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AN ARISTOTELIAN TRAGEDY IN GAME OF THRONES: THE DOWNFALL  
OF THE LANNISTER TWINS

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An Aristotelian Tragedy in Game of Thrones: The Downfall of the Lannister Twins

Taht Oyunları'nda Aristotelesvari Bir Tragedya: Lannister Kardeşlerin Çöküşü

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## Abstract

Fantasy TV series *Game of Thrones*, adapted from George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, is about several families battling for power in the mythical land of Westeros. Two major characters in this power struggle are the twins Cersei and Jaime Lannister, who experience a tragic downfall because of their own actions. This dissertation analyzes their interrelated plotlines according to Aristotle's theory of tragedy in the *Poetics* and addresses the following question: Why can we consider Cersei and Jaime Lannister's plotlines as Aristotelian tragedies?

The study covers Seasons 1-6 of the TV series and adopts an interpretive approach. It emphasizes the imitation (mimesis) of human action in the tragedy of the twins. In accordance with Aristotle's analysis in the *Poetics*, both plotlines contain several pitiable and fearful events as well as shocking yet causally explainable twists. The dissertation argues that this intelligible plot structure can give the audience pleasure by enabling the catharsis of pity and fear. The viewer can find pleasure in understanding how the two tragic heroes make crucial mistakes (hamartia) and cause their own downfall. Mainly, the dissertation claims that this change of fortune demonstrates the unintended consequences of human action as in the case of an Aristotelian tragedy.

**Keywords:** Aristotle, catharsis, Cersei Lannister, fear, Game of Thrones, hamartia, Jaime Lannister, mimesis, pity, plot, Poetics, tragedy, tragic hero

## Özet

George R.R. Martin'in *Buz ve Ateşin Şarkısı* roman serisinden uyarlanan *Taht Oyunları* dizisi, fantastik diyar Westeros'taki güç mücadelesini konu alır. İkiz kardeşler Cersei ve Jaime Lannister bu mücadelenin başlıca aktörlerindedir. Dizi boyunca her iki karakter kendi eylemleri sebebiyle trajik bir çöküş yaşar. Bu tez Cersei ve Jaime Lannister'in çöküşünü Aristoteles'in tragedya anlayışı üzerinden incelemektedir. Tez *Poetika*'yı baz alarak iki karakterin iç içe geçmiş olay örgüsüne odaklanmakta ve bu kurgunun neden Aristoteles'in tragedya anlayışına uygun düştüğünü açıklamaktadır.

Çalışma dizinin ilk altı sezonunu kapsamakta ve yorumlayıcı bir yaklaşım benimsemektedir. İncelenen iki olay örgüsünde de izleyicide korku ve acıma duygularını uyandırabilecek insan eylemleri taklit (mimesis) edilmektedir. Bu eylemler, Aristoteles'in *Poetika*'da belirttiği şekilde, birbirini neden-sonuç olarak izler. Böylece en şaşırtıcı olaylar bile akla yatkın hale gelir. Tez bu rasyonel olay örgüsünün izleyici üzerinde kathartik bir etki yaratabileceğini savunur. İzleyici her iki kahramanın kendi sonunu trajik hatalar yaparak hazırladığını anlayabilir ve bu süreci izlemekten keyif alabilir. Lannister kardeşlerin çöküşü, Aristotelesvari bir tragedyada olduğu gibi, insan eylemlerinin beklenmedik sonuçlarını ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** acıma, Aristoteles, Cersei Lannister, Jaime Lannister, katharsis, korku, mimesis, olay örgüsü, *Poetika*, *Taht Oyunları*, tragedya, trajik hata, trajik kahraman

## INTRODUCTION

Fantasy TV series *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-), based on *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels<sup>1</sup> by George R.R. Martin, is about several noble families who fight for political power in the mythical continent of Westeros. The characters struggle for the control of the realm and plot against their enemies to seize the throne. Two of them, Cersei Lannister and Jaime Lannister, experience tragedy as a result of the critical acts they commit on their road to power. The purpose of this dissertation is to interpret their plotlines in relation to Aristotle's theory of tragedy based on his *Poetics* and answer the following question: Why can we consider Cersei and Jaime Lannister's highly interrelated plotlines as Aristotelian tragedies?

It has been more than two thousand years since Aristotle wrote the *Poetics* yet the classical work is still relevant to our contemporary understanding of tragedy. Rooted in action, tragedy demonstrates how human beings bring about their own downfall by their own agency. The contemporary audience can relate to Aristotle's theory of tragedy as it deals with a timeless and universal subject, which is the human nature. As Jean-Pierre Vernant states, tragedy shows the fragility and limitedness of the human condition. Through the representation and dramatization of action, it makes human beings realize the value of their existence as well as its extreme vanity. Therefore, tragedy urges its audience to submit the human condition to a general interrogation (Vernant 247).

Just like real-life people, characters of a tragedy have specific interests, passions and flaws. Their actions are directed towards an end and they pay the consequences of their errors. In *Game of Thrones*, Cersei Lannister (portrayed by Lena Headey) and Jaime Lannister (portrayed by Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) are two tragic characters that face calamity as a result of their own actions. The HBO series,

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<sup>1</sup> The first novel of Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, *A Game of Thrones*, was first published in 1996. Other novels *A Clash of Kings*, *A Storm of Swords*, *A Feast for Crows* and *A Dance with Dragons* were published respectively in 1998, 2000, 2005 and 2011. Seasons 1-6 of the TV series are based on these five novels.

produced by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, depicts a realm of conflict the Lannisters are a key part of. The narrative structure largely follows Martin's novels. However, Martin adopts multiple point-of-view characters with a third-person limited narrative voice and a first-person perspective. Each chapter in the books focuses on one character by following his or her development. On the other hand, the TV series uses the third-person point of view in a dramatic manner.

This dissertation examines the TV series rather than the novels because Aristotle favors dramatization over pure narration.<sup>2</sup> For him, the poet should construct the plot on dramatic principles and place the events directly before the audience's eyes (Aristotle, "Poetics" 2328-2329). With regard to *Game of Thrones*, Tobias Steiner states that the TV series allows for a stronger identification with the characters, as the audience can witness not only a character's actions but also his or her immediate reactions to the world. In coherence with Aristotle, Steiner thinks that this way of dramatic storytelling is able to throw the viewer directly into the narrative (184).

As a product of 'Quality TV'<sup>3</sup> and a long-form serial drama, *Game of Thrones* successfully adapts the fantasy saga for the screen (Wheatley 60-61). The multiple-season narrative evolution provides sufficient time for the complication and unraveling of the plot. Specifically, the tragedy of the Lannister twins spans over six seasons and presents their change of fortune in a causal sequence of events. It also involves several shocking twists, which conform to Aristotle's understanding of a successful tragedy in the *Poetics*. The work demonstrates the importance Aristotle attaches to tragic plot and its peculiar effect on the audience. Therefore, this dissertation analyzes the twins' tragedy with a focus on the plotlines of both

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<sup>2</sup> In Ancient Greece, there were two basic ways of narrative communication. The first one brought the services of a narrator into play. He was the story's sole teller for its entire duration. The second way involved stage actors who imitated the story without the aid of a narrator (Gaudreault 52).

<sup>3</sup> According to Dan Hassler-Forest, the concept of 'Quality TV' is based on elevating certain programs over others and appealing to a particular high-income audience. For example, HBO's *Game of Thrones* is designed to appeal the educated, upper-middle class subscribers who value the literary qualities of the series (Hassler-Forest 162-163).

characters. It examines their complex narrative structures according to the main concepts in the *Poetics* that are mimesis, catharsis and *hamartia*.

## THE LANNISTER TWINS AND ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

The wealthy, noble and well-connected House Lannister is one of the key families involved in the struggle over the constituent Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. The head of the family, Tywin Lannister, rules the west of the continent. As the richest lord in Westeros, he holds a great deal of influence. He has three children: the twins Cersei and Jaime and their younger brother Tyrion, who is a dwarf. Both Tywin and Cersei harbor a deep hatred for Tyrion because Tywin's wife, Joanna Lannister, died giving birth to him. The Lannisters have a powerful position in the beginning of the series<sup>4</sup>, particularly due to Cersei Lannister's marriage to King Robert Baratheon and Tywin Lannister's immense wealth. However, this perfect outer appearance of the Lannisters hides an ugly reality underneath. The twins have an incestuous relationship since they were young and Cersei's three children, Joffrey, Myrcella and Tommen, are not King Robert's but Jaime's.

