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**A COMPARATIVE FEMALE CHARACTERS' ANALYSIS IN J.R.R  
TOLKIEN'S *LORD OF THE RINGS* AND G.R.R. MARTIN'S *A SONG OF  
ICE AND FIRE* THROUGH A FOUCAULDIAN LENS**

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**Dedication**

*To my parents*

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## **Abstract**

The fantasy genre is well known for its imaginative richness and ingenuity, which managed to develop throughout time, evolving its tropes, techniques, and representations, making the distinction between its published works ever more apparent between early and current iterations. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and George.R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, with a focus on female characters and their representation. The present study is situated within the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's theory to examine the dynamics of power. The analysis makes use of Foucault's ideas to study the characters and explain how modern writers subvert established narrative structures that are moulded by sexist stereotypes. The hypothesis put forth in this study suggests that while Tolkien's female characters negotiate patriarchal structures within the confines of traditional gender roles, Martin's women actively confront and subvert established power hierarchies, reflecting a more modern and nuanced understanding of gender politics. All the while highlighting how contemporary writers challenge the narrative structure shaped by classic tropes in order to revitalise the genre and turn it from a one-dimensional narrative to a nuanced form of storytelling.

## **Keywords**

Feminism, Fantasy genre, female characters, Foucault's theory, sexism

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## General Introduction

Fantasy is the ability to create mental replicas of real-world objects through the act of imagination. However, the psychological meaning of "a fantasy" comes from an exclusive rather than an inclusive definition, which is what we usually mean when we use the phrase. The fact that mental images for which there are no real equivalents can be created highlights the stark contrast between mental representations of objects and actual objects. These are the images that come to mind when one thinks of fantasy because they epitomise the genre in its purest form (Stableford 37).

Fantasy literature is a genre of fiction that includes magical or supernatural elements and is often set in imaginary worlds with fantastical creatures and events (Todorov 24). Examples of subgenres in fantasy can include epic or high fantasy, which have large-scale quests and an ensemble of characters with multiple points of view; portal fantasy, where the main character often travels from the real world to a fictional one; and Grimdark fantasy, which has a gritty atmosphere, morally corrupt characters, and graphic violence (Alter).

Though these types of fantasy overlap, it is a subgenre of speculative fiction that is distinguished from science fiction by the absence of purely scientific themes and discussions (Menadue et al). Historically, one can notice the beginnings and roots of fantasy in myths, which are considered types of stories that represent a concept or facet of a society or a folktale about heroes and otherworldly creatures that are frequently used to explain the origins of natural events or certain characteristics of human behaviour (Dickerson and O'Hara 23). Examples of this can be illustrated in Greek mythology, where the origins of evil and corruption are addressed in the story of Pandora's jar and the story of the Mentacore, which is an explanation of how earthquakes come to be (Hesiod 17, 205).

Fantasy literature developed in mediaeval society's upper echelons, particularly in the courts, where chivalric romance became a popular genre. These narratives were distinguished by epic and romantic stories about heroic knights on noble quests. The Arthurian romances, famous for chronicling the exploits of characters such as Lancelot, Galahad, Gawain, and the knights of the Round Table, are notable examples of this tradition (Baldick 38).

The intellectual movement known as Romanticism, which was characterised by its emphasis on emotion and its reaction to the preceding Enlightenment era, influenced the shaping of fairy tales such as those written by the Grimm Brothers. Additionally, writers inspired by romantic nationalism who sought to preserve traditional tales and folklore contributed to the

growth of the fantasy genre. Several of these fairy tales have survived, remaining relevant in modern times and influencing the fantasy genre's ongoing evolution (Moorcock 36).

Fantasy literature gained popularity during the Victorian era thanks to works by Mary Shelley, George MacDonald, and Charles Dodgson. Hans Christian Andersen and John Ruskin pioneered a new genre of serious fairy tales with sophisticated characterization (Prickett 66). George MacDonald influenced J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, laying the groundwork for more recognised fantasy. William Morris advanced the genre by setting stories in completely invented worlds. Edgar Allan Poe and Oscar Wilde dabbled in fantasy horror, influencing subsequent dark fantasy writers. The Lost World subgenre was pioneered by H. Rider Haggard (Wolfe 239). Classic children's fantasies, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, and L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, rose to prominence (Pfeiffer 247, 254).

In the mid-twentieth century, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*<sup>1</sup> and *The Lord of the Rings* brought fantasy into the mainstream. While the first installment of *The Hobbit* was a fairy tale, the sequel expanded into epic fantasy (Carter 196). Despite his success in the United Kingdom, Tolkien's works gained significant popularity in the United States in the late 1960s, thanks to a counterculture. Tolkien's influence established a distinct fantasy marketing category and inspired a slew of Tolkien-inspired works. His success increased critical acclaim for fantasy, influencing the creation of original fantasy worlds. Tolkien's works, along with other series such as C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, helped to shape the genre and usher in a new era in fantasy literature (Tolkien 7).

By the early 1980s, the fantasy genre had outsold the majority of science fiction authors in terms of market size, such as the philosophical works of Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series (Gwinn). In the 1990s, notable works such as Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, Tad Williams' *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn* series, and George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* were published. The groundbreaking novel *A Song of Ice and Fire* spawned the grimdark subgenre, which is considered to be gritty, violent, and full of morally grey characters who live in an unscrupulous and unfair world that constantly challenges their moral compass (Roberts 42).

This qualitative research will examine the works of J.R.R. Tolkien through a textual analysis, which mainly consist of both *The Hobbit*, a prequel to his acclaimed trilogy, and *The Lord of the Rings*. The discussion will tackle Tolkien's writings on patriarchy and gendered spaces. We will also conduct an analysis through a Foucauldian lens that focuses on power, self-governance and resistance in regards to the characters of Galadriel and Éowyn. On the other hand, in this comparative analysis, we will focus on George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*,

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<sup>1</sup> The Hobbit film adaptation by director Peter Jackson introduced an entirely new female character for the trilogy of films, an elf named Tauriel, to compensate for the lack of women in the novel.

which began in 1996 and is still being developed at the time of the publication of this thesis. It will embody the modern wave of fantasy literature and the changes it introduced in regards to female representation. We will tackle how Martin writes about women who do not only live in a patriarchal society but also persevere to change the system. The Foucauldian framework will scrutinise ideas of power, parrhesia, disciplinary power, and sexuality in regards to the characters of Daenerys Targaryen and Cersei Lannister.

From its origins in mediaeval courts and chivalric romances to the groundbreaking works of J.R.R. Tolkien and the subsequent rise of modern fantasy, epitomised by George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, the fantasy genre has undergone significant evolution over time. Nevertheless, there are still few thorough studies that address the complex issues of patriarchy, sexism, and female representation in both classic and contemporary fantasy literature through Michel Foucault's philosophies. The genre's historical influences—Romanticism and Victorian-era developments, for example—underline the importance of investigating how these factors have shaped and continue to shape how women are portrayed in the fantasy genre. We assume that the lack of thorough studies that address the complex issues of the evolution of female characters constitutes a knowledge gap in this area.

This study uses Michel Foucault's theory of power as a conceptual framework to explain the power dynamics entwined in the creation of gender roles and narratives within fantasy literature. The representation of female characters and the handling of their characterization and agency in *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* are both shaped by power structures, which can be critically examined through the lens of Foucault's insights into how power functions as a network of relations, shaping societal norms and discourses. The objective of this study is to provide a more nuanced understanding of how power shapes literary depictions by revealing the subtle mechanisms that perpetuate and influence specific tropes and archetypes in the fantasy genre through the integration of Foucault's framework.

Through our research, we aimed to answer the following questions: Q1: How do Tolkien's and Martin's female representations reflect or challenge patriarchal gender norms? Q2: How do Galadriel and Éowyn challenge or conform to traditional gender roles, and how does this relate to Foucault's concepts? Q3: How do the characters of Daenerys Targaryen and Cersei Lannister contribute to the discourse on gender and power in fantasy literature? Q4: What insights can be drawn concerning the evolution of female representation in fantasy literature by contrasting the female characters and power dynamics in Tolkien's trilogy with those in Martin's series? Therefore, the aim of this study is to: (1) explain how writers' backgrounds influence their works. (2) Explain how Galadriel and Éowyn operate within the patriarchy and identify which

Foucauldian notions they relate to. (3) Explain how Daenerys and Cersei operate within and challenge the patriarchy, and identify which Foucauldian notions they relate to. (4) highlight the points of convergence and divergence between Tolkien and Martin and numerate the different methods used to subvert sexist narratives.

The remainder of this thesis is divided as follows: Chapter one tackles Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, with an introduction, sections about power as a concept, parrhesia, self-sovereignty, biopower, sexuality, and resistance, and a conclusion. Chapter two is titled *Women and Power in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings*. After the introduction, Section One provides a background on the author, his personal life, and his female representation. Section two offers insight on gendered spaces and biopower and how they restrict female characters. Section three analyses the characters of Galadriel and Éowyn in relation to Foucauldian notions of self-governance and resistance, respectively. This chapter ends with a conclusion. Chapter three is titled *Women and Power in Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*. After the introduction, Section One provides a background on the author, his personal life, and his female representation. Section two offers insight on the patriarchal systems of Westeros and Essos. Section three analyses the narrative and character of Daenerys in relation to Foucauldian notions of parrhesia, disciplinary power, and biopolitics. In addition to an analysis of the narrative and character of Cersei in relation to Foucauldian notions of parrhesia, sovereign power, and sexuality. This is concluded with a lengthy general conclusion that highlights where the authors and their works converge and diverge. As well as a restating of findings and future implications.

Numerous significant works have enhanced the scholarly investigation of female representation, literary tropes, and themes in both classic and contemporary fantasy literature. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien is a classic that laid the groundwork for the fantasy genre. Tolkien's personal life is explored in Humphery Carpenter's book about his biography and his letters. In the meantime, a great deal of scholarly discussion has been sparked by George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. Books like Valerie Estelle Frankel's *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity, and Resistance* offer critical analyses of the ethical and philosophical aspects of the story, covering topics like gender representation and power relationships (Frankel).

Michel Foucault's books such as *The History of Sexuality* and his essays like *Security, Territory, Population* offer a rich theoretical body where we will discuss his ideas and apply them to the aforementioned characters. Other books, such as Sara Mills' and Diana Taylor's *Michel Foucault: Concepts*, tackle his ideas in an approachable way that simplifies the numerous decades he spent developing his philosophies. In addition, around 16 journal articles have been analysed and cited in this work.

As part of the research methodology, a number of approaches are used to thoroughly examine how the fantasy genre has evolved. Initially, the Foucauldian theoretic apparatus is analysed. In order to gain a firm grasp of the narrative nature of both *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, a comprehensive analysis of both works is conducted in terms of their patriarchal systems. After that, using the theoretical framework, a thorough analysis of the chosen characters is conducted. The study makes use of Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, particularly his insights into power dynamics and discourse, to reveal the underlying forces that shape narrative structures. The goal of the study is to shed light on how modern fantasy writers use Foucault's ideas to subvert clichés, question conventions, and navigate power and its concepts. This methodological approach offers a distinctive viewpoint to investigate changes in narrative innovation and gender representation, adding to a deeper comprehension of the current state of the genre.

**Chapter One**  
**Power, Self-Governance, Biopower And Sexuality, According To Michel**  
**Foucault**

## Introduction

J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* had an immense influence on the fantasy genre and popular culture as a whole. His depictions of the war between good and evil against the backdrop of an ethereal world managed to produce a zealous fanbase. However, one area that has drawn significant criticism from both readers and scholars alike is Tolkien's portrayal of female characters and broader themes surrounding gender and power dynamics within his fictional world of Middle-earth. While the central narratives tend to focus predominantly on the quests and heroic deeds of male protagonists like Frodo, Aragorn, and Gandalf, the limited number of prominent female characters has long been a point of contention. Some view his female characters as underrated and misunderstood representations of femininity, while others see it as blatant sexism from a writer of a bygone era.

The philosophical works of Michel Foucault offer a perceptive theoretical framework through which we can examine and comprehend Tolkien's portrayal of gender roles and female agency in *The Lord of the Rings*. In contrast to conventional top-down viewpoints, Foucault's nuanced understanding of power sees it as a complex and multidirectional web of relationships that permeates all societal levels. His theories on biopower, sexuality, and the interconnectedness of knowledge and power enable a more in-depth analysis of the ways in which patriarchal systems and gender norms are created and might be challenged.

In this chapter, we will address Foucault's views on power as being a multifaceted and omnipresent force characterised by resistance and the inviolable link between power and knowledge production, which will serve as the theoretical foundation for a Foucauldian analysis of Tolkien's writings. The upcoming chapters will explore the ways in which female characters such as Galadriel and Éowyn negotiate and possibly challenge patriarchal power structures in Middle-earth.

### 1. Theoretical Framework

#### 1.1. Power as a Concept

The overwhelming themes of power are prevalent in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and G.R.R. Martin. The main plot device in *The Lord of the Rings* is the One Ring, which exerts power over the wielders of the remaining rings. The characters have to fight the temptation the ring holds over them, which creates an internal struggle across the trilogy. Power is portrayed as more dynamic and nuanced in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, with different groups and individuals fighting for control of the Iron Throne and the Seven Kingdoms. Here, characters like Cersei Lannister and Daenerys Targaryen navigate the intricate web of alliances, betrayals, and shifting loyalties that constitutes

power as they attempt to establish their dominance. This is why tackling the works of Michel Foucault, which will be thoroughly explored in the first chapter, seemed most relevant to the topic of the thesis.

Michel Foucault has influenced modern feminist scholarship on the themes of power and sexuality to a greater extent than most other thinkers. In fact, even academics who contest the assertions of this thinker are forced to recognise the value of the contribution his work in these fields represents. Intense interest in Foucault's writings, whether feminist or not, has been evident in the years following his passing (Deveaux 223).

Foregrounding resistance to power is more important to Foucault than emphasising oppression, in contrast to many other earlier Marxist theorists. A number of feminists and other critical theorists have responded favourably to Foucault's work, finding in it a way of thinking about the forms of power relations between men and women that do not neatly fit into the types of relations traditionally described within theorizations of power that tended to focus on the role of the state, ideology, or patriarchy. A significant portion of this work has sparked a critical debate among political theorists and critical theorists because the precise mechanics of resistance to power relations are not always clearly mapped out in Foucault's accounts (Mills 34).

Because the concept of power has a large central role in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, for it is mentioned 307 times across the three novels. In the second and third chapters, we will conduct an analysis of the characters, but before we delve into that, a thorough analysis of Foucault's understanding of power and its dynamics must be made so as to lay a theoretical foundation for this dissertation. An essential component of comprehending Foucault's philosophy involves acknowledging his understanding of power. Foucault's definition of power is not fixed or rigid but nuanced and multifaceted, changing throughout his works. Rather than viewing power as a fixed entity held by individuals or institutions, Foucault conceptualises power as an omnipresent, dynamic, and pervasive force that permeates all levels of society. Foucault's analysis of power function simultaneously on the theoretical and empirical levels. Empirically, he examines power structures that are historically particular and how they have changed from previous versions. For example, he makes a distinction between pre-modern forms like "sovereign power" and modern modes like "disciplinary power" and "biopower." With his analyses of disciplinary power being especially influential, a large portion of Foucault's work on power is devoted to tracking the emergence of these later modes from earlier ones (Taylor 13).

Consider a hierarchical structure, such as a pyramid, with the king at the top, ministers in the middle, and subjects at the bottom. Traditionally, power was believed to reside solely at the top of the pyramid. However, Foucault refutes this notion by demonstrating that power operates in a variety of relationships and can emerge from any level of a structure. For example, an academic transcript,

which documents a student's performance, acts as a disciplinary tool, influencing behaviour from the bottom of the pyramid. Similarly, identifying groups at risk for diseases like lung cancer exemplifies a type of power known as "biopower," which operates on populations rather than individuals through the collection of data that provides knowledge (Taylor 13).

The second level of Foucault's analysis goes beyond historical specifics and encompasses the fundamental features shared by various modes of power. This theoretical level allows us to understand the fundamental principles of power and its mechanisms. Foucault's explicit theorization of power first appeared in the 1970s, particularly in works such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Part Four of *The History of Sexuality* provides a condensed presentation of his theory, defining power as a network of force relations that pervade society and are marked by resistance and interaction via tactics and strategies. These characteristics are central to Foucault's theory of power, and they apply to both modern and historical forms (Taylor 14).

In his investigation of power dynamics, Michel Foucault introduces the concept of "juridico-discursive" representation of power as a means of revealing the limitations of its traditional views. This representation, as Foucault articulates it, is distinguished by its reliance on legal frameworks and discursive mechanisms to comprehend and regulate power dynamics. However, Foucault contends that such a perspective overlooks the complexity and multifaceted nature of power (Taylor 15).

Firstly, the word "juridico" in "juridico-discursive" refers to the primary model of power understanding that places emphasis on legal structures and prohibitions. Foucault critiques this perspective for reducing power to a rigid structure based on taboos and laws. According to him, power is exercised through a variety of methods that go beyond formal legal frameworks and take many different forms (Taylor 16).

