF is a representation of our contemporary world disguised as medieval, so the readers can relate to it (Wawrzyniak, 2014, p. 4), an attitude that is even more encouraged by the TV show and the various spin-offs of the narrative.

Tyrion not only adopts and develops further the monstrous methods of the court, but also makes steps to exclude others from the making of important decisions. On one occasion Tyrion makes sure that his sister would not interfere with his plans for an important meeting.

His back was to her as he filled two cups with sweet Arbor red. It was the easiest thing in the world to sprinkle a pinch of fine powder into hers. [...] He almost felt sorry for poisoning her.

It was the next morning as he broke his fast that her messenger arrived. The queen was indisposed and would not be able to leave her chambers. *Not able to leave her privy, more like*. Tyrion made the proper sympathetic noises and sent word to Cersei to rest easy, he would treat with Ser Cleos as they’d planned (Martin, 2003, p. 294).

At the meeting, he acts as the sole ruler in front of the envoys and makes a decree that would not have been approved by his

sister and the council. He uses monstrous means to ensure that all power would belong to him. Similarly to his blackmailing Lancel, he is aware that his methods are questionable—he “almost felt sorry”—yet he continues in his ways. Poisoning the queen, even if the poison is not deadly, is a serious offense in the fantasy kingdom.

Tyrion relies on a monstrous use of both hard and soft power to achieve his goals. His declared aims are justice and the protection of the capital, both of which are morally commendable, but his means are monstrous. He uses monstrous means to deny others the opportunity to participate in the decision-making as well. Besides his tricks and manipulation, he also uses legitimate means when he organizes the defence of the city, forges alliances and restrains Joffrey’s cruelties.

The evaluation of Tyrion’s rule

As it was mentioned in the “Introduction” section, the TV show, the fandom and the computer analysis of the text of the novel all concluded that Tyrion’s rule was positive. This agrees with his own evaluation:

Tyrion reflected on the men who had been Hand before him, who had proved no match for his sister’s wiles. How could they be? Men like that... too honest to live, too noble to shit, Cersei devours such fools every morning when she breaks her fast. The only way to defeat my sister is to play her own game, and that was something the Lords Stark and Arryn would never do. Small wonder that both of them were dead, while Tyrion Lannister had never felt more alive. His stunted legs might make him a comic grotesque at a harvest ball, but this dance he knew (Martin, 2003, p. 330).

The excerpt suggests that the reason the previous Hands of the King died is that they refused to embrace the monstrous way of ruling. Their moral integrity did not allow them to abuse their power and so they fell prey to Cersei’s ruthless exercise of power. What makes Tyrion different is that he is willing to use monstrous methods. The passage also indicates the contradiction in Tyrion’s personality: it states that he resorts to these methods because it is the only way to succeed and at the same time, we learn that Tyrion enjoys them as well, irrespective of his circumstances and his aim of justice.

His morality is enhanced in the TV show, but it is present in the books as well, and despite his monstrous methods, it makes Tyrion acceptable for the reader to root for. It may well be the reason why he won the poll on who is the best ruler (Sheehan, 2017) and why the TV show ended with giving him power over the kingdom. This also indicates that according to the general opinion the person who is the most successful in handling power must not be afraid of abusing it.

As Emig claimed, Tyrion has an ethical approach to power, but Emig also believes that this approach ultimately fails because Tyrion is unable to wrench power away from his sister. He can only exile those who executed his sister’s orders when she went too far. Emig also indicates that the world of ASOIAF resists Tyrion’s morality, and so his attempt at justice proves frustrating (Emig, 2014, p. 91). Moreover, as the second volume progresses, Tyrion slowly realizes that his own people with whom he filled the capital are just as amoral as those he exiled. In other words, instead of effecting a reform, he replaced his sister’s monstrosity with his own.

“Tell me, Bronn. If I told you to kill a babe... an infant girl, say, still at her mother’s breast... would you do it? Without question?”

“Without question? No.” The sellsword rubbed thumb and forefinger together. “I’d ask how much.”

And why would I ever need your Allar Deem, Lord Slynt? Tyrion thought. I have a hundred of my own. He wanted to laugh; he wanted to weep (Martin, 2003, pp. 99–100).

It would be a simplification to claim that power corrupted Tyrion. Morality is an integral part of his personality regardless of how much power he has. In the Foucaultian sense, monstrosity does not equal immorality, instead monstrosity has the potential for the abuse of power. Shameless monstrosity and morality both consistently define Tyrion’s rule.

Even though many of his actions are monstrous in a sense that they break some kind of rule—either the law or a social value such as honesty—Tyrion exercises restraint in that he refuses to murder a member of his own family:

“And you never go far enough.” Bronn tossed the wingbone to the rushes. “Ever think how easy life would be if the other one had been born first [...] The weepy one, Tommen. Seems like he’d do whatever he was told, as a good king should.”

A chill crept down Tyrion’s spine as he realized what the sellsword was hinting at. If Tommen was king...

There was only one way Tommen would become king. No, he could not even think it. Joffrey was his own blood, and Jaime’s son as much as Cersei’s (Martin, 2003, p. 441).

Eventually this restraint leads to Tyrion’s fall from power. During the siege of the capital, Tyrion is attacked by one of the knights on his sister’s orders and is seriously wounded. His father arrives during the siege and while Tyrion is recovering, he assumes the position of Hand of the King. He takes Tyrion’s hard power away from him by sending home the mountain clans and assuming command over the City Watch, and Tyrion makes no attempt to keep his power from his father. As for his sister, even though he fought her politically throughout the volume, and even poisoned her so that she would be unable to attend an important meeting, he did not attempt to murder her and did not expect that she would order his assassination. His morality limited the extent he was willing to abuse his power and this led to him losing it.

Conclusion

ASOIAF presents the reader with various approaches to gaining and using power, and invites the reader to judge each approach. The present article analysed Tyrion Lannister’s use of power, relying on Foucault’s ideas on monstrosity. Monstrous conduct breaks the social order and its laws, and an excessive power with the potential of the abuse of that power constitutes monstrosity in ruling. Monstrosity is associated with Tyrion Lannister through his appearance, and is also present in his methods when he is given the opportunity to rule in the second volume of ASOIAF.

In scholarship, it has been noted that his outsider status makes Tyrion more sympathetic to the plight of others which gives him moral character (Hartinger, 2012), in opposition to the immorality of his family. It also gives him insight that enables him to predict others’ actions and adapt to different circumstances (Forbish, 2019, p. 56). These talents make him uniquely suited to the successful exercise of soft power, but he also relies on hard power in a monstrous way. He is careful to have access to the three forms of power introduced by Emig: military power, money and bloodline when he starts his rule.

Morality and monstrosity both define his relationship with power. His declared aim is to serve justice and protect the capital, and he uses monstrous methods: he abuses his power to achieve his goals. He loves power itself, and excludes others

from the making of decisions. However, the monstrosity in his handling of power has a positive reception: the fans voted him the best ruler on a poll and the TV show ended with making him Hand to a ruler who delegated the greatest part of ruling to him. Because of his morality, he exercises restraint in how much he is willing to abuse his power and consequently loses his power to his father and his sister. The five volumes of ASOIAF already published do not give an answer to the question of how to best wield power, but Tyrion's success indicates that monstrosity is necessary.

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