The tragedy of the twins start in Season 1 Episode 1 when Bran Stark<sup>5</sup> sees them while having intercourse at the top of a tower. Consequently, Jaime pushes the boy out of the tower window to keep his family safe. Yet Jaime's act leads to a series of incidents that cause the downfall of the Lannister family. It triggers a major war in Westeros, which eventually costs the lives of the twins' father and three illegitimate children. Furthermore, Jaime loses his hand and Cersei gets a public and brutal punishment for her crimes. Their tragedy ends with their youngest child Tommen's suicide in the final episode of Season 6.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The series premiered on April 17, 2011 on American television network HBO.

<sup>5</sup> Bran is the fourth child of Ned and Catelyn Stark. The Stark family rules the northern part of Westeros and is among the most powerful noble houses in the series.

<sup>6</sup> The sixth season of the series premiered on April 24, 2016 and ended on June 26, 2016. Season 7, aired in 2017, is not included in this dissertation.

Both plotlines are in accord with Aristotle's conception of a well-organized tragedy. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle examines the main characteristics of a successful tragedy and lists its differences from other modes of imitation including comedy, epic and dithyrambic poetry. He explains what the poet must do in order to create an effective tragic plot that inspires pity and fear in its audience. According to Aristotle, the tragedian must follow certain patterns in order to better arouse these two emotions.

Aristotle also questions how poetry (hence tragedy, as one kind of poetry) comes into existence and develops over time as a mode of imitation (mimesis). The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on Aristotle's analysis on the emergence of poetry, which results from man's instinct to imitate. Besides the *Poetics*, it refers to Aristotle's *Parts of Animals* and *Posterior Analytics* as well as the ideas of Elizabeth S. Belfiore and Stephen Halliwell to clarify his theory. The chapter explains why human beings take pleasure in imitations and how *Game of Thrones*, as a mode of imitation, represents human action and life through its incidents and characters.

Chapter 2 first deals with the distinct medium, object and manner of tragic imitation and their employment in the plotlines of the Lannister twins. It then examines Aristotle's definition of tragedy and its six qualitative parts with a focus on plot and character. The chapter summarizes Cersei and Jaime's plotlines by emphasizing the crucial moments of their tragic downfall. It also mentions the character traits of the twins, based on their actions and speeches. This second chapter particularly refers to Angela Curran and M. P. Battin's works on Aristotle.

Chapter 3 entirely focuses on the plot, the soul and most significant part of a tragedy for Aristotle. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle states that poets must employ certain techniques in order to construct a well-organized and effective plot. This chapter explains those techniques and their use in the plotlines of Cersei and Jaime Lannister. It analyzes the twins' actions according to the law of probability or necessity, which makes the plot cohesive and plausible. The chapter also highlights Aristotle's preference of complex plots over simple ones and demonstrates why both Lannister

plotlines belong to the former type. According to Aristotle, complex plots are better able to achieve the main end of tragedy: the arousal of pity and fear in the audience and the catharsis of such emotions (“Poetics” 2320).

Due to this vital relationship between pity, fear and catharsis, Chapter 4 first refers to Aristotle’s account of these two emotions in *The “Art” of Rhetoric*. It then deals with the notion of catharsis and its use in the *Poetics*. Over the years, commentators have interpreted Aristotle’s treatment of catharsis in several ways, which can be grouped under three main headings. This chapter reviews those three interpretations offered by Jacob Bernays, Humphrey House and Leon Golden. Chapter 4 also explains why Jonathan Lear rejects these theories and proposes a more comprehensive one. Based on Lear’s analysis, the chapter examines the pitiable and fearful events in Cersei and Jaime Lannister’s plotlines and how understanding their causal, logical sequence can provide a cathartic experience for the audience.

Last but not least, Chapter 5 focuses on Aristotle’s conception of the tragic hero and its main characteristics. It argues why the Lannister twins can be considered as tragic heroes by demonstrating their background and traits as well as the rationale behind their worst acts. The arguments in this chapter support the view that both characters are not entirely vicious individuals. However, this does not change the fact that each is responsible for the suffering he or she experiences. As highlighted in the chapter, the twins experience a tragic downfall due to *hamartia*.<sup>7</sup> Like catharsis, *hamartia* is a term that has been disputed among scholars over years. Chapter 5 interrogates its significance and broad meaning by referring to T. C. W. Stinton and Nancy Sherman’s works. It reaches the conclusion that the twins’ acts of *hamartia* originate from their *hubris*.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the chapter lists characteristic manifestations of *hubris* Aristotle mentions in *The “Art” of Rhetoric* and *The Nicomachean Ethics*. It ends with the argument that both Cersei and Jaime Lannister are responsible for

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<sup>7</sup> The word *hamartia* covers a broad spectrum of meanings but essentially denotes “a character fault or a mistake that causes someone to fail or to be destroyed” (“Hamartia”). In a tragedy, *hamartia* is the causal link between fortune and ruin.

<sup>8</sup> *Hubris* basically means “exaggerated pride or self-confidence” (“Hubris”).

their own downfall due to their voluntary, hubristic acts. Here the chapter refers to John M. Cooper's analysis on Aristotle's theory of voluntary action.

Mainly, the key concepts in the *Poetics*, including mimesis, plot, catharsis and *hamartia*, are all interrelated and form a system of thought (Gresseth 312). They show that the tragic hero's change of fortune originates within himself. Because Aristotle attaches primary importance to human agency, this dissertation analyzes the tragedy of Cersei and Jaime Lannister through their main acts that constitute the downfall. The analysis highlights the unintended and catastrophic consequences of these acts as well as their organization into a comprehensible plot. It also argues why the causal structure of both plotlines can provide the audience cathartic pleasure, even the incidents portrayed are repulsive to witness in real life. Essentially, with a focus on the plot, this dissertation demonstrates how the Lannister twins prepare their own doom as in the case of an Aristotelian tragedy.

## CHAPTER 1

### TRAGEDY AS MIMESIS

In the first three chapters of the *Poetics*, Aristotle lists different kinds of poetry including tragedy, comedy, epic and dithyrambic. All are modes of imitation yet each differs from others in three respects: the medium, object and manner of imitation. Hence to understand Aristotle's theory of poetry and tragedy, one must primarily comprehend the significance he attaches to imitation.

Mainly, Aristotle argues that poetry comes into existence due to two causes. The first cause is the instinct of imitation implanted in man<sup>9</sup> since childhood. The second is the pleasure man feels in things imitated. Although Aristotle does not analyze the concept broadly in his *Poetics*, one can refer to his other works to gain a better understanding of imitation as the underlying cause of poetry.

As a genre of poetry, tragedy imitates human action and life in a fictional plot structure. This aim is fulfilled in *Game of Thrones*, which involves a number of characters whose stories are tragedies. Jaime and Cersei Lannister are two of these characters. Their tragic plotlines are imitative of human action and life, as they display possible kinds of reality and represent universal notions.

#### 1.1. THE TWO CAUSES OF POETRY

In the English translation of the *Poetics*, imitation corresponds to the Greek word *mimēsis*. Oxford English Dictionary defines "mimesis" as the "imitative representation of the real world in art and literature" ("Mimesis"). The term plays a crucial role in Western aesthetic thought as it is used to theorize the essence of artistic

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle uses the word ἄνθρωπος, translated as 'man' by Bywater, to indicate "anthropos", which means "man; human being" (including women) in Greek ("Anthropo-").

works and our response to them. This tight relationship was also very important for Aristotle, who saw mimesis as the underlying cause of poetry.

Aristotle examines the birth and development of poetry in Chapter 4 of the *Poetics*. He states that poetry comes into being due to two causes. The first one is the natural instinct of imitation implanted in man since childhood. Although other creatures are capable of mimicking behavior, man is the most imitative among all. Besides mimicking, all human beings share the universal instinct of making and appreciating imitations. We have this distinctive feature in virtue of being human. This instinct drives people to make imitative works of art and develop them over time. Imitative arts serve the end of man's nature, just like the state (*polis*) that comes into existence due to our natural instinct for political association.

Aristotle emphasizes that imitation is not only an aesthetic but also a cognitive concept. When man starts to imitate in childhood, he plays games of make believe and learns his earliest lessons through these imitations. Therefore, imitation requires the activity of the rational part of the soul and must be in accord with reason.

The second cause of the birth of poetry is the pleasure man feels in things imitated. Aristotle declares that mankind takes delight in viewing the realistic representation of an object; even its original may be painful to look at. For instance, he suggests that seeing a dead body is repulsive but seeing an imitation of it can be pleasurable ("Poetics" 2318). Why does man take pleasure in seeing such an imitation if its content is unpleasant? According to Aristotle, this pleasure is cognitive and comes from learning or inferring. When man sees and contemplates a likeness, he reasons out the similarities and differences between the imitation and its original. This is seeing the imitation as a representation, which is different from seeing it as an object with certain intrinsic properties (like color or execution). Viewing the imitation in a non-representational way also gives man pleasure, but in a different way. Now pleasure arises from the sensory qualities of the imitation and from workmanship. It involves appreciating the well-crafted form of the imitation and the artist's skill.