Secondly, this perspective emphasises the importance of discourse in power relations, which is why the term "discursive" is used. In this context, language and communication are just as important in conceptualising power as physical acts. Speech and expression limitations are viewed as essential to the use of power. Foucault, however, disputes this idea, claiming that there is a more complex and multifaceted relationship between discourse and power. Discourses can be sites of resistance and alternate tactics, in addition to being tools and effects of power (Taylor 18).

The "juridico-discursive" framework identifies five essential characteristics of power: First, interdictions or restrictions are the main means by which it operates. Second, it is embodied in laws or regulations, which establish a clear division between permissible and prohibited behaviour. The third aspect of power is a cyclical pattern of prohibition formed by the combination of the first two traits. As a result, power functions through three different forms of prohibition, which represent a

logic of censorship: denying existence, limiting speech, and negating permission. Last but not least, the ways in which this power operates are always the same. To demonstrate the limits of the juridico-discursive perspective, Foucault offers an example involving choices made about attire. This viewpoint holds that following a dress code that is established by prohibitive laws is a result of power dynamics. But according to Foucault, this oversimplified perspective ignores the myriad of factors that influence people's decisions, such as peer pressure, social norms, and larger cultural trends (Taylor 17).

Beyond the limitations of the juridico-discursive framework, Foucault offers an alternative method of analysing power. He promotes an "analytics of power" that rejects the idea that sovereignty and the law are the best ways to understand power relations. Rather, Foucault calls for a more thorough investigation of power in the specific historical context that it exists in, taking into account the multiplicity of its expressions and the interaction of different social forces (Taylor 16). For example, Tolkien's work occurs in the land of Middle-Earth, which is analogous to a European setting in the Middle Ages, so the characters and their relation to the concept of power must take the setting and its rules into consideration since it provides a clearer context.

## **1.2. Parrhesia and Self-Sovereignty**

When it comes to the concept of sovereignty, Foucault has interesting ideas about parrhesia and self-sovereignty, where the individual practices self-governance to control themselves, which can be relevant to the characters of Galadriel and Daenerys Targaryen. According to Merriam-Webster, Parrhesia is boldness or freedom of speech, and in rhetoric, parrhesia refers to open, honest, and candid speech. It suggests not just the right to free speech but also the duty to speak the truth, even at one's own risk, in the interest of the greater good (Merriam-Webster) (Burton). Parrhesia may offer contemporary readers fresh insights into free speech, democratic participation, and persuasive discourse, but these are not the features that Foucault highlights. As with his investigations into madness, sexuality, governmentality, and biopower, Foucault is primarily concerned with parrhesia as a concrete system of practices influencing the formation of the self. Parrhesia becomes important in political and ethical contexts not so much because it expands our knowledge of free speech as it does, but rather because it outlines pragmatic strategies that strengthen the moral and political feasibility of our incomplete interpretations and particular claims (Luxon 379).

When Foucault returned to the Collège de France in 1981, his students expected him to carry on with his talks about governmentality and biopower. To the surprise of his audience, Foucault instead took a startling turn and turned his attention to ancient ethics. These late lectures were not, as one might have expected, about quietistic, introspective methods of self-improvement. Rather, they

investigated a unique method of managing people in their interactions with one another, their environment, and themselves. These lectures gave rise to a model of ethical self-governance that is based on what he called the "disposition to steadiness," suggesting a new avenue for people to develop their ethical selves. This model includes "curiosity and resolve," "disposition to steadiness," and "the expressive subject" (Luxon 384, 385).

In the context of introspection and ethical motivation, Foucault addresses the ideas of curiosity and resolve. He recommends starting with basic human capacities like memory and observation and focusing on their externalisation rather than going into internal workings. People are encouraged to embrace curiosity towards new experiences and comprehend varied responses without depending on external standards of judgement through parrhesiastic practices like walking and writing. This softens Nietzschean commitments, which are full of nihilistic and pessimistic characteristics, and emphasises the role of guidance in building strength and endurance. Curiosity and resolve are portrayed as dynamic forces shaped through interaction with others and the pursuit of truth, leading to a nuanced understanding of self-development and interpersonal relations (Luxon 385, 386).

Foucault presents the idea of the "Disposition to Steadiness" in the context of parrhesia, emphasising how it influences moral behaviour and personal growth. In order to address the instability people encounter when navigating relationships with truth, others, and themselves, parrhesia places more emphasis on immediate experiences than on abstract ideals. Individuals are encouraged to develop a steady approach to self-examination and response to external stimuli through parrhesiastic practices, steering clear of extremes of rigidity or distraction. This disposition towards steadiness entails restraint in one's curiosity and determination, as well as a balance between hasty decisions and careful thought. In contrast to conventional ethical frameworks, parrhesia highlights the dynamic character of ethical self-governance, in which people continuously negotiate and modify their behaviours and values in light of other people. Parrhesia allows for a variety of interpretations and approaches while fostering a community of practitioners who share common ethical practices. In general, it promotes discernment and restraint in addition to openness and trust, providing a nuanced understanding of moral behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Luxon 386, 390).

Foucault's investigation into parrhesia culminates in the idea of the "Expressive Subject," signifying a change towards a moral society devoid of outside authority. Parrhesia enables people to reconsider their personal growth in light of their social interactions, redefining moral duties in terms of internally created standards as opposed to external directives. People engage in truth-telling practices that aid in the development of an ethical framework within their community by redescribing events and claims in accordance with regional distinctions between truth and falsehood. A stable relationship between words and deeds is fostered by this style of truth-telling that is articulated within

the community and is centred on the current reality. Additionally, this ethical discussion highlights the significance of critical self-reflection and self-governance and opposes the propensity to ignore the valuing process. When people learn to deal with ethical issues and exceptions in their community, they become less defined by fear or outside authority systems and instead see them as chances for continued care and ethical development. By pursuing steadiness, people seek to break free from the idea of the "prison" of the soul, as Foucault puts it in his earlier writings, and move towards a new way of being that is self-inhabiting and grounded (Luxon 390, 392).

When it came to making the shift from personal self-governance to more extensive political participation, Foucault proceeded cautiously. It is important to make ancient practices relevant to modern politics, according to Foucault, rather than hurriedly applying philosophical insights to political programmes. He criticises the propensity for people to back out of political commitments out of fear and instead focuses on the ways that social practices influence people's moral and political development. A crucial component of this shift is the emergence of parrhesia, which gives rise to a politics that is more focused on re-formation than revolution. Foucault emphasises that rather than upholding the power of the law, in contrast to previous methodologies that establish a strong connection between philosophy and politics, Foucault argues for a more complex and nuanced relationship that fosters critical interaction with power relations. He cautions against drawing an unwarranted correlation between moral development and political engagement, highlighting the significance of personal autonomy and stability. The ability of individuals to navigate and maintain the practices that underpin parrhesia is ultimately what determines its effectiveness, even though it provides a means of engaging in ethical and political discourse (Luxon 392, 396).

### **1.3. Biopower and Sexuality**

Foucault distinguishes biopower as a political technology that can control entire societies and uses it as a mechanism for managing large human populations. This control is applied to populations through biopolitical tactics carried out through societal disciplinary institutions, as well as to individual bodies through anatomo-political measures. Foucault's lecture courses elaborate on these concepts:

By this I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental

biological fact that human beings are a species. This is roughly what I have called biopower. (qtd. in Foucault 16)

In his 1977–1978 Collège de France lectures on "Security, Territory, Population," Foucault uses the example of prohibitions such as "do not steal" or "do not murder" to clearly explain the differences between sovereign power, discipline, and biopower. Until the late seventeenth century, people who disobeyed these laws were subject to legal repercussions and punishment based only on the nature of their offence; possible penalties included fines, exile, or death. However, the emphasis changed in the eighteenth century with the rise of disciplinary authority. Even though those who broke the law were still punished, it became just as crucial to comprehend the nature of the offender and the circumstances leading up to their crime. As a result of this change, psychological assessments, monitoring programmes, and rehabilitative measures were put in place to help predict and stop recidivism. Therefore, the goal of punishments was not so much to end the criminal's life as it was to control it using techniques like prison, mental health treatment, parole, and probation. By contrast, biopower—which surfaced later in the eighteenth century—shifted attention to the larger populace. Power has now closely examined demographic trends in criminal activity, rates of crime, and best practices for regulation. While the strategies used were similar to those of those subject to disciplinary power, the focus of regulation and control shifted from the individual to the population (Tierney 90, 100).

Discipline and biopower are sometimes shown by Foucault as separate but related forms of power; however, discipline is also sometimes included in the context of biopower or shown as one of the levels at which biopower functions. Power over life, or biopower, can be applied both individually and collectively. Schools, factories, prisons, and mental hospitals are examples of disciplinary institutions that focus on individual bodies that deviate from the norm, whereas the state is in charge of controlling and regulating the norms of the population as a whole, which includes things like birth rates, life expectancy, public health, housing, and migration. Institutions are the primary means by which discipline is applied, whereas the state is the primary user of biopower, albeit one that is also present in many institutions, such as prisons (Taylor 41, 54).

In *the Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the concept of biopower may not be explicitly seen or read. However, male characters such as Saruman and Sauron do attempt to rule over entire populations, attempting to control not just the lives of individuals but also the destiny of entire races and kingdoms by taking hold of the One Ring that embodies an ultimate power. Yet, since the concept of biopower works better in a world that has the ability to obtain data across large populations, it does not work in the world of Middle Earth since it is inspired by the Middle Ages.

Biopower studies sexuality in addition to populations as a whole, which may not be present in Tolkien's novels but is prevalent in *A Song of Ice and Fire* series that is to be discussed in chapter three of this thesis. Dispelling stereotypes about sexual identity has been made possible in large part by Foucault's emphasis on the analysis of sexuality. He claims in the preface to his study, *The History of Sexuality* (1978–1986):

It was intended to be neither a history of sexual behaviours nor a history of representations, but a history of 'sexuality' – the quotation marks have a certain importance. My aim was not to write a history of sexual behaviours and practices, tracing their successive forms, their evolution, and their dissemination; nor was it to analyse the scientific, religious or philosophical ideas through which these behaviours have been represented. I wanted first to dwell on that quite recent and banal notion of 'sexuality': to stand detached from it, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyse the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated. (qtd. in Foucault, *The History*, 3)

In his extensive work, *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explores how society views sexuality and how this affects one's ability to understand oneself. The first book examines nineteenth-century ideas about sexuality in particular, suggesting that these ideas continue to influence modern viewpoints. He draws a comparison between the strict privacy of the Victorian era and the seventeenth-century openness surrounding sexual matters. According to Foucault, the nineteenth-century attempts to stifle sexual discourse did not have the desired effect. Conversely, they paradoxically encouraged a greater pleasure in breaking social taboos and a heightened desire for sexuality-related conversation (Foucault, *The History of* 3, 13).

Foucault explores the idea of confession, "whereby in order for past actions to be atoned for, they must be spoken about to an authorised person." Following its history from religious atonement rituals such as penance and animal sacrifices to modern therapeutic counselling and LGBTQ+ people's "coming out" stories. He draws attention to the social pressure that people have to reveal every facet of their sexuality, drawing a comparison between the need for confession and the contemporary expectation that one's sexual orientation be acknowledged in public. Additionally, Foucault investigates the attitudes of the ancient Greeks towards sexuality, pointing out that they placed more value on moderation and self-mastery than on particular sexual preferences. He challenges the idea that sexuality is a fixed identity category in modern society, contending that it is a historically contingent construct influenced by self-recognition, power, and knowledge systems. Therefore, Foucault challenges essentialist notions of sexuality by arguing that it is a product of nineteenth-century discourse (Mills 86).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Volume II, Foucault discusses about how the Greeks viewed sexuality and its various orientations. In order to refute the idea that sexuality can be considered rigid, Foucault examines Greek sexual codes. He emphasises the significance of controlling one's desire and developing self-control in order to define one's moral identity. He raises ethical concerns about why sexual behaviour is morally objectionable and shows how, for the Greeks, sexual behaviour control played a role in the development of moral identity, a theme we will thoroughly discuss in regards to the character of Cersei Lannister (Mills 86, 87).

#### **1.4. Power and Resistance**

Foucault states that resistance exists wherever there is power in Volume I of *The History of Sexuality*. The significance of this statement lies in its challenge to the conventional understanding of power dynamics as limited to oppression on one side. According to Foucault, resistance is a necessary component of power relations, and those who resist are essential to the use of power. This perspective, however, also casts doubt on the agency of people who oppose repressive governments because it seems to minimise their deliberate choice to defy authority. Although resistance can be difficult, Foucault's power model helps us move away from seeing people as passive victims and towards the realisation that resistance to oppression is more common than we may realise (Foucault 95).

Scholars such as James Scott delve deeper into the intricacies of power dynamics and opposition. In his analysis of power dynamics, Scott looks at how the powerful and the powerless manage their conduct and demonstrates how these dynamics can change depending on the situation. For instance, when the powerful are not around, the weaker people might strike a calculated pose while openly criticising the power in the background. Similar to this, the powerful may pretend to be in control while talking behind their backs about the difficulties of retaining their position of authority. Scott highlights the significance of delving into the covert transcripts of power dynamics as well as the public performances, which include authority criticisms and subversive acts committed by both parties. Overall, this viewpoint emphasises how complex resistance is within power dynamics and how multifaceted they are (Scott 93).

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explores how power structures and modes of punishment have changed over time, emphasising transitions from capital punishment to contemporary forms of confinement and monitoring. He emphasises that these changes do not always signify progress but rather variations in the mechanisms of power and control by contrasting the more restrained forms of punishment used today with the graphic public spectacle of torture and execution. No matter how

punishment is applied, Foucault contends that its ultimate goal—to deter crime—remains the same, despite the fact that the means of doing so have changed (Foucault, *Discipline* 104, 131).

Moreover, Foucault investigates the relationship between modifications to penal practices and alterations to societal power structures. He contends that traditional forms of authority, such as monarchies, become less relevant as power becomes more distributed within the social structure. The notion that democratic movements are the only forces behind political change is contested by Foucault, who suggests that new forms of power at the grassroots level also have an impact on larger societal changes. Furthermore, Foucault examines the disciplinary policies of contemporary institutions, noting the ways in which self-control and self-regulation practices abound in daily existence. When people internalise these disciplinary norms, it shapes their behaviour and results in subjects who follow external standards of discipline. According to Foucault, this ubiquitous disciplinary mechanism affects social structures even in non-capitalist regimes like the Soviet Union under Communism and goes beyond capitalist production (Mills 44).

Foucault's portrayal of discipline is contested by critics such as Donnelly, who wonder how discipline can be discussed as a cohesive strategy without recognising any coordinating agents behind it. Furthermore, disciplinary regimes are described by Foucault as implying a near-total subjection of individuals, which leaves little opportunity for resistance against these ubiquitous practices. It would appear that this idea goes against Foucault's claim in *The History of Sexuality* that resistance occurs wherever power is exercised. Sandra Bartky, a feminist critic, draws attention to this tension by raising concerns that Foucault's framework might undervalue the importance of resistance against control, which is vital in forming the course of human history. According to Bartky, Foucault's analysis may rob us of the language necessary to properly conceptualise these acts of resistance. She argues for a more expansive reading of Foucault's concepts and highlights the value of critical theorists' and feminists' frameworks in comprehending and expressing resistance to established power systems (Bartky 79).

### **1.5. Power and Knowledge**

Foucault defines knowledge as the product of power relations and information-seeking, a combination he refers to as "power/knowledge". In a piece of writing titled "Prison Talk," he asserts that "knowledge engenders power; power cannot be exercised without knowledge" (Foucault, *Power* 52). This is a significant theoretical development in the discussion of knowledge because it highlights how knowledge is not objective but rather a crucial component of power struggles. It also highlights how creating knowledge is a form of power activism. According to Foucault, highlighting the

interdependence of these two components can be done more accurately by using his newly created compound, "power/knowledge" (Mills 69).

Foucault challenges the notion that knowledge is independently developed by individual thinkers, characterising power/knowledge as a force that shapes what is known. He contends that power and knowledge, as well as their historical developments, have an impact on the subject who knows, the objects of knowledge, and the methods of knowing. Power and knowledge, along with the processes they entail, determine the forms and boundaries of knowledge, not individual scholars. This viewpoint challenges the widespread notion in Western society that knowledge advances only as a result of the assiduous work of scholars. According to Foucault, knowledge and power produce facts; scholars are only intermediaries in this process. Although this may sound overly dramatic, Foucault's radical claims stimulate more in-depth theoretical investigation (Mills 70).

Knowledge tends to surface in situations where groups or institutions are not treated fairly. Foucault draws attention to the ways in which this manifests itself in Western societies, where there is an obvious gender power differential. This results in a deluge of information about women, with numerous books devoted to their experiences and men's viewpoints frequently disregarded. Class and racial dynamics follow similar patterns, with working class and minority groups receiving greater attention. Academic research, according to Foucault, frequently concentrates on people with less power. For instance, rather than using standard accents like Received Pronunciation, linguistic studies frequently examine regional dialects. The persistence of social inequality is facilitated by this imbalance in the production of knowledge (Mills 69, 70).

Yet Foucault sees more than oppression in this process of producing knowledge. He agrees that underrepresented groups can also generate information that subverts the status quo and could transform society for the better (Mills 70).

Foucault contested the idea that the pursuit of knowledge is limited to finding the truth. He argues that what is regarded as factual is largely determined by those in positions of power. Information needs to be rigorously validated by people in positions of authority before it can be regarded as fact. For example, take into consideration how readily people in the West tend to accept as true the veracity of the images that are shown in television news programmes. However, we do not pay much attention to the laborious editing and removal processes these images go through before they are displayed on our screens. This illustration demonstrates how power shapes our perception of reality by influencing what is accepted as fact (Mills 72).

Because truth, power, and knowledge are thus inextricably linked, it is critical to consider the role that power plays in the creation of knowledge. For Western feminist theorists who initially aimed to dispel sexist stereotypes by exposing the reality of women's experiences, this understanding is especially important. Women from underrepresented, non-Western groups, however, disputed this

"truth" because they believed their realities were not sufficiently represented. Since then, feminists in the West have discovered that the term "women" encompasses a variety of perspectives, making generalisations challenging (Minh-Ha) (Mills 75, 76).

According to Foucault, different tactics that uphold and strengthen prevailing narratives while suppressing opposing viewpoints are used to create and preserve truth. His goal is to emphasise how truth is constructed rather than necessarily offering substitute narratives. Foucault admits the significance of challenging information spread by governmental organisations, despite his seeming indifference to truth and knowledge. He acknowledges that knowledge production has the ability to subvert current power structures (Mills 76).

A thorough theoretical framework for examining gender roles and agency in both Tolkien's Middle-earth and George R.R. Martin's fictional world is provided by Foucault's nuanced understanding of power dynamics, self-sovereignty, biopower, sexuality, resistance, and power and knowledge. Instead of presenting power as a one-sided, oppressive force, his ideas show it to be a complex web of relationships that permeates all societal levels. These intricate power dynamics will be analysed with female characters like Cersei, Daenerys, Galadriel, and Éowyn. Their depictions spark interesting discussions about power, femininity, how disciplinary forces shape gender identities, and how subversive knowledge production can upend established narratives. Foucault's viewpoint provides an insightful analysis of this seminal work of fantasy literature as we delve into a discussion of patriarchy in Middle-earth since understanding the challenges faced by its female characters requires a close analysis of its patriarchal structure.

## **Conclusion**

The depth and complexity of the fictional world that J.R.R. Tolkien created is one of the reasons for the trilogy's richness and enduring popularity. But in the decades since their release, many patriarchal conventions and gender disparities have come under scrutiny, and this finely crafted Middle-earth also reflects these issues. This chapter has demonstrated how Michel Foucault's insightful philosophical analysis of the complex aspects of power provides a strong theoretical framework for examining these gender dynamics in Tolkien's influential fantasy literature.

Foucault sees power as a complex interplay of forces that are continually negotiated and resisted at various societal levels, as opposed to seeing it only through a lens of oppression. His understanding of ideas like biopower, the connections between sexuality and power, and most importantly, the interdependence of knowledge production and power, throws light on how patriarchal structures are established and how they might be overturned by subversive narratives.

In the subsequent chapters, we will apply this Foucauldian theoretical foundation to examine specific female characters from *The Lord of the Rings*, like the elf queen Galadriel and the shieldmaiden Éowyn. How do they wield power and agency within the male-dominated realm of Middle-earth? How does their femininity potentially become a source of strength that undermines patriarchal supremacy? And what role might subjugated forms of knowledge play in challenging established gender norms?

The legacy of Tolkien's writings endures in contemporary fantasy and popular culture. We can better understand Foucault's representations of gender and power by utilising his nuanced perspectives, which will continue to strengthen and reinforce their cultural significance for future generations.

**Chapter Two**  
**Women And Power In J.R.R Tolkien's *Lord of The Rings***

## Introduction

This chapter presents a thorough analysis of how two well-known female characters—Galadriel and Éowyn—are portrayed in the framework of J.R.R. Tolkien's groundbreaking trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings*. For a very long time, both characters have enthralled readers and academics alike, acting as centres for conversations about resistance, femininity, and power relations in Tolkien's painstakingly created fantasy universe. Using the already laid framework of Michel Foucault will help shed light on these characters' representation by Tolkien.

Tolkien's training as an academic and philologist had a significant impact on his storytelling style, giving his writings a strong linguistic and mythological foundation (Carpenter 39). But reflecting the social mores of the day, his upbringing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries also influenced his opinions on gender roles and representation. Deciphering this background is essential to understanding the depths of Galadriel and Éowyn's characters and their roles in the narrative.

### 1. Tolkien and Female Representation

In order to understand the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and his philosophy, emphasis has to be placed on his background as it shaped his worldview. The English bank manager Arthur Reuel Tolkien and his wife Mabel welcomed John Ronald Reuel Tolkien into the world on January 3, 1892, in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa. He experienced a great deal of family loss at a young age, fought in World War I, and, after the war, found work assisting in the production of the Oxford English Dictionary. Tolkien was deeply interested in languages and had studied at Oxford University; he soon became a professor of English language at the University of Leeds, and he continued to hold this position at the University of Oxford until 1959, when he retired. He was also friends with a number of other authors and academics, among them C. S. Lewis, author of the Narnia novels, *The Screwtape Letters*, and numerous essays on Christian theology. Tolkien was known to be a devout Catholic (Carpenter).

For the majority of his life, he imagined and worked on the fantastical realm of Middle-earth, which serves as the setting for many of his best-known works, including *The Hobbit* prequel, which he wrote for his children, and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the sequels that had a grittier and darker tone. He is frequently referred to as the "father of high fantasy" because of his Middle-earth novels, which helped popularise the fantasy genre both creatively and commercially. In addition to writing other works, like *Farmer Giles of Ham*, Tolkien illustrated and created maps for his expansive

worlds. Three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* were published, and multiple motion pictures have been adapted from the novels (Carpenter 187, 208).

As a philologist, J.R.R. Tolkien had a keen interest in language. He created multiple languages, which he subsequently employed in his writings about Middle-earth. The majority of his languages have an invented "internal history" in addition to the external history. The internal history refers to how the languages changed over time and were utilised by the fictional characters who spoke them. Tolkien wrote in several languages that have intricate vocabulary and grammar. Some languages have very few words and names, while others lack much detail. The best and most developed languages are Quenya and Sindarin; Black Speech, Khuzdûl, and Rohirric are less developed. In addition, Tolkien wrote the scripts for his languages in Tengwar, Sarati, and Cirth (Carpenter 95, 96).

J.R.R. Tolkien is the author of *The Hobbit*, also known as *There and Back Again*. The first edition came out on September 21, 1937. It was written by Tolkien in the 1930s as a bedtime tale for his kids. The narrative occurs prior to *The Lord of the Rings*. The story revolves around the hobbits, a small race of people, Bilbo Baggins, and the wizard Gandalf going on an exciting adventure together with a group of thirteen displaced dwarves to battle the dragon Smaug, which has taken the dwarves' home and valuables at the Lonely Mountain (Tolkien).

Originally intended to be a follow-up to Tolkien's previous fantasy novel, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* swiftly expanded into a much bigger tale. Additionally, he shifted the plot of both it and *The Hobbit* into the fictional world of Middle-earth. The story was written by Tolkien between 1937 and 1949. In 1954 and 1955, it was first released in three installments under the titles *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*; *The Silmarillion*<sup>2</sup> appeared only after the author's death. *The Lord of the Rings* has since been translated into 38 different languages. It is dubbed the most well-known tale in literature from the 20th century and a seminal work in the fantasy genre by the input of numerous surveys and polls (Rosenberg) (BBC).

The epic tale of *The Lord of the Rings* centres on the conflict between the inhabitants of Middle-earth and a malevolent dark lord called Sauron. Simultaneously, they attempt to destroy a ring that, if it were discovered, would grant Sauron immense power; however, the only location to do so is far into Mordor, the home of Sauron (Nitzsche and Chance 97, 127).

Numerous critics have noted that Middle-earth's female characters have comparatively small roles. Still, a number of prominent exceptions might spring to mind, including Goldberry, Éowyn, Galadriel, and even Lobelia Sackville-Bagginses. Even with these instances, there are comparatively

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<sup>2</sup> The *Silmarillion* is the primary source for Middle-earth's ancient history, the First Age, and the downfall of the Kingdom of Númenor. It is a book consisting of a collection of myths and stories in varying styles by the English writer J. R. R. Tolkien. It was edited and published posthumously by his son, Christopher Tolkien, in 1977.

fewer noteworthy female characters than male characters in general. The fact that Arwen Evenstar<sup>3</sup>, a crucial character in the film trilogy, only occasionally appears in the novels is something Peter Jackson tried to address in his film adaptations. Tolkien himself acknowledged this criticism of his works, as evidenced in a 1955 letter to the Houghton Mifflin Company, where he expressed annoyance at the suggestion that his works lacked religion or female characters, stating, "The only criticism that annoyed me was one that it 'contained no religion' (and 'no women,' but that does not matter, and is not true anyway)." While technically there are female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's dismissal of the criticism regarding their absence leaves room for interpretation (Fredrick and McBride 32).

When it comes to the central characters of the story, it is generally well known that the centre stage of the plot is predominantly given to men such as Frodo, Aragorn, Gandalf, Legolas, Gimli, and Boromir. There are not a considerable number of female characters in the story, and the ones that are, usually play supporting roles rather than take the forefront. Rosie Cotton, Arwen, Éowyn, and Galadriel are a few prominent female characters with varying degrees of significance. Major criticism has long been levelled at J.R.R. Tolkien's depiction of women and femininity, especially in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955). The author's portrayals of femininity in general have been questioned by readers and scholars, who have regularly taken issue with the lack of female heroes and their supporting roles in the story. After the release of Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit* (2012–2014), which made several changes to the way Middle-earth's women were portrayed, the discussion surrounding Tolkien's heroines took on a whole new significance (Łaszkiewicz 15).

Yet, Hopkins contends that despite this lack of multi-layered women, the roles that these few women play are of a calibre that is strikingly out of proportion to their numbers. Their very scarcity seems to give them an air of uniqueness and almost talismanic status, and in some cases, Tolkien uses their femininity—which Lewis saw as such a disadvantage—as the very source of their strength. For example, in one iconic scene, the chief Nazgul, who is immune to mortal man's touch, is destroyed by Éowyn in a scene reminiscent of Macbeth's prophecy. Giving female characters a unique and feminine sense of authority that can never be rivalled by any male character (Hopkins 365).

Apart from spending time with his mother and courting Edith Bratt, who would eventually become his wife, Humphery Carpenter chose to depict the author as a man who lived his life in a largely masculine environment in his biography. He was brought up by a priest in a religious environment that forbade relationships between people of different sexes. He fought in World War I and went to an all-male school. Speaking to a question concerning the dearth of female characters in

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<sup>3</sup> In Peter Jackson's film adaptation, Arwen is played by Liv Tyler. She plays a more active role in the film trilogy than in the book.

his writing, J.R.R. Tolkien likened the mission the Fellowship undertakes in his tale to polar exploration, which is akin to all male expeditions like those led by Amundsen or Peary (Drout 51).

Still, it is impossible to dispute the importance and influence of J.R.R. Tolkien's female characters. Using Michel Foucault's theory of power as a lens to understand the gender dynamics of Middle-Earth, this study will go deeper into the characters of Galadriel, Éowyn, and Arwen to see how they uphold power and how it serves them to achieve more agency in a patriarchal and mediaeval world.

As we previously discussed in chapter one regarding J.R.R. Tolkien's background and views, his perspectives on gender and patriarchy can be interpreted by many as either conservative because of his upbringing as a devout Christian or as subtly progressive because he allows room in his writing style and word choice for interpretations that go beyond the conventional views on women and gender. For example, Rachel Maddox views Tolkien as a “friendly” sexist who, instead of hating women, misrepresents them by using misogynist attitudes that paint them as emotional, prone to motherhood, and less intelligent than men, if one is to inspect Tolkien's letters to his son Michael in 1941 (Maddox 1):

For it is their gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters than the physical) by the male. Every teacher knows that. How quickly and intelligent women can be taught, grasp his ideas, see his point – and how (with rare exceptions) they can go no further when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take *personal* interest in *him*. (qtd. in Tolkien 49)

Other critics, such as Nancy Enright, do not view the small number of female characters as misogyny since the characters offer a feminine power that is different from the masculine power that dominates the world of Middle Earth. While characters such as Aragorn exhibit a complex application of power, female characters in the text stand in for Tolkien's criticism of established, male-dominated power structures. Additionally, the examination investigates readings that reduce female characters to mere archetypes or symbolic vessels, like Galadriel being The Enchantress, Éowyn the Amazon, and Arwen the Princess, arguing that these viewpoints are unable to fully appreciate the subtleties and profound depth of Tolkien's characterization. On the contrary, it suggests that Tolkien's female protagonists subvert traditional power norms by choosing to represent virtues like love over hubris. These qualities highlight the story's deep philosophical foundations and are essential to the overarching themes of redemption and the transcendence of gender limitations (Enright 171, 173).

Building on these diverse readings of Tolkien's treatment of gender, it is clear that the complexity of his narrative goes beyond representations at the surface level. While some critics point out possible biases or stereotypes in his portrayal of female characters, others see a more nuanced examination of power dynamics that goes beyond traditional gender norms. We can better understand the complexities of gender relations in Middle Earth by placing these viewpoints within the larger thematic framework of patriarchy and its manifestations in Tolkien's fictional universe. Specifically, analysing the roles of well-known female characters like Galadriel and Éowyn would provide a lens through which to view their struggles and agency in a patriarchal culture. Therefore, in order to shed light on the larger interplay of power, agency, and gender within Tolkien's literary work, this chapter attempts to go deeper into how Tolkien navigates patriarchal structures through our exploration of gender and the experiences of his female characters, so as to propel us to examine them and their power through a Foucaultian lens.

## **2. Gender and Patriarchy in Middle-Earth**

### **2.1. Women, Gendered Spaces, and Biopower**

J.R.R. Tolkien's world is renowned for being a masterful example of worldbuilding, full of historical detail and even linguistic nuance. Readers can get immersed in the amount of details and complexities he managed to weave over the years he spent crafting, with *The Silmarillion* serving as a bible covering the various gods and races that roam its continents. Inspired by Norse mythology and the world of Midgard, the story of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* takes place on the continent of Middle Earth. The main characters in all of *The Lord of the Rings* novels and films embark on a classic hero's journey, travelling through perilous terrain and roads with a group of companions in order to accomplish their quest—restoring the Lonely Mountain to the dwarves in *The Hobbit* and destroying the One Ring in Mount Doom of Mordor—in *the Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

The Shire and Rohan are two separate realms in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth that each reflect great representations of patriarchal structures reminiscent of various historical eras. The Shire is similar to Victorian England in that it has traditional social customs and a charming rural setting mixed with fantasy elements relating to the race of the hobbits and their obsession with large family trees. In this place, gender norms are deeply embedded, with men in positions of authority like the Mayor and the Thain controlling most aspects of hobbit society. Men handle public affairs and make decisions in the Shire, leaving women to perform domestic duties such as taking care of the family and the home. Similar to this, Rohan's emphasis on chivalry and hierarchical government is reminiscent of the feudal society of the Middle Ages, with characters like Éowyn providing a female perspective, that highlights these patriarchal notions even further.

The only way our heroes encounter women is via their journey from the Shire, where the hobbits reside, to Mordor. This is because the main cast of characters does not include any female characters. While reading, it is evident how gendered the locations in Middle Earth are, with women being pressured to act in ways that uphold patriarchy. Critics have pointed out that the geography of Middle-earth reflects a male-centric perspective, and they have not overlooked Tolkien's apparent misogyny. They note that women in Tolkien's world typically live in environments that conform to conventional ideas of femininity, like homes, farms, or isolated places. These places are frequently portrayed as isolated and cut off from the outside world, which restricts women's ability to exercise independent agency or explore geographical and metaphysical spheres in a manner similar to that of men. The idea that men are free to roam and shape their surroundings while women belong in restricted domestic roles and environments is perpetuated by this gendered division of space, which upholds cultural norms and expectations. Tolkien's depiction of gender and power dynamics in his fictional universe appears to be biased, according to Maddox, as evidenced by a scarcity of dynamic and diverse female characters who actively interact with the wider Middle-earth landscape (Maddox 2).

When Frodo Baggins embarks on his quest with his fellow hobbit companions, the first female character they come across is Goldberry, the wife of a powerful yet eccentric man called Tom Bombadil. Unknown for most of human history, Tom Bombadil was a mysterious creature who was known to reside in the Withywindle Valley in the heart of the Old Forest, east of Buckland, and near the perilous Barrow Downs. Each time he appears, he exhibits control over nature, immunity to the temptation of the ring, and power over it. As Tolkien wrote, "Tom laughed again, and then he spun the ring in the air — and it vanished with a flash. Frodo gave a cry — and Tom leaned forward and handed it back to him with a smile." And a speech that dispels dark forces and calms fears through songs (Tolkien 123, 153).

Yet in contrast, the wife Goldberry is essentially a housewife with a symbolic presence, representing beauty and grace and her representation of nature. She does not have any involvement in the overarching plot or any significance or power compared to her husband, with only her looks given importance.