Enjoying an imitation in a representational way requires seeing the original beforehand. By doing so, man can contemplate the asymmetrical relationship between the imitation and its original and conclude, “that *this* is *that*”. This process of reasoning produces a certain kind of pleasure, which is not about the properties intrinsic to the object. It rather comes from learning and understanding the relationship between the object and its imitation (Belfiore 67). It is deeply related to our cognitive faculties, particularly to memory.

## 1.2. MIMESIS AND UNDERSTANDING

For Aristotle, learning is the liveliest pleasure shared by all human beings and is dependent on the function of the memory. In case of imitative arts, one must have an idea of what he is looking at to compare the imitation with its original. For example, to appreciate a painting as an imitation of a horse one must previously acquire the concept of the horse. This is not possible without memory, recordings of one’s past observations.

In *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle investigates how man acquires the knowledge of the natural world. First he makes a distinction between living creatures that can and cannot retain a trace of sense perception. The former is divided into two subcategories: those with and without a recurrent presence of that trace. A recurrent trace enables the accumulation of images of the same object in memory, which results in experience. In this mnemonic process, sense images create mental images that are copies or models of previously perceived objects (Tsitsiridis 440-441).

Memory allows man to maintain an object’s representation in his mind and compare it with the imitation he encounters. Not only the creator’s perspective but also the viewer’s intellect takes part in this process. By recognizing an imitation, the viewer gives an explanation of it as an object’s representation and infers their similarities and differences. This process of understanding is different than gaining belief about something. Aristotle, influenced by pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes

and his mentor Plato, sees knowledge as an explanation of why something is the case and not merely a correct belief (Curran 84).

As a mimetic work with distinctive intrinsic properties, tragedy signifies supposed realities and gives its audience the illusion of an action that does not really take place. An imitation of an event represents human action in correspondence: X (the incident fictively portrayed) is a mimesis of Y (human action in real life). In *Game of Thrones*, Cersei and Jaime Lannister's tragic plotlines succeed in imitating and representing human action. Although *Game of Thrones* is set in a fantastic realm of supernatural creatures and happenings, its characters and their actions nevertheless hold a mirror up to the world we live in. Like Cersei and Jaime Lannister, leaders of the modern world engage in deception and violence to protect their seats. Contemporary societies witness the threat of conflict and the destruction of peace, similar to the common folk of Westeros who are ruled by politicians greedy for power (Brooks). Hence Martin's characters can be familiar to us; even their stories take place in a quasi-medieval context.

Contrary to other popular works of fantasy<sup>10</sup>, *Game of Thrones* does not operate in a binary fashion. Main agents of the power struggle are neither purely evil dark lords nor obviously good heroes. Painted in "shades of grey", they are very human characters with very human flaws. The problems and choices they deal with are not so dissimilar to the ones we face in our daily lives (Garcia and Antonsson 13-14). For example, Cersei constantly struggles against the gender norms imposed on her, a problem relevant to women in today's world.

Besides reflecting contemporary times, *Game of Thrones* also draws inspiration from history. As Jessica Walker points out, there is a correspondence between Martin's universe and certain historical periods. The Seven Kingdoms run parallel to the early medieval Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy and Cersei Lannister shows

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<sup>10</sup> The battle between good and evil is central to the narrative of fantasy literature and its screen adaptations. For instance, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Rowling's *Harry Potter* series have a hero (Frodo Baggins and Harry Potter) who is up against a dark opponent (Sauron and Voldemort). Both Baggins and Potter conquer evil in the process and become a savior (Haastrup 133).

hints of Eleanor of Aquitaine (Walker 71). There is a portrayal of medieval chivalry, centered on characters such as Jaime Lannister and Brienne of Tarth (Hackney 132). The ambitions of the nobles and the suffering of their serfs are also based on medieval times and its paralyzing social conventions (Serwer).

Whether it represents present-day or what we learn from history, the world of *Game of Thrones* is not so radically discontinuous from ours. The series confront its audience in a cognitive way by blending realism and fantasy. According to Johnston and Battis, it is this commitment to realism that likely makes the series attractive to viewers (3). In other words, the audience is likely to enjoy *Game of Thrones* as an imitation because they can infer and understand its relation to the real world.

According to Aristotle, a mimetic work is more intelligible and pleasurable if it has a well-organized plot structure. Hence the events that imitate human action and represent possible kinds of reality must be organized into a coherent and comprehensible whole. They must be displayed convincingly and recurrently in a causal sequence.

Aristotle associates the making of a tragic imitation with the natural process of biological organisms. Parts of a tragedy and a biological structure are organized in such a way that none can be added or removed without changing the whole. Tragic imitation is analogous to a living thing because both exist systematically for the sake of an end. The final cause of a biological organism is the activity of the soul. In *Parts of Animals*, Aristotle says that “When its Soul is gone, it is no longer a living creature, and none of its parts remains the same, except only in shape, just like the animals in the story that were turned into stone” (69). A dead person might have the same shape of a living one yet he is not a human being anymore because he is unable to perform his function. The peculiar pleasure of tragedy corresponds to the soul of a living thing. Just like an organism, a tragedy must have an intelligible structure (plot) so that it can perform its main function, which is the arousal of the proper pleasure in its audience. In other words, understanding the plot allows the audience to grasp and enjoy the organizational sequence of events that develop into a coherent whole. Thus,

for Aristotle, deriving pleasure from an imitation is not merely dependent on the perceptible beauty of sights and sounds. It rather fundamentally relies on a comprehensible plot structure.

Special visual and sound effects play an indispensable role in the portrayal of the fantastic realm *Game of Thrones* takes place. Yet, based on an Aristotelian approach, the audience can chiefly derive pleasure from understanding the intelligible organization of events and the features of reality intentionally signified in them. The tragic plotlines of the Lannister twins display why each experiences a change of fortune because of his or her own actions. The discovery of their incestuous relationship by Bran Stark and Jaime's reaction set the story in motion. What happens afterwards depict how both Jaime and Cersei Lannister prepare their own downfall in a causal sequence of events, which represent possible kinds of reality. As the audience we witness their greed for power, the destruction of peace and what it costs them, the suffering and death of their loved ones. The peculiar pleasure of tragedy comes from seeing how these characters contribute to their own misfortune by taking actions that imitate the past and present of the world we live in.

Mainly, the audience is likely to derive pleasure from watching *Game of Thrones* because it addresses their cognitive faculties as a mimesis of human action and life. The delight in understanding essentially comes from its well-organized plot structure but also from its characters embodying universal traits. These traits help us gather the meaning behind the character's actions and thus make the imitation more intelligible and pleasurable. For instance, Jaime Lannister's boldness, bravery, arrogance and temper explain why he makes certain choices that result in his own downfall. The same goes for Cersei Lannister's ambition, pride and greed. Both characters display the universal trait of rashness, which make the unintended consequences of their actions plausible.

### 1.3. THE IDEALIZING CAPACITY OF MIMESIS

Although the Lannister twins undergo a terrible ordeal, the audience can still derive pleasure from watching their downfall. This is due to the idealizing capacity of mimesis, which establishes a gap between the object and its imitation. Aristotle, unlike Plato, rejects the possibility of treating mimesis as the unconditioned reality. His defense of mimesis in the *Poetics* can be read as a response to Plato's attack on tragedy in the *Republic*, where Socrates dismisses it from the ideal city he is constructing. According to Plato, mimesis has a dangerous and deceptive nature because it can be mistaken for the reality it represents. He thought that seeing an imitation is tantamount to experiencing what is imitated. Therefore, mimetic works are able to mold the audience according to their stimulated representations of the world.

On the other hand, Aristotle acknowledges the dual aspect of mimetic representation. For him, tragedy conveys supposed realities yet it does not aim to give affirmative and determinate declarations about the world. Contrary to natural sciences and medicine, tragedy is exempted from satisfying the truth within specific domains of knowledge. Historical events can provide material for tragedy yet they are outside poetry's main area of interest as well. Unlike history and science, poetry is not a discipline of inquiry (Halliwell 500).

The dualism of mimesis is essential for tragedy as it enables the audience to distinguish the pain they have in seeing and the pleasure they take in contemplating. For example, a murder is painful to see when we perceive it with our senses. However, when we consider it as part of an organized plot structure we derive pleasure from learning why the murder occurs. Tragedy, which imitates experiences people would not wish to have and actions they should not take, is pleasurable because it presents all these in an intelligible fictional structure designed by the playwright.