"O slender as a willow-wand!

O clearer than clear water!

O reed by the living pool! Fair river-daughter!

O spring-time and summer-time, and spring again after!

O wind on the waterfall, and the leaves' laughter! (qtd. In Tolkien, *The Fellowship* 140)

Frodo's speech to Goldberry in this poem expresses his admiration for her grace and beauty, comparing her to elements found in nature like river reeds, clear water, and willow wands. The visual conveys a feeling of purity and vitality, perfectly summarising Goldberry's nature-loving persona.

The main ways that Goldberry's character is shown are through her interactions with Frodo and his friends and her relationship with the natural world. Although she does not have a clear domestic role, her presence in Tom Bombadil's home implies a domestic wife who takes care of the house and their guests. Chapter six of *the Fellowship of the Ring* mentions, "The table is all laden with yellow cream, honeycomb, and white bread and butter," suggesting Goldberry has already cooked for the guests (Tolkien 136).

According to Viars and Coker (2015), she is made to live in a small forest, cut off from the rest of Middle-earth, "in an idyllic Green World" that reflects her femininity (Viars and Coker 40). Goldberry's house can be examined using the framework of biopower, which Foucault defined as the means by which authorities manage and control populations on both an individual and a collective level, even though it is not overtly portrayed as a gendered space. Although Foucault's primary focus was on larger societal structures, the application of biopower to Goldberry's field permits an investigation of the ways in which power functions in more intimate, smaller settings.

There are components in Goldberry's house that represent specific gendered aspects in line with Foucault's theories. For instance, as previously mentioned, Goldberry fits into traditional gender roles associated with domesticity and nurturing because of her role as a caretaker of the house and its natural surroundings. In this way, her home can be viewed as a setting where these roles are played out and reinforced, which helps to perpetuate gender norms in the story. However, one can see Goldberry as a character with power and agency, with her relationship to nature in her own house highlighting the biopolitical aspects of her territory. She exercises authority over the ecological dynamics within her sphere of influence because of her position as a steward of the land and its inhabitants. One aspect of biopower is the ability of individuals or groups to regulate and govern the conditions required for life and survival, as demonstrated by their control over natural resources and biological processes. To illustrate, one paragraph might suggest Goldberry's ability to control the rain in chapter 7, "In the House of Tom Bombadil," where the characters look out the window and find rain pouring outside and a rain-song sang by Goldberry described in terms that relate her further to the essence of nature.

As they looked out of the window there came falling gently as if it was flowing down the rain out of the sky, the clear voice of Goldberry singing up above them. They could hear few words, but it seemed plain to them that the song was a rain-song, as sweet as

showers on dry hills, that told the tale of a river from the spring in the highlands to the Sea far below. (qtd. in Tolkien, *The Fellowship* 146)

Harrison points out that the problem still stands that Goldberry's portrayal in *The Lord of the Rings* is devoid of the nuance and complexity that one would expect from a fully formed female character. In contrast to women who have experienced a wide range of emotions and hardships, including childbirth pains and the full range of human emotions, Goldberry is portrayed more as a natural element. She is as beautiful as Mother Nature herself, but she does not possess the nurturing and fertility that come with being a mother. Known as the "river-daughter," she represents a particular aesthetic quality of nature instead of the bountiful and protective mother figure, restricted to a household setting. Her helplessness is highlighted by the fact that she cannot leave Bombadil's territory or even go get her own flowers, which are contained inside their sphere of influence. In contrast to Tom, who moves freely even within his own boundaries, Goldberry stays still and is limited to her symbolic role (Harrison 22).

Because of this portrayal, Goldberry stays the same throughout the story and does not experience any meaningful character development; instead, she plays the role of a static symbol, an extension of her husband, devoid of the agency and growth that fully realised characters usually enjoy. This lack of development serves to further emphasise how unrealized Goldberry is in the story and serves as a constant reminder of the constraints Tolkien's narrative choices placed upon her.

In the first novel, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 6, Lothlórien is where the meeting with Galadriel occurs. Galadriel is the first woman we meet when *the Fellowship of the Ring* gets to Lothlórien. After travelling through Moria, they seek safety there. As she greets them and plays a vital part in their journey, Galadriel provides the Fellowship with direction, wisdom, and assistance.

Galadriel's haven, Lothlórien, sticks out in Tolkien's story as a gendered place. It represents the character's marginalisation and protection, serving as both a haven and a representation of feminine strength. Galadriel, the most important female character in the series, is kept apart from the rest of Middle-earth by Lothlórien. Just as Galadriel's feminine strength is concealed and shrouded in mystery, so too are the woods of Lothlórien. In fact, she only twice leaves these woods in the story, both times on errands that portend the eventual fall of the power she possesses: first, to bless Aragorn and Arwen's marriage, which will ensure her realm's demise, and then, in the last pages of the novel, to depart from Middle-earth entirely (Harrison 146).

This intentional isolation is a reflection of traditional gender norms, which confine women primarily to the home. Galadriel is a powerful figure, but she works in the background, hidden and excluded in the protective cocoon of Lothlórien's femininity (Maddox 2).

Even though Galadriel is admired and revered by a large portion of the Middle-earth population, she is nevertheless susceptible to the biases and prejudices that are deeply rooted in patriarchal societies. She has faced criticism and distrust from men who are not accustomed to women in positions of authority. This is demonstrated by Eomer's view of Galadriel's as a "witch", her realm as a "web of nets" and his early mistrust of Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas because of their connections to her. Galadriel's gender still affects how people view and treat her, even after her crucial role in stopping Sauron. The difficulties faced by strong women in a world dominated by men are further highlighted by Boromir's reluctance to enter Lothlorien and Eomer's mistrust of the trio. Eomer's perception of Galadriel is still somewhat narrow even as his understanding of her grows, as demonstrated by his involvement with Gimli around comments about the looks of Galadriel and Arwen. This demonstrates how, even in Galadriel's defiance of conventional roles, traditional gender norms continue to shape how women are perceived and expected to behave. Her experiences show how difficult it is to overcome patriarchal norms, even for people with remarkable talent and moral fortitude (Hopkins 366).

It was also not an easy task for the Fellowship to enter Lothlórien. They had to overcome the difficulties of the Great River, Anduin, before they could enter the realm. As portrayed in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the Fellowship had to forge through perilous waters and come into contact with the forces that protected the Elven borders. They were only permitted entry into the magical forests of Lothlórien after proving their merit and outlining their goals in front of Haldir, the Elf councillor (Tolkien 385). The procedure for entering the realm represents its guarded and protected nature, emphasising its importance as a place of both refuge and seclusion in the narrative but also as a gendered space for Galadriel.

Galadriel's gifts to the Fellowship are vital to their continued existence because they bring practicality and aspects of domesticity. The elvish waybread, or lembas, which in the novels, like other food prepared by Elven hands, could not be corrupted by evil and therefore could not be eaten by those who are also corrupted, is a reflection of Galadriel's nurturing role and provides sustenance for them on their journey. In addition, Galadriel and her maidens laboriously weave elven cloaks, which enable the Fellowship to blend in with their environment and represent solidarity and safety. Cooking and sewing are among the housekeeping tasks, suggesting that Galadriel may be somewhat of a homemaker in Middle-earth. Through her actions, she not only meets the physical needs of the Fellowship but also contributes to their emotional and spiritual well-being, cementing Lothlórien as a gendered space.

In the second novel, *The Two Towers*, Chapter Six: "The King of the Golden Hall" introduces Éowyn, one of the most important female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, as the story moves to the kingdom of Rohan. Her home is the capital city of Rohan, Edoras, which is portrayed as

a gendered mediaeval setting with strict expectations for women. The patriarchal structures that rule Eorlas often limit women to household responsibilities and demand that they carry out their roles within the parameters of their community (Tolkien and Tolkien 660).

Even though Éowyn has more geographic freedom than "powerful and immortal" characters like Galadriel and Goldberry, her quest for independence causes her great suffering. After leaving the safety of her native country, she encounters dangerous situations, almost dies, and falls into depression. This moving contrast highlights the thoughtful way in which Tolkien portrayed strong female characters. Galadriel and Goldberry, for example, are limited by space and can only exercise their power in isolated realms; Éowyn, on the other hand, suffers terrible repercussions when she tries to rebel against society's norms. Thus, Tolkien's story emphasises the difficulties faced by people who do not conform to traditional gender norms as well as the complexities of feminine agency (Maddox 2).

The story of Éowyn in *The Lord of the Rings* regrettably perpetuates the idea that women who stray from traditional gender norms frequently suffer terrible consequences. This idea is especially apparent in Tolkien's depiction of Shelob, whom we meet in *The Two Towers*, Chapter 9, Shelob's lair (Tolkien and Tolkien 938). She is the only female character in the series who blatantly rejects traditional feminine expectations, and she is not even human or elf but a venomous spider. Given that female giant spiders are known to devour their mates, these hideously ugly animals represent a threat to masculinity (Fredrick and McBride 33). Shelob's portrayal is a potent example of the consequences that women who refuse to comply with social norms—especially when they assert independence or autonomy—face. Shelob's actions are portrayed in the story as problematic and disruptive, which is consistent with Tolkien's belief that female characters who display independence or defiance are fundamentally flawed.

Since Shelob is one of the few female characters in Tolkien's trilogy, her persona is reminiscent of Ungoliant from *The Silmarillion*. Both characters are portrayed as being completely consumed by their own desires and acting on the pleasure principle, which means they are looking for short-term satisfaction without thinking about the long-term effects. This portrayal is consistent with Tolkien's criticism of women who refuse to conform to conventional maternity roles, which Maddox highlights in his letters to Michael. Shelob's self-centeredness and irrationality are blamed on her gender, which serves to perpetuate the idea that women are fundamentally emotional beings who are incapable of reasoning or creating support systems (Maddox 3).

Although Sauron and Shelob are both the embodiments of evil, there is a notable difference between the two, which is also evident in other villains such as Melkor and Ungoliant. Melkor and Sauron demonstrate the ability to reason, which allows them to create complex schemes to subdue the forces of good. They are also males who are allowed to venture and move freely to exact their plans

and forge alliances. Shelob and Ungoliant, on the other hand, act only in accordance with their own desires and disregard the long-term effects in favour of the pleasure principle (Fredrick and McBride 34).

It is possible to examine Shelob and Ungoliant's depictions of irrationality and self-indulgence in greater detail when considering their confined environments, especially Shelob's lair. These caves are physical manifestations of the restrictions Tolkien placed on them, limiting their movement and their capacity to form alliances. According to this reading, Shelob's cave represents imprisonment, restricting her freedom of choice and keeping her from reaching her greatest potential. Characters with analytical thinking and strategic planning, such as Melkor and Sauron, on the other hand, work in vast domains where they are free to travel and form alliances as they please.

Shelob takes on a role similar to that of sovereign power, using her predatory instincts to control life and death. But unlike male villains like Melkor and Sauron, Shelob emphasises subversion and manipulation over overt dominance in her use of biopower, giving her biopower a decidedly feminine feel. Her capacity to seduce and devour victims is indicative of a kind of visceral and intimate biopolitical control that preys on the weaknesses of her victims.

Tolkien did not choose arbitrarily to give his characters particular genders; rather, he made a conscious decision to match each character's desired characteristics. According to Fenwick, Tolkien provided some background information, as demonstrated by this question posed in a letter to his son Christopher: "Do you think Shelob is a good name for a monstrous spider creature? It is of course only 'lob' ('lobbe' = spider [OE]), but written as one, it seems to be quite noisome". Interestingly, this sentence indicates Tolkien's purposeful desire for Shelob to represent two different concepts: femininity (represented by "she") and monstrosity (represented by "lobbe"). Shelob's gender is implied by the fact that it is part of her name, implying that her femininity is an essential component of who she is (Fenwick 20). As such, Tolkien's conception of gender roles and the characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity within his narrative framework are reflected in the gendering of characters such as Shelob and Ungoliant. Shelob's imprisonment in her cave highlights the difficulties experienced by characters confined by their physical surroundings, highlighting the gendered complexity of agency and power in Tolkien's world (Fredrick and McBride 34).

Characters like Goldberry, Galadriel, Éowyn, and Shelob are just a few examples of the many explorations of gendered spaces and biopower found in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth, which mirror the author's background and patriarchal ideas of worldbuilding. Although their experiences are shaped by patriarchy, societal expectations, and traditional roles, many scholars and readers have been able to develop interpretations of gender that go beyond the binary understandings, encouraging more in-depth consideration of identity and power dynamics, which will be covered in the following section.

### 3. Character Analysis

#### 3.1. Galadriel and Self-Governance

Decades after the first edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was released, Galadriel is still regarded as one of the most iconic female characters in fiction and is a recurring figure in both pop culture and literature. Her enduring significance—which has been enhanced by Peter Jackson's film adaptations—has cemented her place as a central figure in conversations about female protagonists and their complex relationships to ideas of femininity, power, and knowledge. Galadriel's relevancy has increased, and interest in her character has been rekindled by the recent Amazon prequel TV series, *The Rings of Power*<sup>4</sup>. Interestingly, the writers of the series' choice to show a younger Galadriel dressed in armour instead of silk has caused controversy in fan communities, provoking thought on how different people interpret canonical texts and the plethora of ways on how to successfully create strong female characters (Engelbrecht). This change in representation highlights how ideas about femininity and strength in storytelling are changing, encouraging investigation into the challenges of character growth and story adaptation. Rather than using a politically conservative or postmodernist feminist lens to analyse Galadriel, we chose to use a Foucauldian lens to examine Galadriel through the eyes of Tolkien.

According to Hopkins, in Tolkien's lore, women frequently hold positions of power. The land that Eriol travels to is ruled by a woman named Meril-i-Turinqi in *the Book of Lost Tales*. Eventually, it became Numenorean customary for the eldest child of the king, regardless of gender, to succeed him. An even more blatant example is Galadriel, who greatly outshines her husband, Celeborn. She is the one who wears the Ring of Power, has access to the knowledge provided by the Mirror, and ultimately acts without Celeborn when she departs Middle-earth (Hopkins 365).

Despite many authors viewing Lothloriel as a gendered space, Galadriel is not the typical wife expected by Victorian-inspired ideals to be obedient and subservient. The *Silmarillion* contains extensive background information on Galadriel, but even in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is clear that her relationship with Celeborn deviates from the traditional husband-and-wife dynamics that Tolkien's contemporaries were accustomed to. Their interactions show that they are partners in decision-making, but they do so separately rather than together. Galadriel also rejects the cliché of the conventional romantic heroine in spite of her beauty and elegant manner. In fairy tales and romances, older women are typically reduced to roles like hags, witches, or evil stepmothers, where their wisdom poses a threat to men and their attractiveness is diminished. Galadriel, on the other hand, defies this notion; she is older and even a grandmother, but her Elven ancestry keeps her attractive

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<sup>4</sup> Amazon has reportedly spent \$465 million (£399 million) on the opening season of *The Rings of Power* alone, making it the most expensive television show ever produced.

and youthful, as seen by her ability to charm Gimli, who is enamoured by her ethereal presence (Hopkins 365, 366).

Unlike Éowyn, Galadriel's power does not lie in wielding a sword and battling the enemy in a literal sense. Her powers lay in her pursuit of knowledge and her wise character. According to Foucault, knowledge tends to surface when groups are marginalised and not treated fairly. However, at the time of Galadriel's upbringing, her race, the elves, were arguably the race with most power, but because we are analysing a fantasy world with a soft magic system, it could be argued that because Galadriel possesses a mirror that allows her to foretell versions of the future, she may have encountered the upcoming doom of the elves. This prompted her to accumulate as much knowledge as she could in order to become a vessel for knowledge and a wise sage that characters go to for counsel.

Galadriel's access to hidden knowledge and prescience through the Mirror of Galadriel is consistent with Foucault's theory that knowledge is a form of power. Her standing in Elven society is enhanced by this talent, which also establishes her as an important advisor and strategist in the struggle against evil. An example of this is her creation of the White Council<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Galadriel's position as a source of knowledge allows her to exercise soft power by convincing others and using her intellectual authority to influence their attitudes and actions.

The perspectives of biopower and biopolitics can be used to examine Galadriel's vast knowledge and wisdom. Galadriel is positioned as an essential figure in the use of biopower in Tolkien's mythology due to her heritage and experiences. Galadriel is a powerful figure in Middle-earth because she is a bearer of one of the Three Rings of Power, Nenyä, a member of the royal Noldorin house of Finwë. Her care for Lothlórien is a prime example of her function as a ruling power, in which she supervises the welfare of the territory and controls the interactions and actions of those who live there. Galadriel, who embodies elements of biopolitical governance, guarantees the preservation of the natural environment and the harmony of its inhabitants through her leadership and guidance.