To sum up, Aristotle argues that poetry has emerged and evolved over time due to man's instinct to imitate and the pleasure humans take in understanding imitations. He states that tragedy, as a genre of poetry, essentially imitates human action and life. According to him, the audience of a tragedy derives a cognitive pleasure from comprehending the relationship between the tragic imitation and its original. Based on Aristotle's theory, the audience of *Game of Thrones* is likely to understand and enjoy the imitation of the real world in the series, which overlaps both with the present-day and medieval times. Moreover, the audience can relate to the morally grey characters that represent the complexity of human nature, including Cersei and Jaime Lannister who are neither flawless nor purely evil. The downfall of these two characters demonstrates what Aristotle values most in a tragedy: a well-organized plot structure that makes the imitation more intelligible and thus more pleasurable. The next chapter examines Aristotle's definition of tragedy and its six main elements, with a focus on the plot and in relation to Cersei and Jaime Lannister's downfall.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **ARISTOTLE'S DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY**

Aristotle gives his definition of tragedy in Chapter 6 of the *Poetics*. The definition is built upon the first three chapters of this work, in which Aristotle classifies different modes of imitation according to their medium, object and manner. In other words, Chapters 1-3 provide material for Aristotle's definition of tragedy in Chapter 6.

#### **2.1. THE MEDIUM, OBJECT AND MANNER OF IMITATION**

Aristotle starts *Poetics* by stating his purpose in writing this work. His goal is to treat poetry in general and analyze the essential qualities of its species. He also inquires how a good plot structure is constructed and the number and nature of the constituent parts of a poem. After specifying his aim, Aristotle lists different kinds of poetry including epic, tragedy, comedy and dithyrambic and underlines their common feature: being a mode of imitation. Yet each differs from others in three respects. The medium, object and manner of imitation are distinct in each case.

*Poetics* Chapter 1 is concerned with the medium or means imitative arts operate through. The medium of a mimetic artwork is used to create and deliver representational content to the audience. Different art forms use specific means to achieve mimesis. While painters use colors and drawings to reproduce the sensory appearances of an object, actors use their voices and gestures to convey a believable experience of human action.

In case of poetry, the means of imitation are “rhythm, language and harmony – used, however, either singly or in certain combinations” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 2316). Basically, these means are used to imitate human action and represent the emotional states of characters. Both tragedy and comedy use rhythm, language and harmony successively contrary to dithyrambic and nomic poetry, which employ them

simultaneously. Tragedy, as a mixture of spoken verse and song, uses language alone when the characters speak in dialogue and rhythm alone when the chorus chants. It adopts all three means when the chorus or characters sing.

In *Game of Thrones* language, rhythm and harmony are all used. With regard to language, both existing and invented ones play a part in demonstrating the cultural and geographical differences in the series. Unlike the people of Westeros, those in Essos<sup>11</sup> use invented languages such as Dothraki and High Valyrian. The nomadic and horse-mounted Dothraki warriors, who inhabit the vast plains of Essos, speak Dothraki. The priests in Essos use High Valyrian to communicate with each other and the highborn children from Westeros learn it as a sign of nobility. Both Dothraki and High Valyrian are limitedly created by Martin for the novels and further developed by David J. Peterson for the TV series. On the other hand, English is used to convey the main language of Westeros, which is the Common Tongue. The Westerosi characters have diverse accents according to their social status or the region they live in. Northerner characters sound different than southerners (Peterson 21) and the lowborn and highborn pronounce words in distinct ways. Thus the noble Lannisters speak differently than the commoners. In Season 2 Episode 7, Tywin Lannister points out this difference with an example: the lowborn say “m’lord” but the highborn say “my lord”.

Besides linguistic diversity, mottos of royal houses play a significant role in the series. Each noble family has its own motto that is indicative of their actions and character. For example, the official Lannister motto “Hear Me Roar” projects the family’s power, strength and ferocity. Lannisters also have an unofficial saying: “A Lannister always pays his debts”. On the literal level, the saying reminds us the family’s immense wealth. However, it has another meaning that is crucial in understanding Lannisters. It indicates that a Lannister always seeks revenge if he or

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<sup>11</sup> Located to the east of Westeros, Essos is another continent in the fantasy world Martin has created.

she is wronged. This unofficial motto shows the true nature of Lannisters and their desire for vengeance.

Names of places are also significant in *Game of Thrones*. Winterfell, the castle and home of House Stark, depicts the snowy and remote atmosphere in the north of the realm. King's Landing, site of the Iron Throne and capital of the Seven Kingdoms, signifies the fierce battles for power. When Ned Stark sets off to King's Landing to act as King Robert's advisor, he leaves his remote home behind and enters into a world of chaos, manipulation and greed. The place names set the scene and also indicate the difference between the cautious Starks and power-driven Lannisters (Pulford).

Combining rhythm and harmony, the music of *Game of Thrones* contributes to the plot with themes for individual storylines and specific families. For instance, Lannister's song *The Rains of Castamere* indicates the dangers of crossing this vengeful family. It tells the destruction of House Rayne, which rebelled against House Lannister. The song is a constant reminder of the threat Lannisters pose to their enemies.

The second way to distinguish different types of poetry is based on their object of imitation. Common to all forms of poetry, the objects of imitation are men in action. By action (*praxis*), Aristotle means behavior deliberately taken in order to achieve an end (*telos*). In Chapter 6 of the *Poetics*, he emphasizes that a person's actions determine whether he ends up in success or failure.

The object of imitation is the essential distinguishing feature between tragedy and comedy. Tragedy imitates men as better than in real life and comedy as worse. The higher type of men represented in tragedy have a high social standing and enjoy great renown and prosperity, such as Oedipus the King. On the other hand, comedy typically features socially inferior individuals who do not belong to an aristocratic class. The characters of a comedy are ridiculously ugly, yet their deformity does not indicate pain or harm to others. Mainly, Aristotle is saying that the graver poets

imitate serious actions of noble personages and trivial ones represent people of a baser sort.

As the main agents of their family's tragedy, Cersei and Jaime Lannister embody the seriousness, nobility and prosperity Aristotle looks for in the objects of tragic imitation. In addition to being one of the most noble and powerful houses in Westeros, the Lannisters are the wealthiest family in the realm. Their seat Casterly Rock sits atop the most productive gold mine in the western region of the Seven Kingdoms. The Lannister sigil, a gold lion on a crimson field, projects royalty and prosperity. As the color of the crown and money, gold is eye-catching and indicates rule and sophistication. Like gold, crimson also signifies high social status. Greeks and Romans used crimson for military robes and in the Elizabethan Era of Britain only the royal and wealthy were allowed to wear this color (ScreenPrism).

In the beginning of the series, Cersei Lannister is married to King Robert Baratheon and her children are declined to be kings. Her marriage brought the Lannister family to King's Landing and allowed them to have power over the Iron Throne. Meanwhile, Jaime Lannister is a member of the Kingsguard, an elite and sacred order of seven heroic knights sworn to protect the King. The Kingsguard involves the greatest and most skilled warriors in Westeros who take no wives and accept no lands. Jaime Lannister was knighted at the age of fifteen and joined the Kingsguard a year later, which makes him the youngest knight to join the order. Therefore, with their noble background, wealth and prestigious social positions, both characters adopt the qualities Aristotle defines for the object of tragic imitation.

The manner of imitation is the third feature that distinguishes types of poetry. It sets tragedy and epic apart, which share the same medium and object of imitation. While tragedy uses the dramatic mode, epic is associated with the narrative mode. In case of epic, the poet can narrate the story with or without creating a fictional character. He can himself be the narrator or use a character, as Homer does in the *Iliad* through the character of Muse. Oppositely, in the dramatic mode characters acted out on stage imitate human action without the aid of a narrator.

According to Aristotle, dramatic mode is superior to narrative because it has a more direct relationship with action and can make the audience witness events before their eyes in a better way. In *Poetics* Chapter 24, he praises Homer for being the only poet rightly appreciating the part he should take. Homer speaks very little in his own voice and quickly brings characters into the story after a few prefatory words. This is one of the factors that make him better than other poets who perform themselves over the poem and imitate rarely and little. Aristotle says that Homer is peculiar because “Just as he was in the serious style the poet of poets, standing alone not only through the excellence, but also through the dramatic character of his imitations” (“Poetics” 2318).

Aristotle does not see artistic imitation as the expression of innermost thoughts and feelings of the poet. He rather thinks that the poet creates a story, an approach closer to our understanding of literary and cinematic fictions today. According to Aristotle, the poet enables the audience to enter into a fictional world. This is exactly what *Game of Thrones* does. The series display events in Martin’s novels on screen by using the dramatic mode. It presents fictional events by “showing” rather than “telling” and accomplishes the sense that an action is happening before the audience’s eyes. Portrayed on screen, storylines in the books are dramatized through the actions and words of characters. In particular, Cersei and Jaime Lannister’s tragic plotlines are dramatic representations of noble and prosperous characters fighting for power and experiencing a downfall. As dramatic characters, Cersei and Jaime Lannister speak for themselves and create a vivid mental picture of action in the minds of the audience.