Moreover, Galadriel's possession of Nenyä, the Ring of Water, emphasises her affinity for nature and her capacity to control its elements, as she used it to create and conceal Lothlórien from evil and preserve its flora and fauna (The One Wiki to Rule Them All). This connection to elemental powers is consistent with Foucault's concept of biopower, which is the ability of individuals or groups to influence the conditions required for life and survival. Galadriel's control over the elements is a reflection of her ability to influence the landscape and affect the natural processes that keep Lothlórien alive. When Frodo enters Lorien, "it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of

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<sup>5</sup> The White Council, or Council of the Wise, was a group of Elves and Wizards of Middle-earth formed to counterbalance the growing power of Sauron at Dol Guldur at the request of Lady Galadriel.

time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lorien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world" (Tolkien 392). This feeling emphasises how timeless and resilient Lothlórien is; it is a monument to the biopower of Galadriel, whose caretakership keeps the old knowledge and life alive in the realm (Fenwick 19).

Despite this power, knowledge, and influence, Galadriel remains uncorrupted and unscrupulous, unlike the villains of the story, who wield similar power and use it to corrupt. Galadriel uses what Foucault calls self-governance or self-sovereignty. This is illustrated in one scene in chapter 07, "The Mirror of Galadriel," when Frodo suggests her taking the One Ring for she seemed far more powerful and capable of shouldering the responsibility of destroying it. "I will give you the One Ring, if you ask for it. It is too great a matter for me ", she ponders it by saying, "I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp." She then practices what Foucault calls parrhesia, or candid speech, as she openly shares her unfiltered desires and her plans should she bear the One Ring.

‘And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!’ (qtd. in Tolkien, the Fellowship 410)

Ultimately, Galadriel rejects it, illustrating her commitment to self-sovereignty, ethical governance, and a "disposition to steadiness," following the Foucauldian framework towards self-governance. As if by self-examining herself through parrhesia and controlling her curiosity about this external stimulus, she triumphs over the temptation. This "expressive subject" engages in a raw speech that tells the truth as it is, so as to build an ethical framework because otherwise, the world with Galadriel as the bearer of the One Ring is "terrible," "dreadful," with hints of people's unconditional obedience with "all shall love me and despair," suggesting a tyrannical power not different from the one Sauron wants.

Her saying: "I passed the test," represents both her personal victory over the lure and temptation of power and her commitment to a higher moral standard. Galadriel reaffirms her independence and morality in the face of overwhelming temptation by deciding to give up the Ring and stay loyal to herself. "I will diminish, and go into the west, and remain Galadriel," (Tolkien, the Fellowship 410) is a moving statement made by Galadriel that captures a deep-rooted acceptance and

humility. Galadriel admits, with these words, that time and the inevitable waning of her powers are upon her. She gives up the need for control or dominance and embraces vulnerability by stating her willingness to diminish. By embracing her place in the natural order of things without resistance or defiance, Galadriel is demonstrating her self-awareness and resignation. She decides to accept her race's upcoming doom and the fleeting nature of her abilities rather than clinging to power or trying to extend her influence.

### 3.2. Éowyn and Resistance

Notably, women are portrayed in Tolkien's writings in ways that mostly go beyond their traditional roles in relation to men, which frequently confine them to being pursued, rescued, or tragically sacrificed. Tolkien subverts the mythologies he was inspired by. Mythological female characters like Polyxena, Andromache, Helen, and Dido serve as prime examples of how women have historically been portrayed in epic stories as being fringed, loved, or rescued like the damsels in distress in old fairy tales. Tolkien adds a new dimension and a fresh perspective with a heroine, Éowyn, who actively participates in combat by dressing like a man.

*The Two Towers* introduces Lady Éowyn, from the perspective of Aragorn, in chapter six, "The King of The Golden Hall". She resides in Rohan, a kingdom of Men in Middle-earth home to the adept horseriders known as the Rohirrim. Éowyn is a noblewoman by birth, the sister-daughter of King Théoden, and goes by the name "shieldmaiden" despite making only a few appearances in *The Two Towers*.

She is initially introduced as a passive character and described as a "woman clad in white" who has the traditional role of caring for the king's needs (Tolkien and Tolkien 669). Through Aragorn's eyes, a powerful and independent male character in the story, views her as exceptionally fair, with hair that resembles a river of gold. As a daughter of kings, Éowyn was described by Tolkien as "slender and tall she was in her white robe girt with silver; but strong she seemed and stern as steel" (Tolkien and Tolkien 672).

Tolkien intended Éowyn to have more authority by creating a character who was "stern as steel" as opposed to merely a fair and defenceless woman. According to Hellström, author Laura Michel says that Tolkien seems to highlight her beauty while granting her strength and resilience. In her essay *Politically Incorrect: Tolkien, Women, and Feminism*, she first defends the sociohistorical background of female characters being beautiful, but she also dismantles the stereotype of women as weak. Tolkien's insistence on depicting Éowyn as a strong, attractive female character is further evidenced by the way he uses the word "fair" in conjunction with strength-related symbols and synonyms throughout Éowyn's story (Hellström 9).

Additional male characters' perspectives emphasise Éowyn's strength. Because women are still not allowed to hold significant political positions in Rohan due to patriarchy, Háma, a man, declares that not only men are willing to assume the role of ruling in the king's absence and selects Éowyn. This occurs during a debate about who can succeed the king following his march to battle and despite serving as a cupbearer at an all-male council. "There is Éowyn, daughter of Éomund, his sister. She is fearless and high-hearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone" (Tolkien and Tolkien 683). This strengthens her reputation as a person whose courage and tenacity are respected by others.

Éowyn's character develops significantly in *The Return of the King*, especially in a crucial scene that emphasises her resistance and defiance of society's expectations and patriarchal norms. She accepts and accommodates Aragorn at first, acting as a nurturer and carer, but her attitude quickly shifts. Declaring her agency and revealing her true self, Éowyn, who is described as "clad in white; but her eyes were on fire" (Tolkien and Tolkien, *The Return* 1026), boldly expresses her desire to join Aragorn in facing danger and battle. Éowyn's liberation from the confines of conventional gender roles and societal expectations occurs at this pivotal moment (Hellström 10, 11).

According to Foucault, if power exists, then a form of resistance will automatically ensue from this form of power, in this case, the patriarchy (Mills 40). Éowyn's fear of fitting into a predefined role is a clear example of Foucault's concept of disciplinary practices within society, particularly with regard to gender norms. Women are expected to adhere to traditional gender norms and expectations, which act as a form of disciplinary power that controls their conduct and restricts their freedom. Éowyn's defiance of this confinement is a reflection of her opposition and resistance to patriarchal disciplinary methods of frailty, obedience, motherhood, and servitude.

"What do you fear, lady?" he asked. "A cage," she said. "To stay behind bars, until use and old age accept them, and all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall or desire" (Tolkien and Tolkien, *The Return* 1027). Here, Foucault's idea of power as ubiquitous and functioning through a variety of mechanisms is pertinent. Éowyn's fear of a "cage" can be interpreted as a metaphor for the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society. Éowyn's resistance to putting herself in such confinement is a reflection of her awareness of patriarchy's pervasive power and her desire to fight against its oppressive effects.

In addition, Foucault's idea of disciplinary power clarifies how patriarchal societies manage and control people via sanctions, normalisation, and surveillance. Women who fail to fit into traditional gender roles may experience violence or other forms of social repression, which serves to maintain patriarchal power structures. It is possible to interpret Éowyn's reluctance to follow these rules as a form of resistance to disciplinary authority since it expresses her agency and autonomy against social pressure.

Éowyn may not have suffered from violence as a result of her non-conformity, but her Amazonian warrior character does not last, and it goes through a normalisation in the subtext of *the Return of the King*. According to Maddox, Éowyn's journey signifies freedom from the confines typically attributed to female characters like Galadriel and Goldberry, who are confined to their respective gendered spaces. However, she pays a price for her quest for independence: she faces perilous barriers, descends into a deep depression, and almost perishes from injuries that could have killed her. In stark contrast to the portrayal of more submissive female characters, Éowyn appears to be penalised in Tolkien's story for deviating from her assigned role in her society. She could have been just as strong in combat as any other male character created by Tolkien; in fact, she subverts a prophecy in a Macbeth-like style by killing the Witch-King, something that no man is ever able to accomplish. Nevertheless, she is still viewed as foreign to the sword (Maddox 2).

Éowyn's decision to adopt a warrior persona in defiance of patriarchal conventions does not result in the realisation of contemporary feminist ideals. In the guise of the male warrior Dernhelm, she must hide her gender in order to be taken seriously in combat, despite her valiant deeds. She shows strength and resilience while hidden, but when she reveals who she really is, she opens herself up to attack, implying that Tolkien struggled to make sense of the idea of a female warrior in his story. This emphasises the idea that Tolkien adheres to traditional gender roles and that the idea of a "female warrior" is seen as an oxymoron (Maddox 7).

Additionally, compared to her male counterparts, Éowyn's journey is characterised by emotional and physical weakness, even after the Battle of Pelennor Fields. She takes longer to heal and is portrayed as being more delicate, requiring extended bed rest, whereas Merry and Faramir heal more quickly. She is depicted as fragile and reliant despite her bravery, which suggests a support of conventional gender stereotypes. Tolkien's portrayal of women as fundamentally weaker, even in the face of comparable injuries and adversities, is highlighted by Éowyn's slow recovery and her perceived vulnerability in comparison to male characters like Merry and Faramir. This implies a story structure that is consistent with how society views gender roles, which hold that women should be more emotionally and physically frail than men (Maddox 7). This could be seen by many critics and readers as a biological reality for women, but it becomes hard to believe that's what Tolkien intended—a cautionary tale.

Éowyn is validated by her marriage alone, not by becoming a recognised warrior queen. Faramir pulls her from the periphery of society, mending the wounds left by Aragon and restraining Éowyn's inclinations towards bravery and manly pursuits. Faramir, a Minas Tirith's warrior, guides her towards recovery and tames Éowyn's wild warrior impulse, while also promoting a sense of fulfilment within the home. Accepting the role that civilization expects of her as a woman is the first step towards Éowyn's healing. This is the role that she played as the niece of the King of Rohan and

her brother, which is to be a lovely, helpful, and cheery companion to a woman (Fredrick and McBride 35). Éowyn's resistance to patriarchal expectations of femininity is gradually subdued by this process, which is a kind of Foucauldian normalisation that reintegrates her into the established social order. Éowyn begins a healing journey by embracing the role that is expected of her as a woman, fitting in with societal gender norms, and discovering a sense of belonging in the home.

Detractors point out that Tolkien's portrayal of women tends to idealise traditional gender roles, celebrating figures such as Galadriel for personifying virtues associated with the home rather than emphasising personal choice and independence. This pattern may be seen in Éowyn's storyline, where she transitions from pursuing dominance and power to accepting traits typically associated with femininity, like taking on a more traditional role and getting married to Faramir. Tolkien's story implies that women can only find true validation and spiritual fulfilment by fitting into these traditional roles. Éowyn's story, however, also functions as a warning, suggesting that breaking from these gender norms can have disastrous results, mirroring the fate of characters who oppose the status quo like Shelob (Maddox 2).

## CONCLUSION

Our examination of Galadriel and Éowyn in the context of Michel Foucault's philosophy has opened our eyes to the ways in which gender representation and social norms interact in the fantasy genre. Our understanding of the complexity of these characters and their relevance within the larger themes of the story has deepened as a result of placing Tolkien's background and the historical setting in which he wrote in context.

Moreover, our examination has brought to light the complex relationship between Tolkien's training as a philologist and scholar and how he portrayed gender in his works. We can better comprehend the cultural norms and values that shaped Tolkien's worldview by looking at the sociohistorical background of his upbringing. This helps us understand the intricacies of his characters and their importance in the story.

The idea of gendered spaces, a recurrent theme in Tolkien's writing that mirrors larger social norms and power structures, has been essential to our analysis. Within Middle-earth, Galadriel and Éowyn live in different realms, and each challenges gender norms in a unique way. Based on Foucault's theories of biopower and biopolitics, Galadriel, as the ruler of Lothlórien, embodies a kind of soft power rooted in knowledge and wisdom. Her use of the Mirror of Galadriel and her care for Lothlórien demonstrate her role as a guardian of life and wisdom, influencing Middle-earth's future through her selfless deeds.

Éowyn, on the other hand, disobeys social expectations by taking up arms and fighting against Sauron's forces, symbolising a more overt form of resistance to patriarchal norms. Éowyn's journey, which has Foucault's ideas of disciplinary power and resistance, illustrates the conflicts that exist between societal norms and individual agency as she struggles with the restrictions placed on her by her gender and social status. Her transition from being a passive bystander to an active participant in the conflict over Middle-earth's destiny highlights how gender roles are flexible and that resistance is possible in Tolkien's world.

Galadriel and Éowyn are both reflections of and challenges to conventional gender roles and expectations because they are products of the historical and cultural context in which their creator lived. Their stories invite readers to investigate the complexities of femininity within the framework of Tolkien's mediaeval world by acting as focal points for conversations on agency, power dynamics, and resistance.

Future studies on Tolkien's treatment of female characters should provide insightful information about both his worldview and the developing literature-related discourse on gender representation. Through a critical examination of these characters and their stories, academics can keep revealing the nuances of meaning hidden in Tolkien's timeless tale, which will deepen our knowledge of the writer and his lasting influence on fantasy literature.

After wrapping up our examination of J.R.R. Tolkien's depiction of female characters, we will now focus on George R.R. Martin, another legendary figure in the fantasy genre. Although Tolkien's writing established the groundwork for contemporary fantasy fiction, Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series has expanded the genre's parameters in novel and thought-provoking ways. We will explore Martin's nuanced depiction of women in Chapter 3, paying particular attention to Cersei Lannister and Daenerys Targaryen. We will uncover the rich and intricate themes and philosophies that define Martin's epic saga by analysing his treatment of these iconic figures through a Foucauldian lens and considering the context of power, politics, and gender dynamics. We hope to provide new insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by women in fantastical worlds crafted by the creative imaginations of master storytellers, as well as shed light on the changing landscape of female representation in fantasy literature.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Women And Power In Martin's *A Song Of Ice And Fire***

## Introduction

We now shift our analytical focus to another influential work that has transformed the fantasy genre: George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novel series. We have previously examined the complex gender dynamics and navigation of patriarchal power structures within J.R.R. Tolkien's renowned *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy through a Foucauldian philosophical lens.

In contrast to Tolkien's Middle-earth, which portrayed an iconic world of heroic quests and high fantasy, Martin's fictional Westeros offers a grittier, morally ambiguous tapestry of intrigue, violence, and the bloody struggles for dominance between noble houses. However, amidst this intricate and dramatic intrigue, issues surrounding gender identity, the representation of women, and the ongoing application and resistance of patriarchal control continue to be crucial concerns that demand further analysis using Foucault's philosophical frameworks.

To better understand Martin's methods of presenting women and gender politics in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, we will first look at his personal history and literary influences in this chapter. We will also examine how Martin's nuanced portrayals of the female protagonists in the series both uphold and challenge the gender stereotypes that are already well-established in the fantasy genre. Moreover, we will shed light on the mediaeval and patriarchal backdrop that these events take place in and how Tolkien and Martin converge yet differ in their middle ages aesthetic.

Next, using the Foucauldian lens, we will perform an in-depth character analysis of two of Martin's most important and contentious female characters: Daenerys Targaryen and Cersei Lannister. We will examine Daenerys' journey from a timid young bride to the "Mother of Dragons," who welcomes her own personal conquest, by examining ideas like biopower and disciplinary power. Foucault's theories on power, sexuality, and subjugated knowledge will be used to analyse Cersei's unreserved grasp for sovereign control despite Westeros' deeply embedded patriarchy.

In the end, these dual character analyses will show how Martin's well-known but contentious fantasy novels illustrate evolving societal and personal conceptions of women, power, and gender identities—concepts that Foucault's philosophical research enables us to understand in fresh and perceptive ways.

### 1. Martin and Female Representation

The *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (1991–) by George Raymond Richard Martin is considered to be one of the most ground-breaking fictional works in the fantasy genre. Born on September 20, 1948, in New Jersey, U.S.A. He managed to write a work that raised the bar for storytelling and

inspired a surge in the high fantasy genre. He is dubbed “the American Tolkien,” with over 90 million copies in 47 languages sold as of 2024 (Rothman et al.) (Barnett). The reason for its critical and commercial success is Martin’s efficiency at writing hundreds of characters who equally contribute to a complex plot that takes place in an expansive world full of noble houses, factions, cities, and continents. He is known for his shocking plot twists and cliffhangers, which are not done only for shock’s sake but to produce realistic consequences characters can grapple with.

This on-going series has a plethora of points of view in each of the five out of seven published novels, which helps us delve deeper into the psyche and circumstances that render the characters into morally ambiguous people with layers upon layers to unfold. The HBO service adapted the novels into arguably the most famous TV series in the world, opting for the first novel’s title, *A Game of Thrones*<sup>6</sup> (2011–2019), breaking world records even further and cementing its lore and worldbuilding into 2010’s pop culture. Not only that, but it sparked numerous spinoff shows that are either being streamed, like *House of the Dragon*, or are still in development.

The story is known for its ensemble cast of characters, its expansive worldbuilding, mature themes of incest, violence, and politics, and its plot twists and cliffhangers. George. R. R. Martin does not write jaw dropping moments for shock’s sake, but in order to subvert the plot armour main characters tend to have and to produce realistic and consistent consequences for the characters to grapple with. Additionally, the plot’s lack of structure gives it a raw and realistic approach rarely seen in storytelling (Gessey-Jones et al.). In an interview with The Guardian, Martin himself divides authors into two categories: gardeners and architects, as in those who let events unfold as they write, which Martin belongs to, and those who outline their novels before the writing process, respectively.