## **2.2. TRAGEDY DEFINED**

Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in *Poetics* Chapter 6 grows out of the concepts he mentions in the first three chapters of the work, namely the medium, object and manner of imitation. His famous definition is as follows: “A tragedy, then,

is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 2320).

Certain parts of this definition correspond to Aristotle’s analyses in Chapters 1-3. When he says “in language with pleasurable accessories”, he is referring to the means of imitation that are rhythm, language and harmony. These are “brought in separately in the parts of the work”, in other words they are used successively. The differentia of object is found in the “action that is serious” undertaken by noble and heroic men. Lastly, Aristotle’s emphasis on dramatic form indicates that tragedy must be in the mode of action.

Aristotle systematically constructs his definition out of the phrases he previously employs. First, he determines imitation as the highest remote genus. Then he lists all the differentiae to identify tragedy as a specific type of imitation with certain qualities. These are using language, rhythm and harmony successively to imitate actions of noble and heroic men in dramatic mode. This method is not peculiarly Aristotelian. It was actually adopted by Plato and the Academy (Battin 295).

Besides modifying the highest genus with the use of differentiae, Aristotle adds three phrases that are not drawn from his previous distinctions. The first one regards the completeness of tragedy, which must present a non-arbitrary beginning, middle and end. According to Aristotle, a well-organized tragedy should not begin or end haphazard. The plot must be a selection of incidents a character lives through and these must intelligibly and coherently hang together as a single, unified action. Each part of the plot must make a vital contribution to the whole and none should be removed. Otherwise the complete whole will be disturbed.

Aristotle secondly adds the magnitude of the plot, which corresponds to its size. The plot must neither be too short nor too long because the audience must easily

embrace the story in one view. The scale of a tragedy must allow coherent observation by not exceeding the audience's range of perception and memory. While doing so, it should provide sufficient time for the development and resolution of action. Hence magnitude is deeply interwoven with completeness.

According to Aristotle, both order and magnitude give the plot its beauty. In Chapter 7 of the *Poetics*, he compares the plot to a living organism. Successive phases of a plot are analogous to an animal's head, trunk and tail. None of them is unnecessary. Together they provide cooperation, function and completeness. Like the parts of an animal's body, a plot must exhibit causal connections (Gallop 81). In addition to an orderly structure, a certain magnitude is necessary both for the plot and living organism. Each will be imperceptible if it is too small. On the other hand, if each is too vast then the eye cannot take it all at once and the whole will be lost for the spectator. Aristotle argues that an orderly completeness and the right magnitude give beauty to an imitation even if it has an unsightly appearance.

Thirdly, Aristotle adds that tragedy contains incidents arousing pity and fear and also aims to achieve the catharsis of those emotions. Catharsis is among the most debated terms of the *Poetics*. Commentators analyzing the concept are mainly divided into three groups: those who say it is the purgation, purification or clarification of emotions. These different approaches are analyzed in detail in Chapter 4. Now it is sufficient to say that evoking pity and fear is the indisputable goal of tragedy.

In *Game of Thrones*, the tragedy of the Lannister twins has a clear beginning, middle and end. It starts in Season 1 Episode 1 when Bran Stark discovers their incestuous relationship and ends in Season 6 Episode 10 when their last living child Tommen commits suicide. Between these two incidents, Seasons 1-6 compose the middle of the downfall. Thus the series give sufficient time (sixty episodes, ten per season) for the development and resolution of action. Moreover, the plot allows coherent observation by linking incidents of the downfall in a causal manner. Its successive phases show how each event functions in the change of fortune. In other words, the plot has the chief role in Cersei and Jaime Lannister's tragedy.

## **2.3. SIX PARTS OF A TRAGEDY**

After giving its formal definition, Aristotle lists six qualitative parts of a tragedy: plot, character, thought, diction, melody and spectacle. These are also based on the classifications in Chapters 1-3 of the *Poetics*. Diction and melody constitute the means of imitation, spectacle belongs to the manner of imitation, and plot, character and thought correspond to the object of imitation. The quantitative parts of a tragedy include prologue, epilogue, choral songs and acts or episodes. Both qualitative and quantitative parts contribute to the arousal of pity and fear and the catharsis of such emotions.

### **2.3.1. Plot**

Plot (*muthos*), the arrangement of incidents, is the most essential of these six elements because tragedy fundamentally imitates human action and life. For Aristotle, plot is the first principle and soul of tragedy. The soul of an animal brings life to its body, determines its physical makeup and directs its life functions such as growth. Similarly, the plot shapes tragedy from beginning to end and determines everything happening in it. Hence the poet cannot portray a random set of events on stage. Incidents representing human action must be given to the audience in an orderly structure (Gallop 81).

The tragedy of Cersei and Jaime Lannister begins when Bran Stark discovers their secret at the end of the first episode. This episode starts with the death of Jon Arryn who was the top advisor of the king. Cersei and Jaime Lannister are seen for the first time in his funeral. Cersei looks worried as Arryn learned about the incest before his death and could have told it anyone. Contrarily, Jaime is much less distressed. Afterwards, the twins travel to Winterfell in the north with Cersei's husband King Robert Baratheon, their dwarf brother Tyrion and three illegitimate

children Joffrey, Myrcella and Tommen. Robert asks his old friend Ned Stark, Lord of Winterfell, to become his new advisor.

Cersei and Jaime's visit to Winterfell changes everything. The twins have intercourse at the top of a tower but Bran Stark, an avid climber, catches them in the middle of the act. Jaime pushes Bran out of the tower window in order to protect his family and keep the relationship secret. This act sets the story in motion. Bran unexpectedly survives but the fall cripples him and leaves him in coma. Meanwhile, Bran's mother Catelyn Stark receives a letter from her sister Lysa, Jon Arryn's wife, indicating her husband is murdered by the Lannisters. Lysa's letter, alongside Bran's suspicious paralyzing injury, puts the spotlight on the Lannister siblings.

Ned Stark immediately starts to investigate Jon Arryn's death after arriving at King's Landing. In the meantime, his wife Catelyn arrests Tyrion Lannister for an assassination attempt on Bran. This causes a war between the Starks and Lannisters. As tension rises between these two powerful families, Ned Stark learns of the incest and confronts Cersei over her illegitimate children. He warns her to flee into exile before telling King Robert the truth. However, Cersei makes her plans accordingly and arranges Robert's death, which appears as a hunting accident. Consequently, Robert's eldest son Joffrey takes the throne and orders Ned's beheading much to everyone's surprise. Yet before his execution, Ned writes the truth to Robert's older brother and true heir Stannis Baratheon. This revelation urges people in Westeros to question the legitimacy of Joffrey's reign and more importantly starts a huge war that will eventually bring catastrophe to the Lannister family.

In Season 2, Robert's brothers Stannis and Renly battle for the throne while Ned's eldest son Robb fights for his independence from the Seven Kingdoms. Jaime, who was captured by Robb in Season 1, is a prisoner during this season. In his absence, Cersei commits incest with their cousin Lancel, an act that will have further consequences for her in Season 5. Meanwhile, King Joffrey becomes more and more uncontrollable even by his own mother. He constantly goes against his uncle Tyrion who is appointed as his main advisor by Tywin Lannister. Tyrion develops strategies

against their enemies and forges a marriage alliance between Myrcella and Trystane Martell.<sup>12</sup> This alliance strengthens House Lannister's political position yet makes Cersei furious as her beloved daughter is sent far away to Dorne.<sup>13</sup>

Jaime kills his cousin Alton in an attempt to escape from his prison cell but is recaptured. However, without Robb's knowledge, Catelyn Stark releases and sends Jaime to King's Landing with her sworn sword Brienne of Tarth. She wants to exchange him for her daughters in the capital. In Season 2 Episode 9, Stannis's army attacks King's Landing and the city almost falls. However, just when all hope is lost for Cersei, Tywin Lannister unexpectedly enters the room saying they have won the battle. At the end of Season 2, it may seem like the Lannisters are on the winning side. Yet these incidents in the first two seasons lie at the core of Cersei and Jaime Lannister's downfall, as the war will bring devastating consequences for the twins in the following seasons.