“I think there are two types of writers, the architects and the gardeners. The architects plan everything ahead of time, like an architect building a house. They know how many rooms are going to be in the house, what kind of roof they're going to have, where the wires are going to run, what kind of plumbing there's going to be. They have the whole thing designed and blueprinted out before they even nail the first board up. The gardeners dig a hole, drop in a seed and water it. They kind of know what seed it is, they know if planted a fantasy seed or mystery seed or whatever. But as the plant comes up and they water it, they don't know how many branches it's going to have, they find out as it grows. And I'm much more a gardener than an architect.” (qtd. in Flood)

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<sup>6</sup> According to the site IMDB, *Game of Thrones* is the most watched Tv show of all time.

The plot of the series revolves around three interconnected stories: a struggle for dynastic dominance among various noble houses; the increasing danger posed by the strong supernatural Others (also called the White Walkers); and the desire of the daughter of the overthrown Westerosi king to return from her exile in Essos and take the Iron Throne. Martin was inspired by Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Isaac Asimov's *The Foundation*, and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. As well as the real historical events of the War of the Roses with the Lancasters and the Yorks, in the novels, it is between the Lannisters of Casterly Rock and the Starks of Winterfell.

The story has a traditional mediaeval setting where patriarchy is rampant, similar to that of Middle-Earth. Although both Tolkien and Martin create vast fantasy universes with a soft, alluring magic system and a basis in mediaeval themes, Martin departs from Tolkien's more straightforward storytelling style and romanticised view of the past. Martin challenges fantasy conventions and provides a more nuanced reflection of modern concerns by bringing realism and complexity to his portrayal of the Middle Ages (Carroll 3-6).

Female characters like Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, Arya Stark, and Sansa Stark are excellent embodiments of these mediaeval-inspired mature elements. The predominantly patriarchal society forces Martin's women to seize some of the power that their masculine world possesses, whether politically or personally. In contrast to the largely submissive and minimal women of Tolkien's equally masculine world. We will discuss how patriarchy functions in Westeros, which is inspired by feudal England, and Essos, which is inspired by a variety of Asian and European countries, given the remarkable amount of character development these women go through and their strife towards agency and self-fulfilment.

The intricate plots of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels are advanced by a sizable ensemble cast of female characters. Martin's women are essential protagonists with complex storylines and significant personal agency. In all, 31 POV (point of view) characters can be found in the five novels that have been released thus far. 9 of the 31 points of view belong to female characters. The series' 9 female point-of-view characters are: Daenerys Targaryen, Catelyn Stark, Cersei Lannister, Arya Stark, Sansa Stark, Brienne of Tarth, Asha Greyjoy, Arianne Martell, and Melisandre. So, approximately 29.03% of the POV characters are female (Statistics for Ice and Fire).

Most of the characters in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series are written from a limited third-person point of view. This implies that every chapter is written from the perspective of a different character, giving readers a glimpse into that character's experiences, feelings, and thoughts—but only to the extent of what that character is aware of or can perceive. The main viewpoint used in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, however, is third-person omniscient. This narrative style provides a broader view of the story and its characters, allowing the narrator to know and describe events, thoughts, and feelings beyond what any single character might experience.

Martin's points of view allow the reader to know and relate to the experiences of the female character, giving much-needed insight on their experiences as women navigating a sexist world. Whereas Tolkien's points of view do not allow for such analyses, they tend to focus mainly on the male cast with little to no commentary on the characters' inner emotions. Martin has been commended by many for giving women a multilayered and human representation. One prominent point-of-view character is Cersei Lannister, who reigns as Queen Regent and goes to great lengths to uphold her family's authority through cunning and even the original "damsels in distress," Sansa and Arya Stark, turn into plotters who use shrewd tactics and willpower to survive the harsh realities of the Civil War. Another main character, Daenerys Targaryen, gathers her own army and dragons in an effort to take back the throne of her family.

These women are more than just the male heroes' meek love interests or subservients; they are equally ambitious individuals who make important choices that change the course of events and wrestle with difficult moral issues. Their intricately crafted tales comprise a substantial chunk of the overall narrative, spanning tens of chapters. In contrast, the quests of male characters such as Frodo, Aragorn, and Gandalf are the main focus of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Strong female characters, such as Galadriel and Éowyn, have a few pivotal scenes, but their storylines are generally straightforward, simple, and centred around aiding the men or upholding a standard of purity or nobility. They lack Martin's degree of moral complexity, personal drive, and plot-driven actions.

Like we previously discussed, the Middle Ages are the setting for this series. As a result, many people in that era thought women were inferior. Though the text depicts many female characters as heroic, researchers still discovered misogynistic elements in the text about strong women. This could be easily argued as a natural consequence of a series set in a gritty, morally grey, and patriarchal world. Yet examining *A Song of Ice and Fire* for possible stylistic sexism reveals fascinating details about how gender dynamics are portrayed in the story. Characters negotiating the limitations of their gender roles take place against the backdrop of Martin's complex world, which is reminiscent of a mediaeval society, which begs the question: does Martin's writing support or refute these gender stereotypes? (Theobald)

Through the application of gender-sentiment analysis, an examination of the novels' stylistic structure provides insightful hints. The analysis reveals subtle patterns in Martin's writing style by identifying words that are frequently used in conjunction with each gender category. Even though terms like "lord" and "ser" are used consistently in all gender categories, differences still exist, especially when it comes to the usage of words like "little," "sweet," and "tears" in sentences related to women. These results point to a nuanced representation of female characters, frequently portrayed as possessing emotive or diminutive traits, which may be a reflection of underlying gender biases in the writing (Theobald).

Although the analysis shows some indication of subtle stylistic sexism, it needs to be placed in the context of a larger literary work. Comparing Martin's portrayal of gender bias to other literary works—feminist fantasy in particular—may shed important light on how prevalent it is. However, comparing it to arguably less feminist works like the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy could showcase how the latter pales in contrast.

## 2. Gender and Patriarchy in Westeros and Essos

Because the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* mainly occurs on the fictional continents of Westeros and Essos, with a backdrop of a mediaeval setting full of notions of chivalry and court intrigue, the patriarchal element is even more apparent through themes, character arcs, and points of view. The politics of the world are what drives the plot forward, so as a result, various discussions can be accumulated on gender in relation to who holds political power and who executes it in the realm.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's theories, the representation of gender dynamics and roles in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is intricately linked to themes of power and discipline. Martin's portrayal incorporates elements from a number of sources, such as historical research, literature from the Middle Ages, and his own narrative decisions. A society where strong, warrior men are preferred and women are expected to be submissive and chaste (with rare exceptions) is reflected in the medievalist world of Westeros. Martin disproves idealised notions of chivalry by exposing them as a thin veneer that hides violent and toxic masculinity. Traditionally connected to civility and safeguarding women, chivalry is actually a violent code of honour that serves the needs of the State and the Church of the Seven, acting as sovereign and disciplinary power structures. The violent underbelly of patriarchal society, where masculinity is associated with misogyny and aggression, is revealed by Martin's rejection of chivalric ideals (Carroll 55)

Randyll Tarly is a prime example of toxic masculinity; he treats Brienne of Tarth, a female armoured knight, misogynistically. He chastises her for being in armour and warns her that if she were to be raped, she would get no justice from him, highlighting how victim blaming and rape culture are considered the norm. Moreover, Randyll Tarly imposes strict gender norms on his son Samwell, who, instead of wanting to fight, wants to learn and be more knowledgeable. Men and women in Westeros suffer from marginalisation and victimisation as a result of this widespread and single definition of gender. The Westerosi culture perpetuates limited notions of masculinity, in which physical masculine strength is valued above all else and those who do not meet this mould are devalued (Carroll 57, 58).

There are some similarities between how women are portrayed in mediaeval Europe and Martin's world, but there are also some clear distinctions. Unlike in historical Europe, there are female warriors in Westeros, though they are rare (Arya Stark, Asha Greyjoy, and Brienne of Tarth). But some cultures in Essos have harsher gender norms than others. For example, the Dothraki, who are inspired by the Mongolians, do not recognise female warriors until Daenerys arrives and breaks that convention. In both contexts, women practice customary crafts and roles like knitting and embroidery; highborn women are literate but subject to rigid social norms regarding chaperoning and virginity. Daughters usually inherit after sons, unless they live in the south of Westeros, in Dorne, where inheritance is not based on gender. But according to a civil war<sup>7</sup>-era decree, women cannot inherit the Iron Throne directly; instead, they must do so through male ancestors (Frankel 222).

Martin's depiction of gender relations in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is consistent with Foucault's theory of power functioning through discipline, in which social norms establish what constitutes appropriate behaviour and penalise deviance from it. Through coercion and violence, Westeros' patriarchal structure upholds traditional gender norms, maintaining an oppressive system.

His literary works feature prominent figures who are women who rise to prominence within the patriarchal structure and subsequently modify it to suit their personal interests. Additionally, Martin's characters grow to understand the significance of gender in their lives and the expectations placed on women in a patriarchal society. The patriarchal social construct of proper behaviour for women creates distinct genders. Gender is a construct of a particular society rather than a biological aspect of identity (Buchanan 8).

Martin recognises the differences between sex and gender, that cultural contexts, rather than innate characteristics, often shape the differences between men and women, and that his feminist approach to writing about women is a result of his belief that all people should be treated as equals. "You know I've always considered women to be people," Martin says in an interview as a guest on the 2012 Canadian Broadcast Network programme *Strouboulouopoulos Tonight* (Vesey-Byrne). By making sure that his female characters have an impact on the storyline and societies portrayed in the novels, he questions conventional views towards women in historical contexts.

The social structures of Westeros prevent women from achieving higher positions of authority and frequently force them to choose between politics like Cersei Lannister or fighting like Arya Stark and Brienne of Tarth. Men are able to fill both roles, but women are usually restricted to one or the other and face barriers originating from patriarchal, feudal standards. Women's perspectives on power are further shaped by regional variations in Westeros, where cultural norms

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<sup>7</sup> The Targaryen Civil War, also known as Dance of the Dragons, is covered in G.R.R. Martin's companion book *Fire and Blood*, which covers the history of the Targaryen rulers.

dictate different opportunities and expectations. To illustrate further, social norms limit women in King's Landing and the surrounding areas to primary roles as wives and mothers, so they frequently manoeuvre delicately around political power. Characters such as Olenna Tyrell, who uses sly tactics to manipulate alliances and gain positions of power for herself and her family, exemplify the cunning needed to wield influence in a society dominated by men (Carroll 65).

Patriarchy manifests itself in different forms in the series; oppression against female characters appears in various forms, including marginalisation, powerlessness, exploitation, and violence. Characters that defy gender stereotypes, such as Arya Stark, who prefers horseback riding to sewing and other traditionally feminine hobbies, are marginalised by society, going as far as being mocked for her boyish appearance with words like "horse face," "lumpyhead," and "squab." The marginalisation that the story's female characters go through is highlighted by this social pressure to live up to gender stereotypes (Prawiti and Wardani 4).

Furthermore, a recurring theme is powerlessness, especially in the case of characters like Danaerys Targaryen. The forced marriage of Danaerys to Khal Drogo at age 13, whose brother Viserys arranged for political purposes, is a prime example of how women are frequently at the mercy of male relatives and social norms. Because she lacks the ability to control her own destiny, Danaerys serves as a symbol of the structural power disparities that exist in patriarchal societies, where women are expected to play subservient roles (Prawiti and Wardani 5).

The oppression that female characters experience is exacerbated by exploitation, as demonstrated by Cersei Lannister's marriage to King Robert Baratheon. As a pawn in her family's political games, Cersei is not given the freedom to make her own decisions about her life but rather is used to create alliances and gain power. The objectification of Cersei by her husband, who sees her mainly as a tool to gain power and fortune, highlights how women are commodified in the context of marriage and dynastic politics (Prawiti and Wardani 7).

Last but not least, Danaerys' experiences of coercion and sexual abuse during her marriage to Khal Drogo serve as an example of how violence is used as an oppressive tool against female characters. Women are particularly vulnerable in a society where men hold a disproportionate amount of power and control because of Danaerys' fear of upsetting her brother and the violence her husband inflicted upon her as a result. The story illustrates how male gratification frequently results in the objectification and exploitation of women's bodies, which feeds the cycles of abuse and subjugation (Prawiti and Wardani 7, 8).

Examining the patriarchal systems of Westeros and Essos as portrayed in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it is clear that themes of oppression, power, and discipline are closely related to gender dynamics. The social norms that are established in this epic series are inspired by literature and history, upholding traditional gender roles and toxic masculinity ideals that are necessary for both

the plot and character development. After this investigation, a Foucauldian character analysis of Cersei Lannister and Daenerys Targaryen sheds more light on the ways in which patriarchy appears and affects women in this world, all the while showcasing the strength they accumulate through their character arcs.

### **3. Character Analysis**

The reason why we opted for Daenerys and Cersei and not radically different characters such as Arya Stark or Catelyn Stark is because they are nobility who choose to exercise power in two radically different ways, which provides us with an intellectually stimulating discussion on their characters, especially through a Foucauldian lens.

Despite being diametrically opposed characters in the struggle for the Iron Throne, Daenerys Targaryen and Cersei Lannister have surprisingly similar fundamental traits and drives. These two strong women have faced extreme trauma, brief periods of subservience, and persistent challenges to their authority from a patriarchal society that actively opposes their rise to power. They are daughters of noble families, both were married off in political marriages, and they are both mothers to three children. Despite this, their reactions to these similar situations differ dramatically, even going against each other.

Importantly, they are all driven by a fierce determination and desire to overcome the oppressive gender politics that have limited their freedom. They hunger to re-inscribe new paradigms to overthrow the patriarchies that have mistreated them. Unfazed by humiliating customs or overwhelming odds, they both tenaciously pursue their goals of unbridled dominance by overcoming all obstacles.

Still, the contradictions are starting to show. With an iconoclastic view, Daenerys believes that corruption and injustice can only be destroyed by "fire and blood"—a revolutionary uprising. On the other hand, Cersei's rise to power is based on repressive and reactionary methods; she has a strong desire to violently uphold the establishment systems that serve her group.

Daenerys and Cersei are the perfect example of two opposite but equally powerful models of challenging and strengthening patriarchal orders, with their sharply opposed ideals only coming together in their shared desire to elevate themselves as unstoppable mothers. Despite their shared traumas, they were irrevocably drawn towards catastrophic conflict by their opposing visions of a revived Westeros.

### 3.1. Daenerys Targaryen, Parrhesia, Disciplinary Power and Biopolitics

#### 3.1.1. Plot

Daenerys Targaryen presents a rather modest image when we first meet her in *A Game of Thrones*. She was banished as the daughter of the former Seven Kingdoms king, and she has spent her entire life under the watchful eye of her abusive and half-mad, older brother Viserys. The meek and timid Daenerys, only 13 years old, is married off to the powerful and much older Khal Drogo as a mere political ploy to aid her brother in rebuilding the army to retake his throne back in Westeros.

Throughout the epic fantasy series, what happens is that Daenerys gradually changes from this scared child-bride into one of the most powerful conquerors on the continent of Essos. She experiences a climactic vision of herself as "The Stallion Who Mounts the World" and, through some miracle, she survives the pyre of her husband Drogo's funeral and emerges with three dragon hatchlings, creatures of great power that have not been seen in centuries. This is the beginning of her ascent as the "Mother of Dragons." This rediscovery of her inner fire propels Daenerys' transformation into a fearless, formidable presence.

After Drogo's death in *A Clash of Kings*, Daenerys fully assumes the role of the khaleesi, inspiring his formidable khalasar with a renewed sense of ambition and self-assurance. Dany is focused on relocating to the Red Waste and secretly raising her dragons, Drogon, Rhaegal, and Viserion, now that she has won the allegiance of what is left of Drogo's khalasar. She is increasingly convinced that she must set sail for Westeros in order to assert her claim to the Iron Throne after having visions of the Prince Who Was Promised in the House of the Undying.

In *A Storm of Swords*, Dany takes her first significant action against Astapor and Yunkai's slavery practices when she gets to Slaver's Bay. In a pivotal moment, she gives up one of her dragons to the elite Unsullied warrior group, then skillfully assumes leadership of both the Unsullied and the dragon to ferociously free Astapor. She solidifies her status as a liberator.

Despite not being mentioned in the fourth novel, *A Feast for Crows*, Daenerys' actions in Slaver's Bay and growing influence have an impact on the story in Westeros as word of her victories spreads. She is still working to undermine the authority of the slavers.

Years of postponing her invasion have weakened Daenerys' hold on power in *A Dance with Dragons*. Her dragons have developed into uncontrollable beasts from feeble hatchlings. She remarks, as if realising that her own growing empire is corrupting. Dany battles the realities of leading a divided city while battling groups like the Sons of the Harpy after seizing control of Meereen. Dany is unwavering in her resolve to overthrow the oppressive wheel in Slaver's Bay before launching her invasion, even in the face of Drogon's rampage and entreaties to set sail for Westeros.