In Season 3, House Lannister makes a new alliance with House Tyrell to win the still ongoing war. Joffrey is betrothed to marry Margaery Tyrell much to his mother's dislike. Cersei and Margaery try different methods to control Joffrey. In the meantime, Jaime continues his journey to King's Landing with Brienne but both are captured by the Boltons. When Bolton men led by Locke attempt to rape Brienne, Jaime saves her by using his wits. However, he arrogantly crosses the line and tries to secure his own release. As a result, an offended Locke suddenly cuts off Jaime's sword hand. This is one of the major incidents that constitute the downfall and a significant turning point in Jaime's life as his self-identity depends on his skills with a sword. Still, when Jaime meets Roose Bolton he manages to secure a deal with him. Boltons betray House Stark, kill Robb and Catelyn and become the new Great House of the north. Jaime safely returns to King's Landing with Brienne and reunites with Cersei after a long time.

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<sup>12</sup> Trystane Martell is the heir to House Martell, one of the main seven noble houses in Westeros.

<sup>13</sup> Dorne is the southernmost part of Westeros and is ruled by House Martell.

Tragedy strikes both twins in Season 4 Episode 2. They lose their first child when Joffrey dies at his own wedding after drinking poisoned wine. Joffrey's death paves the way for a series of terrible events. The boy points an accusing finger at Tyrion in his final moments and the twins diverge over whether their brother is guilty or not. While a furious Cersei wants to see Tyrion dead, Jaime thinks otherwise so he asks Tywin to spare his brother's life. However, Tyrion demands a trial by combat<sup>14</sup> when he faces injustice in the court. Determined to destroy Tyrion, Cersei chooses the extremely violent knight Ser Gregor Clegane as her champion. In consequence, Oberyn Martell decides to fight for Tyrion to avenge his sister whom Clegane raped and murdered. Tyrion is found guilty and sentenced to death when Clegane kills Oberyn very brutally by crushing his skull. Although it seems like Cersei has achieved her aim, events take an unexpected turn when Jaime frees Tyrion from the dungeon. Before escaping to Essos, Tyrion shoots and kills Tywin who hated his son for all his life. Hence in Season 4 there are two major incidents that constitute the downfall: the deaths of Joffrey and Tywin. Both losses are unanticipated for the twins but their causal antecedents, which are analyzed in detail in the following chapter, can be seen.

After losing their son and father in Season 4, Cersei and Jaime receive a threat against their daughter Myrcella in Season 5. Myrcella is not safe anymore in Dorne as Ellaria Sand seeks revenge for her lover Oberyn Martell's death. While Jaime leaves the capital to bring Myrcella home, Cersei forms a new alliance with the High Sparrow, the leader of a religious sect called the Sparrows. She allows him to reinstate the Faith Militant, a religious army, to weaken the power of the Tyrells over his son Tommen who is now the king. The Faith Militant arrest Margaery's brother Loras Tyrell for homosexuality and Margaery for giving a false testimony. However, Cersei's plan backfires when her cousin Lancel, now a member of the Faith Militant,

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<sup>14</sup> A trial by combat is also known as an "ordeal by combat", in which "the victor is said to win not by his own strength but because supernatural powers have intervened on the side of the right" ("Ordeal"). This historical, real-life practice is used in *Game of Thrones* to determine the guilt or innocence of a person. Both the accuser and the accused choose a champion to fight for them.

confesses committing adultery with her. Cersei is thrown into prison and treated ruthlessly.

Two pivotal incidents occur in the final episode of Season 5. Cersei confesses her adultery with Lancel and is released from prison on one condition. Publicly shamed and insulted, she undergoes a naked walk of atonement through the streets of King's Landing. In the meantime, Myrcella and Jaime depart for the capital. While saying goodbye Myrcella unknowingly kisses Ellaria on her lips, which are coated with poison. On the board, she reveals her knowledge of Jaime's parentage and says she is glad have him as her father. The two embrace but the poison takes its effect and Myrcella tragically dies in her father's arms. At the end of Season 5, Cersei and Jaime once again experience the agony of losing a child despite all their efforts to protect their family. Furthermore, a traumatized Cersei has to undergo a trial for her crimes in the next season. Therefore, the twins still have a way to go before their downfall ends.

In Season 6, a mourning Cersei and Jaime make schemes against the High Sparrow. Cersei chooses a trial by combat over a court trial and appoints Ser Gregor Clegane as her champion. Yet the cunning High Sparrow manipulates Tommen and makes him forbid the ancient practice in the Seven Kingdoms. Having no intention of standing trial in front of religious judges, Cersei blows up the courtroom full of people waiting for her to arrive, including the High Sparrow and the Tyrells. Consequently, a shocked Tommen takes off his crown and commits suicide by jumping out of the window.

The tragedy of Cersei and Jaime Lannister ends with the death of their youngest child. With Tommen's suicide, Cersei becomes the queen of Westeros and gains the immense political power she has desired for a long time. The twins manage to destroy their enemies and survive the war and but they also lose their dear family in the process. Moreover, Jaime loses his sword hand that makes him a soldier and Cersei suffers public humiliation. All these incidents of the tragic plot follow each other as cause and effect. Unexpected twists occur from time to time but they are

always reasonably explainable. These acts that constitute the downfall also shed light on the character traits of the Lannister twins.

### **2.3.2. Character**

Aristotle states that character (*ethos*) is about certain qualities ascribed to tragic agents by the poet. It reveals moral purpose by showing what the agent chooses or avoids. Hence a speech is not expressive of character if it does not indicate choice or avoidance. Although character determines an agent's qualities, it is his actions (plot) that determine his fate and whether he ends up happy or miserable. This explains why Aristotle regards plot as primary and character as secondary. As the dramatic imitation of human action and life, plot is the end which tragedy aims at. In other words, the primary goal of tragedy is not the depiction of character.

According to Aristotle, there may be a tragedy without character but not without action. Thus the plot is indispensable to tragedy. His view on the characterless tragedy has been much debated among critics. Some commentators such as John Jones and Stephen Halliwell say that tragedy certainly does contain character, which is revealed through action. They refer to Aristotle's ethics where character and action are correlated (for instance, virtuous acts build a virtuous character). This group advocates that a characterless tragedy is not possible as character is displayed through consistent patterns of action. Another group of interpreters including Catherine Lord and Elizabeth S. Belfiore take Aristotle literally. They defend that a characterless tragedy does not make an agent's dispositions and ethical qualities explicit. In other words, the agent's moral choices are not clearly understood from his actions and speeches in the play. For example, a king may do good things for his citizens. Yet the tragedy will be characterless if his motives are not clear. Does the king do good to really help the citizens or to appear as a just leader? This question is not explicitly answered in a characterless tragedy (Curran 130-131).

In *Game of Thrones*, Cersei and Jaime Lannister's characters are clearly explicit from their actions and speeches. Cersei embodies narcissism<sup>15</sup>; she only loves herself, her twin Jaime and three children who are all extensions of self. In Season 2 Episode 7, she tells Ned Stark's daughter Sansa Stark:

“The more people you love, the weaker you are...Love no one but your children. On that front a mother has no choice.”

According to Tyrion, Cersei's love for her children is her only redeeming quality. Yet her false mental constructions of Joffrey, Myrcella and Tommen can turn this quality into a negative. For instance, she spoils Joffrey and turns a blind eye to his sadistic nature until a certain time. Additionally, she incorrectly thinks Myrcella is suffering in Dorne away from her family. However, Myrcella becomes perfectly happy once she is not under her mother's control.

As a narcissist, Cersei has no regard for anything but her own self-interest. She does not try to make herself a better person or improve the world she lives in. She only concerns about the survival of herself and her few loved ones. Her words to Ned Stark in Season 1 Episode 7 became the series' motto:

“When you play the Game of Thrones, you win or you die. There is no middle ground.”

Cersei strives to protect herself and her family but she rarely considers the unintended consequences her actions might have. She is not as intelligent as she thinks. After Ned Stark discovers her incestuous relationship, Cersei plans to exile him and is partially successful when Ned falsely confesses treason under coercion. However, she does not foresee Joffrey ordering Ned's execution and starting a war.

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<sup>15</sup> A narcissist exaggerates his self-importance, disregards the feelings of others and shows arrogant behavior and attitude (Psychology Today).

Cersei's another big mistake is forming an alliance with the High Sparrow in order to undermine the Tyrells. Her scheme backfires when she too is imprisoned and forced to perform a humiliating walk of atonement. Falsely thinking the High Sparrow is only loyal to her, Cersei's ego prevents her from seeing the danger he possesses.

As an ambitious and greedy person, Cersei believes herself to be politically astute yet she is excluded from power, particularly because of her father Lord Tywin. Tywin Lannister thinks that Cersei is too rash, impatient and shortsighted. According to him, Cersei must cement a marriage alliance and raise children rather than engaging in politics. On the other hand, Cersei thinks herself as the female version of her father and detests the restraints put on her because of her gender. She is jealous of men and their control over the society. In Season 2 Episode 9, when women hide in a fortress during the war, she says:

“I should have been born a man. I would rather face a thousand swords than be shut up inside with this flock of frightened hens.”

Cersei is cruel to her enemies, especially to her dwarf brother Tyrion whom she blames for their mother's death. She is ready to destroy anyone who gets in her way. In Season 2 Episode 2, she tells Tyrion:

“You want to rule? This is what ruling is; lying on a bed of weeds, ripping them out by the root, one by one, before they strangle you in your sleep...You've never taken it seriously, you haven't, Jaime hasn't! It's all fallen on me.”

Unlike Cersei, Jaime has little interest in politics and court intrigue. He primarily sees himself as a soldier and enjoys proving his superiority on the battlefield. When Jaime is introduced to the audience in Season 1, he is utterly disdainful and cynical. He is arrogant about his own abilities but not without reason.

Jaime is known as one of the deadliest warriors in the Seven Kingdoms, a bold and courageous knight inspiring loyalty in his men. Due to his superiority complex, Jaime takes pleasure in mocking other people who he perceives as incompetent. His arrogance is clearly seen in Season 1 Episode 10, when he has a conversation with Catelyn Stark after her husband's execution:

Catelyn: That's what you want the world to believe, that you don't fear death.

Jaime: I don't, my lady. The dark is coming for all of us. Why cry about it?

Catelyn: Because you are going to the deepest of seven hells, if the gods are just.

Jaime: What gods are those? The trees your husband prayed to? Where were the trees when his head was getting chopped off? If your gods are real, and if they are just, why is the world so full of injustice?

Catelyn: Because of men like you.

Jaime: There are no men like me. Only me.

In Season 3 Episode 3, Locke points out Jaime's arrogance before cutting his hand off:

Locke: You think you are the smartest man there is. That everyone alive has to bow and scrape and lick your boots.

Jaime: My father...

Locke: And if you get in any trouble, all you got to say is "my father" and that's it, all your troubles are gone.

Jaime: Don't.

Locke: Have you got something to say? Careful. You don't want to say the wrong thing. You're nothing without your daddy and your daddy ain't here. Never forget that. Here, this should help you remember.

*[Locke cuts Jaime's hand off and Jaime screams in agony]*

The loss of his sword hand is one of the major turning points in Jaime's life. Another is his decision to kill Aerys Targaryen, the Mad King he swore to protect. After this incident, Jaime earned the nickname Kingslayer and became known as a dishonorable man. The truth behind the death of King Aerys is revealed when Jaime shares his personal story with Brienne in Season 3 Episode 5.

As a teenager, Jaime was in the service of Aerys Targaryen; the Mad King with an obsession of burning people who displease him. When Robert Baratheon revolted against King Aerys, forces led by Tywin Lannister sacked King's Landing. The Mad King realized he was losing the war so he ordered Jaime to kill his own father and the pyromancer to burn the city down. In order to save the people in the city and his father, Jaime killed the pyromancer and the Mad King. As he slit the Mad King's throat and stabbed him in the back, Ned Stark entered the throne room and drew the conclusion that Jaime dishonorably betrayed the king he swore to protect.

Jaime's relationship with Brienne signifies the duality of his nature, the dichotomy between his good and evil sides. At the beginning of their journey, Jaime is as arrogant and cynical as ever. For the audience, Brienne is his true opposite. She is an honorable knight fighting for the good of all. Yet they become equals when Locke captures them. They start to fight against the same side and keep each other alive. Jaime's goodness manifests itself when he lies to Locke about Brienne's fortune to save her from rape. This establishes a bond of respect and trust between him and Brienne. When he tells her the real story behind Aerys Targaryen's death, this is probably the first time he has spoken about it to someone else. The story reveals Jaime's traumatic past and his self-sacrifice for the good of thousands of people (Taylor 66-67).

Jaime is twisted yet not wholly ignoble. Like Cersei, he is rash and worries about the consequences of his actions after committing the act. He can be cruel and violent, but not without a cause. When he pushes Bran Stark out of the window, he acts for a greater good: the protection of his family. This is another major turning

point in Jaime's life alongside the killing of King Aerys and the loss of his sword hand.

### 2.3.3. Thought, Diction, Melody and Spectacle

There are four other qualitative parts of tragedy Aristotle mentions: thought, diction, melody and spectacle. Thought (*dianoia*) is mainly about proving or disproving some particular point. It refers to the rational thoughts of dramatic personalities such as the arguments they make or views they hold. Together, character and thought reveal what the agent hopes to accomplish and deliberations that motivate his actions (Curran 126).

By diction (*lexis*), Aristotle means the expression of the thoughts of characters in words, excluding lyrics in songs. While diction involves all spoken verses in dialogue (such as a prayer, threat or question), melody (*melos*) pertains to songs and music. For Aristotle, melody has the chief place among the embellishments of tragedy. It should be emphasized that melody must only enrich the plot and not compete with it.

Although it has an emotional effect on the audience, spectacle (*opsis*) is the least artistic part of the tragedy. According to Aristotle, it is connected least with the art of poetry because tragedy's power is felt even if it is not acted out on stage. In other words, one can feel the tragic emotions of pity and fear by just hearing the plot. The production of spectacular effects depends not on the poet but on the costumier, or in nowadays the stage director.

Like melody, spectacle must not overshadow the plot. In *Game of Thrones*, visual and special effects play a significant role in the portrayal of a fantastic realm involving dragons and supernatural creatures. Yet what actually stands out is the organization of the plot, which involves several storylines that add up to and connect with each other. With their twists and turns, the plotlines of Cersei and Jaime Lannister display incidents in a causal sequence while imitating human nature. The

incidents intelligibly and coherently hang together as a whole, and this is the quality Aristotle values most in a tragedy.

Mainly, Cersei and Jaime Lannister's plotlines correspond to Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*. They imitate the actions of noble personages in a dramatic mode with the use of language and occasionally music. The tragedy of the twins is complete as it has a clear beginning, middle and end. The plot demonstrates Cersei and Jaime's character traits and more importantly, allows the audience to understand the downfall as a single action with causal connections. Spanning over six seasons, the downfall involves six main incidents: Jaime's loss of his hand, the murders of Joffrey, Tywin and Myrcella, Cersei's walk of atonement and Tommen's suicide. The following chapter explains why these events occur and how they build a complex plot, which is best able to arouse pity and fear according to Aristotle.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **ARISTOTLE’S CONCEPTION OF THE TRAGIC PLOT**

After giving the definition of tragedy and listing its six qualitative parts in *Poetics* Chapter 6, Aristotle focuses on the proper structure of the tragic plot in Chapter 7. For Aristotle, a well-constructed plot must be whole and complex with a certain magnitude, display a change of fortune and an order based on probability or necessity. All these qualities contribute to the achievement of the ultimate goal of tragedy.

In *Game of Thrones*, Cersei and Jaime Lannister’s highly interrelated plotlines employ the qualities Aristotle requires for a well-organized tragedy. Both characters experience a change from good to bad fortune with a clear beginning, middle and end. At the beginning of Season 1, the Lannister twins are noble, powerful and prosperous individuals with three illegitimate children as products of their incestuous, passionate relationship. They highly value their family and take extreme measures to protect it. Yet, at the end of Season 6, the twins lose their father and three children. Their complex plots involve several shocking incidents but also display how each character follows probable or necessary steps that result in calamity.

#### **3.1. THE LAW OF PROBABILITY OR NECESSITY**

As Aristotle declares in *Poetics* Chapter 6, a tragic plot must be whole with a beginning, middle and end. A beginning is “not itself necessarily after anything else and which has naturally something else after it”, a middle is “by nature after one thing and has also another after it” and an end is “naturally after something itself, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 2321).

The law of probability or necessity should govern tragedy as a whole. The beginning, middle and end must follow each other according to that law. In other

words, tragedy provides structural unity due to the probable or necessary connections between its incidents. A well-constructed tragedy will be disturbed if one of its incidents is displaced or removed.

Although this law is crucial for Aristotle's understanding of the tragic plot, he does not give readers an exact definition of probability or necessity in the *Poetics*. Still, certain passages in this work indicate the significance of this law for an effective tragedy. In Chapter 9, Aristotle emphasizes the distinction between poetry and history. The historian deals with what has happened, but the poet is interested in what may happen according to probability or necessity. Thus tragedy displays how a certain kind of person will probably or necessarily act in a given situation. For example, it is probable for Oedipus<sup>16</sup> to kill a stranger who insults him because he is an impulsive man. The problem is that the stranger he kills is his biological father. Oedipus' impulsiveness can be seen when he questions his adoptive parents after hearing the prophecy. They do not give Oedipus a straight answer about their parentage so he decides to leave the city as a caution, not thinking this choice can make him fulfill the prophecy.