The remarkable personal development of Daenerys is what comes through in these novels. The once-apprehensive girl transforms into a confident, independent conqueror who is not afraid to walk through fire. Martin, however, presents this development not only as a feminist liberation story but also as a perceptive examination of the addictive and dangerous consequences of chasing power at all costs.

### 3.1.2. Analysis

The journey of Daenerys depicts the violent overthrow of the patriarchal status quo as well as the emergence of a fearless new female leadership. Still, it also illustrates the progressively blind ambition that results from a singularly focused desire to rule. Her storyline makes one wonder if revolutionaries who have experienced ultimate authority and power can really maintain their own moral compass.

As shown through her arc, Michel Foucault's concepts of parrhesia, biopower, and disciplinary power provide a framework for analysing the character of Daenerys Targaryen, who embodies a complex interplay of power dynamics and personal agency. The transformation of Daenerys from a banished princess to a strong leader demonstrates how she navigates these Foucauldian themes in the midst of Essos' political machinations and power struggles.

Throughout the series, Daenerys' use of parrhesia, or truth-telling, is a defining characteristic of her persona as she courageously challenges oppressive systems and fights for justice, with epic speeches famous in both the novels and the TV show. A noteworthy instance of her dedication to revealing the truth, no matter the personal repercussions, arises from her dealings with the Slaver's Bay ruling class. In *A Storm of Swords*, Daenerys faces the Astapor slave traders, fearlessly opposing their harsh methods and fighting for the release of the unsullied soldiers, who are groomed as eunuchs from a young age and drugged to feel no pain.

“Unsullied!” Dany galloped before them, her silver-gold braid flying behind her, her bell chiming with every stride. “Slay the Good Masters, slay the soldiers, slay every man who wears a tokar or holds a whip, but harm no child under twelve, and strike the chains off every slave you see.” She raised the harpy’s fingers in the air... and then she flung the scourge aside. “Freedom!” she sang out. “Dracarys! Dracarys!” (qtd. in Martin, *A Storm*)

In this scene, Daenerys tries to bargain with one of her dragons for an enslaved army of the unsullied. The slaver is a cruel man whom she tricks; she commands her dragon to burn him and goes

on a speech ordering her newly acclaimed army to kill their former master, unfraid of guards, archers, or the pandominium she would unleash in the city. This is one of many examples where Daenerys uses parrhesia and comes out triumphant. She changes the social fabric as she conquers the cities of Slaver's Bay and liberates their slaves from their shackles. As a result, she gets dubbed "The Breaker of Chains" and "Mhysa," as in mother.

This is also demonstrated by Daenerys' brave claims and declarations of her legitimacy in claiming the Iron Throne, in spite of the dangers involved. Her right to sovereignty stems from her conviction that she has a dynastic right to rule, which allows her to resist the strict power structures of the regime that uprooted her family.

"Remind your Good Master of who I am. Remind him that I am Daenerys Stormborn, Mother of Dragons, the Unburnt, trueborn queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. My blood is the blood of Aegon the Conqueror, and of old Valyria before him." (qtd. in Martin, *A Storm*)

Throughout the series, this kind of speech is heard frequently. It is usually politically charged because she is perceived as a danger to the rulers of both Essos and Westeros, where her Iron Throne is located. In her remarks, Daenerys never displays fear; instead, her intentions are clear and unambiguous. She consistently asserts that she is the legitimate ruler of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros and that she will stop at nothing to regain her rights, even if some people question her sex or her ability. Her other titles only add other layers to her that serve her in the long run. They have ethereal and prophetic qualities, so the common people follow her as a messiah figure. They are also menacing to her enemies, as they know she is a strong player in the game of thrones. "All kneel for Daenerys Stormborn, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Shackles and Mother of Dragons," Missandei called" (qtd. in Martin, *A Dance*).

Beyond merely dynastic claims, titles like "Mother of Dragons," "The Unburnt," and "Stormborn" serve to further solidify her sovereign identity. They serve as a signal for her extraordinary, almost mythical traits and skills that elevate her above conventional governing structures. She is more than just a dynastic claimant, as evidenced by the hatching of dragons that were believed to be extinct for ages. These titles presented her as an example of the "Prince Who Was Promised" who would bring about the restoration of legitimacy.

Daenerys also shows signs of Michel Foucault's biopower. She has ultimate control over her subjects' lives as the Khaleesi of the Dothraki horde. The Dothraki people follow strong leaders and believe in strength. She has literal control over their bodies as their khaleesi, ordering them around in

combat, deciding on penalties or executions, and more. This is consistent with the idea put forth by Foucault that biopower rules and subjugates physical forms. A tangible example of Daenerys exercising her biopower can be seen when:

One of the first things Dany had done after the fall of Astapor was abolish the custom of giving the Unsullied new slave names every day. Most of those born free had returned to their birth names; those who still remembered them, at least. (qtd. in Martin, *A Storm*)

The three dragons that Daenerys miraculously hatches from stone eggs are a powerful example of biopower. Mhysa, the Mother of Dragons, continues to rule over these terrible creatures that are capable of great harm and demise. Their ability to awe and terrorise people is equivalent to having biopower over possible victims. Her ability to command the dragons represents the pinnacle of biopower: control over a weapon of death. As if possessing a mediaeval fantasy weapon analogous to nuclear power with the use of the one word command "dracarys". In chapter 27 of *A Clash of Kings*, Daenerys reports: "Of all. They shall come day and night to see the wonder that has been born again into the world, and when they see they shall lust. For dragons are fire made flesh, and fire is power." (qtd. in Martin, *A Clash*)

After Daenerys assembles armies dedicated to her cause, comprised of dothraki, unsullied, and freed slaves, she employs strategic biopolitical measures to elevate and control the populace of her nascent kingdom. She swiftly ends the cruel indoctrination programmes that produced these soldier-slaves with the Unsullied. She creates logical programmes that allow the formerly enslaved to obtain stable employment, resource access, and compensation for the freedmen of Meereen.

"One of the first things Dany had done after the fall of Astapor was abolish the custom of giving the Unsullied new slave names every day. Most of those born free had returned to their birth names; those who still remembered them, at least." (qtd. in Martin, *A Storm*)

Still, Daenerys's biopolitical tactics go beyond progressive liberal changes. Her orders carried the highest level of punishment achievable, resulting in the mass execution of Meereen's slave owners as payback for the child crucifixions. This serves as a powerful illustration of the mortality compulsion that forms the basis of Foucault's ideas about biopower. She is free to grant or withhold life itself from her subjects according to her definition of proper submission.

She had them nailed to wooden posts around the plaza, each man pointing at the next. The anger was fierce and hot inside her when she gave the command; it made her feel like an avenging dragon. But later, when she passed the men dying on the posts, when she heard their moans and smelled their bowels and blood...

Dany put the glass aside, frowning. *It was just. It was. I did it for the children.* (qtd. in Martin, A Storm)

The persona of Daenerys alternates between that of a kind, liberating "mhysa" and that of the heir to the Targaryen House. This seemingly paradoxical, dichotomous position is, as Foucault puts it, the essence of biopolitical governance. Comprehensive calculations regarding biopower are necessary, not only for population control and subjugation but also for fundamental population regulation at the statistical and demographic levels of birth, death, productivity, health, and other factors.

She lifted her head. "And I am Daenerys Stormborn, Daenerys of House Targaryen, of the blood of Aegon the Conqueror and Maegor the Cruel and old Valyria before them. I am the dragon's daughter, and I swear to you, these men will die screaming." (qtd. in Martin, A Game)

It is necessary to mention that Daenerys uses disciplinary power for benevolent reasons. She crucifies the slavers because they did the same thing to innocent children. She burns her enemies and goes to battles to free slaves and revolutionise the world into a more progressive era.

"This Mother of Dragons, this Breaker of Chains, is above all a rescuer." (qtd. in Martin, A Dance). Daenerys is a passionate leader who cares about the machinations of politics and ruling, which distinguishes her from ruthless monarchs such as Cersei Lannister. "Why do the gods make kings and queens, if not to protect the ones who can't protect themselves?" (qtd. in Martin, A Storm).

For Daenerys, the journey from exiled beggar princess, who is constantly used and abused, to fierce Khaleesi and Mother of Dragons is replete with instances of her applying different biopower discipline techniques. As she inevitably approaches the borders of Westeros in the two upcoming unpublished novels, it is evident that her theories regarding the appropriate use of harsh authority and power will only expand in scope. It would take careful navigation and direct application of interlocking matrices of biopolitical control, forced biopower leverages, and hyper-regulated population management philosophies to subjugate the Seven Kingdoms under her rule.

In summary, Foucault's concepts allow us to analyse the complex interplay of power dynamics that underpin Daenerys Targaryen's transformation from a timid exiled child-bride to a

powerful ruler. She uses parrhesia to fight oppression and exert control over her subjects through biopower. Her use of disciplinary authority, though, begs ethical concerns about her quest for power. These themes will follow her as she travels through Westeros, inspiring more in-depth thought on the nature of authority and government.

In Westeros, Cersei Lannister employs other Foucauldian principles, despite her similarities in both biology and circumstances to Daenerys. Cersei uses sexuality, sovereign power, and disciplinary power to cement herself as a person worthy of wielding authority.

## **3.2. Cersei Lannister, Parrhesia, Sovereign Power and Sexuality**

### **3.2.1. Plot**

Cersei Lannister is one of the characters in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* who best captures the complexities and contradictions of power dynamics. Cersei is a fascinating subject for analysis through Michel Foucault's frameworks because she is a woman rising through the patriarchal hierarchy of the Seven Kingdoms. The unavoidable connections between sexuality, gender, discipline, subjectification, and the ongoing struggles for sovereignty are strongly illustrated through her journey.

In the first novel, *A Game of Thrones*, Cersei is presented as the devious wife of King Robert Baratheon, who assumed control of Westeros following her triumphant uprising against the Targaryens. Cersei's main responsibilities include using cunning political manoeuvring to maintain her children's claim to the Iron Throne and to consolidate Lannister power. It is important to note that her three children, Joffery, Myrcella, and Tommen, are not her husband's children but rather the offspring of her incestuous relationship with Jaime, her twin brother. The revelation of her illicit relationship with Jaime, which raised the possibility of scandal, was a turning point in later novels. She has no qualms about shoving Bran Stark out of a tower window in order to maintain the secret when questioned. This starts a chain of events that eventually results in war.

In the second novel, *A Clash of Kings*, Cersei becomes Queen Regent and rules through her young son Joffrey following the death of Robert, whom she poisons while hunting. Yet as her power is questioned more and more, she is forced to take harsh, desperate measures in an attempt to maintain control. After the death of King Robert, the Seven Kingdoms go through a civil war, with many men trying to take the Iron Throne. Following Robert's passing, Cersei experiences hardships such as the Siege of King's Landing as the War of the Five Kings rages. Her increasingly desperate acts include pursuing Tyrion, her dwarf younger brother, whom she hates, with hired knives. What really turns things around is her calculated plan to marry her son, Joffrey, to Margaery Tyrell.

In *A Storm of Swords*, Cersei battles the resurgence of the Faith Militant movement and familial tensions, which cause her hold on the realm to wane. Her power, lust, and paranoia become more unbridled. Tywin, Cersei's father, returns and challenges her for control of the kingdom, which causes Cersei's influence to decrease. Her influence is reduced by the High Sparrow's revival of the Faith Militant. She underestimates the power she unleashes and foolishly equips the religious order against threats like the Tyrells in a pivotal moment. In addition, she accuses her brother Tyrion of killing her son Joffery during his marriage to Margery Tyrell in Chapter 60.

*A Feast for Crows* is the first time we get to see things from Cersei's perspective. During Cersei's brief reign as Queen, there is bloodshed, scandal, and the Faith's captivity of her. Growing more unpredictable and solitary, Cersei snaps violently as she feels control ebbing away. Cersei, newly crowned Queen Regent, is surrounded by sycophants and rules with an increasingly deranged grip. Important incidents include the false accusations of disloyalty and adultery that led to her arrest and Margaery's. She suffers a walk of shame after the Faith turns against her for crimes of adultery, incest, and regicide. Her misguided attempt to overthrow the Tyrells fails miserably.

“The rule was hers; Cersei did not mean to give it up until Tommen came of age. I waited, so can he. I waited half my life. She had played the dutiful daughter, the blushing bride, the pliant wife. She had suffered Robert’s drunken groping, Jaime’s jealousy, Renly’s mockery, Varys with his titters, Stannis endlessly grinding his teeth. She had contended with Jon Arryn, Ned Stark, and her vile, treacherous, murderous dwarf brother, all the while promising herself that one day it would be her turn. If Margaery Tyrell thinks to cheat me of my hour in the sun, she had bloody well think again”. (qtd. in Martin, *A Feast*)

The main theme of Cersei's story is the conflict between her sense of unwavering ambition and her sense of destiny, and the fact that her relentless quest for power causes enemies to become more active and alienates allies. Every erratic action she takes to maintain control only serves to further entrench her paranoia and cause her inevitable downfall.

### **3.2.2. Analysis**

A unique viewpoint on Cersei Lannister from Martin's series can be obtained by applying a Foucauldian analysis to her. The theories of power by Michel Foucault—parrhesia, sovereignty, sexuality, and disciplinary power, in particular—offer a framework for understanding Cersei's

nanced motivations and actions as well as the dynamics of power at work in the fictional world of Westeros.

Although Cersei Lannister's use of parrhesia, or frank speech, is evident in some instances in the novels, it differs greatly from Daenerys's or even Galadriel's usage in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. As Foucault puts it, parrhesia is the act of speaking bravely and honestly, often in circumstances where doing so could get one in trouble for being so honest. Cersei's tendency towards impulsiveness and impatience puts her in precarious situations where she speaks too candidly without considering the consequences.

Ned Stark, the King's Hand, meets with King Robert in *A Game of Thrones*, Chapter 39. Tensions increase when Robert and Cersei arrive and talk about recent events, such as Ned's refusal to free Tyrion Lannister and make amends with Jaime. Robert becomes enraged at Cersei for standing up for Jaime, and this leads to an actual physical altercation between them. Ned feels stuck in his position as Hand of the King because Robert refuses to listen to him, even though Ned tries to reason with him.

“I took you for a king. Jaime and Tyrion are your own brothers, by all the laws of marriage and the bonds we share. The Starks have driven off the one and seized the other. This man dishonors you with every breath he takes, and yet you stand there meekly, asking if his leg pains him and would he like some wine.”

Robert's face was dark with anger. “How many times must I tell you to hold your tongue, woman?”

Cersei's face was a study in contempt. “What a jape the gods have made of us two,” she said. “By all rights, you ought to be in skirts and me in mail.” Purple with rage, the king lashed out, a vicious backhand blow to the side of the head. She stumbled against the table and fell hard, yet Cersei Lannister did not cry out. Her slender fingers brushed her cheek, where the pale smooth skin was already reddening. On the morrow the bruise would cover half her face. “I shall wear this as a badge of honor,” she announced.

“Wear it in silence, or I'll honor you again,” Robert vowed. (qtd. in Martin, *A Game*)

Though in a subversive way, Cersei's statement in this scene can be seen as parrhesia. Cersei is quietly questioning gender norms and power dynamics in their marriage by proposing that Robert wears the gown, which is associated with femininity, and she wears the armour, traditionally associated with masculinity. By suggesting that she views herself as the most powerful and dominant person in their relationship, she is challenging the established hierarchy of gender roles. It is crucial

to remember that Cersei is using sarcasm and subtext in this passage because openly questioning Robert's authority does have negative effects on her. She is slapped, but instead of crying, she takes the blow and sees it as something to be proud of, which can be seen as further usage of candid speech. In chapter three of *A Feast for Crows*, Cersei says that “a woman may weep, but not a queen.” (Martin, *A Feast*)

In chapter 45 of the same novel, Ned Stark confronts Cersei after discovering her incestuous relationship with her brother. A scandal that could get her and her children killed, but she seems to be unfazed by his revelation. She admits her love and lust for her brother with no guilt, shame, or fear of consequences.

“Your brother?” Ned said. “Or your lover?”

“Both.” She did not flinch from the truth. “Since we were children together. And why not? The Targaryens wed brother to sister for three hundred years, to keep the bloodlines pure. And Jaime and I are more than brother and sister. We are one person in two bodies. We shared a womb together. He came into this world holding my foot, our old maester said. When he is in me, I feel... whole.” The ghost of a smile flitted over her lips. (qtd. in Martin, *A Game*)

Cersei's desire for dominance and power is closely linked to her sexuality. She employs her sexual appeal and femininity as tools to control and sway people around her, especially men in positions of power, throughout the entire series. She uses her relationships with Jaime and other male characters as a way to further her political goals and assert her agency. Not even Cersei could love someone who was herself or a part of her in some way. Her identical twin is the one person she has ever truly loved in life. The ultimate expression of self-love is loving one's twin, a reflection of one's self, which is also sort of the epitome of what it means to be narcissistic. Cersei's incest and hatred for the limitations of her own sex can also be seen as a form of regaining back a form of agency that cannot be achieved unless through sexual expressions. From a narcissistic perspective, her love for her kids can also be viewed as an extension of herself (Bartleet). However, as shown by the secrecy surrounding her incestuous relationship with Jaime and the consequences she faces when it is revealed, Cersei's sexual agency is also limited by cultural expectations and norms.

If the gods had given her the strength they gave Jaime and that swaggering oaf Robert, she could have made her own escape. Oh, for a sword and the skill to wield it. She had a warrior's heart, but the

gods in their blind malice had given her the feeble body of a woman. (qtd in Martin, A Dance)

According to Foucault, discourses have a significant influence on how people view sexuality and create standards of appropriate conduct. In the world of Westeros, ideas of honour, duty, and social standing are closely linked to ideas of sexual morality. Throughout the story, tensions and power struggles arise because Cersei's actions and desires frequently clash with these dominant discourses. She challenges established norms and draws criticism from her enemies, for instance, by defying social expectations regarding women's roles and sexuality, especially as a queen regent.

She sleeps with her twin brother, partly due to her narcissism and seeing him as a reflection of herself, and partly because she despises her gender and the limitations it puts her under. This action has led her to produce three children who are thought to be the king's children, which leads to complicated and dangerous ramifications for both the people involved and the realm as a whole.

When Jaime is captured and is no longer in close proximity to Cersei, she chooses her cousin, Lancel Lannister, to be her sexual partner. He is a person who is pliable enough for her to control and rule over. She goes as far as using her cousin to kill her husband. Although King Robert Baratheon was not poisoned, his squire Lancel purposefully gave him wine that was more potent than he anticipated, making him light-headed during a perilous boar hunt. Cersei made arrangements for this. The plan worked, as Robert was mortally wounded by a large boar that gored him. Evidence of this is in the second novel, when Tyrion remarks that "Cersei had made shameless use of their cousin, both in and out of bed." (qtd. in Martin, A Clash)

These are not the only instances in which Cersei used her sexuality to further her own goals. Cersei's relationships with the Kettleblack brothers serve as an example of how disciplinary power is used, with her sexuality being used as a tool for control and manipulation. Cersei has authority over the Kettleblack brothers because they are under her command as members of the Kingsguard and the City Watch. She takes advantage of their desire for her to further her own goals, whether they are destroying political competitors or establishing her dominance over King's Landing, such as orchestrating a sexual scandal regarding her daughter-in-law, Margaery Tyrell. In this way, Cersei personifies Foucault's idea of the sovereign, who controls and governs others' actions in order to preserve power.

She gave him a smile and a squeeze. "Tell me true. Do you think our little queen is pretty?" Ser Osney drew back, wary. "I suppose. For a girl. I'd sooner have a woman." "Why not both?" she whispered. "Pluck the little rose for me, and you will not find me to be ungrateful." (qtd. in Martin, A Feast)

Following Foucault's work on how the sexuality of the person must be revealed and atoned for through a confession, we can draw a similar pattern that Cersei falls into. She gets imprisoned by the Faith Militant, who are a group of religious zealots whom Lancel joins and confesses his fornications to. Cersei is captured by them, and she has to confess and atone for her crimes of incest, regicide, and fornication. She does confess to bedding her cousin and the knights, but not to the incest or regicide, as she knows that would lead to her possible execution.

“It does not excuse my sin, High Holiness, but I was lonely and afraid. The gods took King Robert from me, my love and my protector. I was alone, surrounded by schemers, false friends, and traitors who were conspiring at the death of my children. I did not know who to trust, so I ... I used the only means that I had to bind the Kettleblacks to me.”

“By which you mean your female parts?”

“My flesh.” She pressed a hand to her face, shuddering. When she lowered it again, her eyes were wet with tears. (qtd. in Martin, *A Dance*)

A further facet of Foucault's theories that Cersei can make use of is his notion of disciplinary power as well as the "panopticon." The panopticon is a metaphorical jail where the prisoners are always watching, internalising the authority figure's gaze, and controlling their own actions. This concept is demonstrated in the Westeros setting by Cersei's paranoia and ongoing fear of being discovered or discredited by her adversaries.

Cersei is plagued by a prophecy of a "younger, more beautiful queen" who will steal everything she values throughout the entire series. She develops a strong sense of insecurity and mistrust as a result of this prophecy, which makes her constantly watch and control people around her. Her actions, such as orchestrating the downfall of Margaery Tyrell, can be interpreted as a form of disciplinary power, where she seeks to eliminate any potential threats to her position and authority.

In conclusion, Cersei Lannister's complex motivations and actions within the world of Westeros can be examined through the lens of Michel Foucault's theories on power, sexuality, and discourse. We can better comprehend the complex dynamics at work by looking at how she employs parrhesia, subverts gender norms, uses sexuality as a tool of power, and internalises disciplinary power. Cersei's narrative offers a gripping examination of the relationship between desire, power, and social expectations. It also highlights the various ways in which women negotiate and contest the prevailing discourses that influence their patriarchal environments. A Foucauldian analysis reveals

Cersei as a complex and provocative character, motivated by a complex web of societal pressures, personal aspirations, and the constant struggle for control and dominance.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on the complex interactions between gender politics, patriarchal structures, and power dynamics that form the compelling stories of Daenerys Targaryen and Cersei Lannister in George R.R. Martin's epic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. In the quasi-mediaeval, patriarchal society of Westeros and Essos, women navigate, challenge, and are constrained by systems of power in a variety of ways, as these two diametrically opposed yet equally formidable female characters demonstrate.

The conceptual frameworks of Foucault, which include parrhesia, biopower, sovereign power, disciplinary power, and the intersections of sexuality and power dynamics, have been instrumental in offering insightful analytical lenses for examining the motivations, character arcs, and effects of Cersei and Daenerys. As a revolutionary who battles the corrupting effects of unbridled ambition, Daenerys emerges as a figure who uses biopower and parrhesia to overturn oppressive orders and establish her sovereignty. On the other hand, Cersei's cunning manipulation through sexuality, sovereign power, and disciplinary mechanisms reveals her skill in her unwavering quest for dominance within the patriarchal hierarchy of Westeros.

This analysis highlights the ways in which Martin's deftly constructed female characters go beyond facile stereotypes to represent the nuances and paradoxes present in women's experiences of power in patriarchal settings. Their stories powerfully convey the challenges, victories, and moral conundrums that confront women who defy long-standing gender norms and oppressive systems.

In the end, this chapter has advanced a sophisticated comprehension of the representations of power dynamics, gender dynamics, and subversive agency in Martin's well-known literary work by fusing Foucauldian theory and literary analysis. The analysis of Cersei and Daenerys sheds light on the various ways that women negotiate the perilous terrain of desire, power, and submission in the richly detailed world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Future studies could examine the ways in which other notable female characters from the series—like Margaery Tyrell, Brienne of Tarth, or Arya Stark—interact with and challenge patriarchal power structures via their own experiences and narratives. Furthermore, contrasting Martin's depiction of gender dynamics and power relations with that of other fantasy novels or historical sources may provide interesting new insights.

To conclude, this analysis of Foucault has shown the great depth and resonance with which Martin's epic fantasy series addresses questions of power, gender, and the difficulties of female

agency in patriarchal settings. The journeys of Cersei Lannister and Daenerys Targaryen serve as powerful examples of the ongoing importance of analysing how women are portrayed in positions of power in literature and other media.

## General Conclusion

This dissertation has looked at the nuanced portrayals of women and power relationships in J.R.R. Tolkien and G.R.R. Martin's influential fantasy novels. The main argument, viewed through a Foucauldian lens, has been that, in contrast to Martin's women, who actively challenge and subvert established power hierarchies, Tolkien's female characters navigate patriarchal structures within the parameters of traditional gender roles. This suggests that Martin's women represent a more sophisticated and contemporary understanding of gender politics.

In this section of this comparative study, we delve into the points of convergence and divergence between the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien and G.R.R. Martin. We will tackle the narrative plots of the female characters and their navigation of social patriarchal systems, the mediaeval and thematic nature of their works, and their different uses of Foucauldian aspects of power.

Tolkien and Martin have been shown to be products of their respective times. Gender roles and how they functioned in patriarchal societies were socially rigid concepts in Tolkien's 20th-century world. His experiences in the war, the university, and his close relationship with men have all influenced his writing, which features a cast of all male characters embarking on an adventure. His writing of women is minimal, as they do not participate in the narrative fabric of the trilogy as much as Frodo, Sam, Aragorn, and Gandalf.

The female characters we encounter are few in number and contribute little except for supporting the male cast. Goldberry is a domestic housewife in comparison to Tom Bombadil's eccentric powers. Galadriel does not venture beyond her realm. Arwen has neither significance nor relevance except for being the prized wife Aragorn gets at the end of *The Return of the King*. Shelob is the only female villain, but she is a non-talking spider. Éowyn is the only woman who challenges patriarchy and gender norms, but she is eventually married off in a conventional marriage to Faramir, as if to signify her going back to her senses.

Martin, on the other hand, lived his adult life during the second wave of feminism, when patriarchy and gender roles became less strict and rigid. Many critics and readers regard his women as morally complex individuals with flaws, dreams, and agency to achieve, despite a world that is grittier and more mature than that of *The Lord of the Rings*. Daenerys Targaryen, Cersei Lannister,

Brienne of Tarth, Catelyn Stark, Arya Stark, and Sansa Stark are just a few of the female characters whose stories and contributions to the epic series are as significant as the male characters.

To elaborate, we have established how Tolkien's patriarchy manifests itself in gendered spaces that limit women's movement and prevent them from playing active central roles in the story. Examples include Lothlorien and Rohan. Contrastingly, Martin's world does not have any gendered spaces. Despite highborn women being expected to stay behind the walls of their castles, they still move and travel.

For example, Daenerys's exiled status forced her to travel to most of the cities on the continent of Essos prior to her marriage to Khal Drogo. Catelyn Stark and her daughters Arya and Sansa travel around a large area of Westeros, forging alliances and enemies as they get involved in the politics and skirmishes of the Seven Kingdoms. For instance, Arya Stark disguises herself as a boy for easier travel and even reaches the city of Braavos on the continent of Essos to learn how to be an assassin. This all occurs despite the sexist backdrop of the medieval setting of Westeros and Essos.

Unlike Tolkien, Martin subverts and uses tropes of medievalist Tolkienesque fantasy to work against the genre in his portrayal of women. In contrast to Tolkien, Martin makes extensive use of female characters, many of whom have significant roles. In the story's progression. "Many critics have noted that women do little of any importance in Middle-earth," and "it is not true to say there are no women in *The Lord of the Rings*, but there are certainly few," write Candice Frederick and Sam McBride (Buchanan 6). George R.R. Martin's portrayal of women in *A Song of Ice and Fire* reveals a sophisticated understanding of gender dynamics within a patriarchal society. Martin's female characters actively question conventional notions of womanhood, seeing the system's flaws and choosing not to comply instead of being passive objects of their roles. Martin's women defy conventional literary clichés by being multifaceted, strong-willed individuals with rich histories rather than clichéd figures like Madonna vs. the whore or the damsel in distress (Carroll 63).

While Martin's depiction of the mediaeval world faces the harsh and brutal realities of power struggles, moral ambiguity, and societal complexities, Tolkien's work, steeped in nostalgia and romanticism, presents a sense of escapism from modern complexities. Martin also criticises the fantasy genre as a whole, arguing against its propensity for clichés and in favour of more realism (Carroll 7).

The *A Song of Ice and Fire* series receives acclaim for its portrayal of accuracy, with fans arguing that its authenticity is a trait as Martin blends both fantasy and historical fiction together. Critics who question the series' controversial themes of rape, incest, and violence are met with supporters who believe that George R.R. Martin accurately and realistically portrays the Middle Ages as he takes events that happened in history, such as child brides and incest amongst pharaohs and noble

families. However, the meanings of "accurate" and "authentic" are open to debate, as are the terms "mediaeval" and "the Middle Ages." The argument that Martin's realistic approach leads to a narrative when compared to fantasy works necessitates an examination of changing perceptions towards fantasy literature. Early critics viewed fantasy as dangerous, especially for younger readers, like Lauren S. Mayer who calls Martin's work as a piece of "fetish medievalism" (Mayer). Yet proponents like George MacDonald and J.R.R. Tolkien advocated for its artistic significance in their works, *The Fantastic Imagination* (1893) and *On Fairy-Stories* (1939). While Martin critiques escapism, he admires Tolkien's creations while striving for an authentic depiction of mediaeval times. He defines his fantasy as mature and intricate, in contrast to what he sees as clichéd imitations of Tolkien's work. However, these assertions may be viewed as elitist and problematic since they overlook contributions within the fantasy genre while idealising Martin's brand of realism without acknowledging its modern mediaeval elements (Carroll 10, 13).

The aim of this study was to: (1) explain how writers' backgrounds influence their works. (2) Explain how Galadriel and Éowyn operate within the patriarchy and identify which Foucauldian notions they relate to. (3) Explain how Daenerys and Cersei operate within and challenge the patriarchy, and identify which Foucauldian notions they relate to. (4) highlight the points of convergence and divergence between Tolkien and Martin and numerate the different methods used to subvert sexist narratives.

This study has examined the complex ways that women are portrayed in two seminal works of the fantasy genre. Using an analysis of power dynamics, agency, and resistance through the lens of Foucault, we have discovered notable distinctions between Tolkien and Martin's approaches to the representation of female characters in their respective fictional worlds. In exploring the portrayal of female characters, a comparative analysis of J.R.R. Tolkien's Galadriel and Éowyn and George R.R. Martin's Daenerys Targaryen and Cersei Lannister reveals intriguing insights into power dynamics, agency, and resistance within these fictional worlds.

The ethereal Elven queen Galadriel in Tolkien's story represents a sense of otherworldly grace and wisdom. Her enduring and ethereal power is attributed to her kinship with the land and her people. Galadriel's role as a guardian and guide, however, somewhat restricts her agency; she is more interested in helping the Fellowship on their quest than pushing the story along with her own goals. Galadriel's power can be interpreted as disciplinary in the Foucauldian framework as long as it stays within the bounds of Elven social norms and expectations. Her use of parrhesia provides her with a sense of self-governance adequate for a ruler with ethics and morality.

In Tolkien's writing, Éowyn stands for a distinct aspect of female agency. She challenges gender norms and expectations by dressing as a man to fight the Witch-king and she aims to establish her value in a world dominated by men. Her desire for bravery and glory, coupled with her disdain for

social conventions, puts the established power structures in Rohan to the test. Éowyn's actions can be seen as expected acts of resistance in a harsh patriarchal society that seeks to confine her, when seen through a Foucauldian lens.

These characters allow us to see Tolkien's approach to writing female characters. They typically have ethical portrayals, a feminine, pleasant aura, and minimalist representations. These are good and just women without any flaws in their personalities or layers of complexity. Even the brief romance that develops between Éowyn and Faramir towards the end is a poorly thought out attempt to turn Éowyn back from a warrior to a warrior, which feels like a character regression.

Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* features Daenerys Targaryen as a pivotal character, whose transformation from an exiled princess to a formidable ruler exemplifies a nuanced examination of power. The storyline of Daenerys is characterised by her slow ascent to power through the use of dragons, her capacity to arouse adoration and loyalty through the abolishment of slavery, and her challenges in negotiating a perilous political environment. Daenerys' power can be understood within a Foucauldian framework as a type of sovereign power, exercised through her capacity to dominate and rule over others, with many instances of parrhesia.

In contrast, Cersei Lannister represents a distinct kind of power in Martin's story. Cersei is a sly and devious political player who uses deceit, manipulation, and brutality to gain control. She acts violently and betrays others in order to hold onto her position of power because she is driven by a desire for dominance and control. From a Foucauldian perspective, Cersei's authority can be seen as disciplinary in that it uses coercion and fear to enforce compliance.

The analysis and key findings that have been presented have allowed for insightful comparisons between the authors' different approaches to representing women's agency, power, and resistance. Even though Galadriel and Éowyn are strong characters in Tolkien's work, they are ultimately constrained by the traditions of their mediaeval setting. Galadriel's authority stems from following rules, while Éowyn's disobedience results in a traditional happy ending. Martin's Daenerys Targaryen and Cersei Lannister, on the other hand, represent intricate negotiations of disciplinary and sovereign power, using cunning, sexuality, and parrhesia to subvert the patriarchal systems of Essos and Westeros.

There are many potential directions for future studies that build on this analysis. Similar research could examine the ways in which other well-known female characters from Martin's novels, like Brienne of Tarth or Arya Stark, negotiate agency and power in the patriarchal realm of Westeros. This Foucauldian framework could also be used to analyse gender representations in other fantasy novels, such as Brandon Sanderson's *The Stormlight Archive* or Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*, revealing recurring themes or different approaches in the genre. In order to promote a deeper understanding of the intricate interactions between literature and societal narratives, interdisciplinary

research could also look into how these literary portrayals intersect with discourses on gender, power, and social norms in the real world.

In the end, this dissertation emphasises how important it is to continue to analyse how gender and power are portrayed in literature, especially in the popular and renowned fantasy genre. Through revealing the complex relationships at work in the writings of Tolkien and Martin, we are reminded of the enormous influence that narrative structures can have on influencing how we perceive the world and upholding or subverting social norms. We must keep discussing these intricate stories as readers and academics in order to promote a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of gender, power, and the human condition.

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