Oedipus experiences a change of fortune after fleeing Corinth. He kills Laius on the journey, not knowing he is his own father and the King of Thebes. When he arrives at Thebes, he sees that the Sphinx has plagued the city. The Sphinx asks a riddle to all passersby and destroys those who cannot answer it correctly. Oedipus answers the riddle and consequently the Sphinx kills herself. As a reward, he receives the throne of Thebes and marries the widowed queen Jocasta, his mother. After a while, a pestilence ravages Thebes of its harvests and people. Oedipus learns that the killer of King Laius must be identified for the problem to be solved. While

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<sup>16</sup> In Sophocles' classical tragedy *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus (the prince of Corinth) hears a terrifying prophecy, which tells that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus tries to escape his fate but his actions actually fulfill the prophecy. After leaving Corinth, he unknowingly encounters his biological father King Laius on his way to Thebes. They argue and Oedipus kills him. He then becomes the new king of Thebes by marrying his own mother Queen Jocasta (Patterson 569).

investigating the identity of the murderer, Oedipus finds out the truth. He punishes himself by gouging out his own eyes and goes into exile.

*Oedipus the King* is highly praised by Aristotle because of its well-organized plot. All incidents follow each other as cause and effect. Hence nothing occurs by mere chance. This link of causation between incidents displays the tragic character's change of fortune. It shows what the character necessarily or probably does in a given situation and how his actions lead to happiness or misery. Oedipus leaves for Thebes due to the prophecy and he becomes the new king of the city as a result of killing Laius. His investigation of Laius' killer is probable because he is a king with a passionate sense of justice. He shockingly and unexpectedly blinds himself yet this act is also probable. Oedipus gouges out his eyes because he was blinded by his pride and he did not see the truth standing in front of him all the time.

Like *Oedipus the King*, the plotlines of Cersei and Jaime Lannister display a causal sequence based on probability or necessity. Bran's discovery of the incest in Season 1 Episode 1 is surprising but not irrational. His advanced climbing skills are shown in the first half of the episode. It is highly probable that Bran continues to climb towers, even his mother warns him against the dangers, because he is a young boy with a sense of adventure. Additionally, it is necessary for Jaime to push Bran out of the window, as he desperately has to protect Cersei and their three children from death at the hands of King Robert.

One of the most pivotal moments in the series is Ned Stark's execution in Season 1 Episode 9. His beheading at the order of Joffrey comes as a shock because he was the protagonist of the show and the foundation on which everything was built (Malitz). Still, the incident is probable as Joffrey is a cruel, spoiled boy who deeply enjoys the agony of others. Cersei turns a blind eye to his sadistic nature and fills him with an insatiable sense of grandeur. For example, in Season 1 Episode 3 she tells him, "You are my darling boy and the world will be exactly as you want it to be". Joffrey is also a rash person and does not think about the further consequences of his

actions. Once he becomes the king of Westeros, it is probable for him to kill Ned Stark without considering the political aftermath of this decision.

Another significant and probable moment occurs in Season 3 Episode 3 when Jaime tries to bribe Locke to secure his own release. As usual, Jaime arrogantly expects his charm and status to save him. However, Locke mocks Jaime's false sense of entitlement and cuts off his hand after saying, "You're nothing without your daddy and your daddy ain't here". Locke's reaction is also probable because he has an issue with entitlement and people who come from privilege. Thus he does not care about Jaime's father (Taylor 65).

Season 4 includes two major incidents of the downfall that are both probable. In the fourth episode of the season, it is revealed that Margaery's grandmother Olenna Tyrell has poisoned Joffrey. Olenna's act is probable because she wants Margaery to marry the sweet-natured, innocent Tommen instead of "that beast". The murder leads to Tyrion's unjust arrest, trial and almost execution. Yet Jaime releases Tyrion from his cell and arranges his escape. It is no surprise as Jaime is the only member of the family who maintains a good relationship with Tyrion. He never approves Cersei and Tywin's abuse towards his younger brother. Hence he cannot stand the thought of Tyrion being executed for a crime he did not commit. When he helps Tyrion escape, Jaime does not think that his brother would kill their father. Tywin's death is also shocking yet probable. Tyrion quickly and unexpectedly decides to kill his father but the impulse has been building in him for years due to their troubled relationship.

Myrcella's death is not contrary to reason as well. In Season 5, there is an ongoing tension between Prince Doran of House Martell and Oberyn's lover Ellaria Sand. Doran permits Myrcella to leave for King's Landing but Ellaria thinks the girl must be killed for revenge. When Doran gives Ellaria an ultimatum, she is forced to pledge loyalty to him. At the moment of farewell, she asks Myrcella to forgive her and kisses the girl on the lips. It is later revealed that Ellaria poisoned Myrcella to

death through the kiss. The incident is surprising but probable. Although Ellaria bows the knee to Doran, she is venomous and determined to avenge Oberyn's death.

Season 5 has another surprising but probable event: Cersei's arrest. The Queen Mother wrongly thinks the High Sparrow is loyal only to her so she uses him to eliminate the Tyrells. However, the religious leader believes that all people, whether high or lowborn, are equal in the eyes of gods and must be punished equally if committed a crime. Therefore, it is probable for him to arrest Cersei for her sins even she is the most powerful woman in Westeros.

Tommen's death, the final major incident of the downfall, is also causally explainable. The boy kills himself after witnessing the catastrophe that killed hundreds, including his beloved wife Margaery. His suicide is probable as there is no one to comfort him after the explosion. He suffers this trauma alone because Cersei neglects him when he needs her most. Instead of seeing her son right after the explosion, she is preoccupied with torturing Septa Unella, a sadistic nun who tormented her while she was in prison.

All these probable or necessary incidents fit into Aristotle's conception of the successful tragic plot, as they follow each other as cause and effect. It all starts with Jaime's decision to push Bran out of the window. His motive is to protect his family but events turn in the opposite direction and the twins face calamity. Bran's fall leads to Tyrion's arrest by Catelyn Stark. Consequently, Tywin Lannister declares war to get his son back.<sup>17</sup> After Ned's execution, the war spreads all over Westeros and costs Jaime his hand. It also forces the Lannisters to make alliances with House Tyrell and House Martell. Both alliances bring deadly consequences. Olenna kills Joffrey, which crushes Cersei so much that she hysterically accuses Tyrion and manipulates his trial to get him executed. Tyrion chooses a trial by combat due to the injustice in the court so Cersei appoints Ser Gregor to destroy him completely. She nearly achieves her end when Ser Gregor kills Oberyn Martell but suddenly loses her father after Jaime

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<sup>17</sup> Tywin Lannister deeply hates his dwarf son yet he takes up arms against the Starks once Tyrion is captured because he values the family honor most (Cogman 120-122).

releases Tyrion from prison. Furthermore, Myrcella gets murdered in retribution for Oberyn's death. Cersei also tries very hard to eliminate the Tyrells. However, her alliance with the High Sparrow collapses. When she is forced to stand trial, Cersei kills all her enemies at once but loses Tommen despite all her efforts to protect him.

These events occur on account of one another yet also come as a surprise. Aristotle states that plots with incidents of this kind are complex and best excite pity and fear. Complex plots have three significant elements: *pathos*, reversal and recognition.

### **3.2. COMPLEX PLOTS**

In *Poetics* Chapter 10, Aristotle states that plots are either simple or complex. Simple plots display the tragic character's change of fortune without the elements of reversal and recognition. On the other hand, complex plots involve both reversal and recognition or at least one of them. Aristotle emphasizes that these two elements must arise from the internal structure of the plot. They must be the probable or necessary results of preceding actions.

Whether simple or complex, all tragic plots have *pathos*. Starting from Chapter 11, Aristotle explains *pathos*, reversal and recognition in detail. Each has a significant place in the organization of the plot and contributes to the main end of tragedy. Both reversal and recognition increase the tragic effect that comes from the plot. Therefore, complex plots are better than simple ones.

#### **3.2.1. Pathos**

Aristotle defines *pathos* as "an action of a destructive or painful nature, such as murders on the stage, tortures, woundings, and the like" ("Poetics" 2324). As a violent action, *pathos* arouses pity and fear in the audience as it does in real life. Incidents not dramatized on stage yet contribute to the story also inspire these

feelings. For example, a death described by a messenger is a representation of evil and suffering. It brings the incident before the eyes of the audience and makes evil appear near by means of words.

With regard to the twins' downfall, the first moment of *pathos* occurs when Jaime loses his sword hand in a horrifying scene. The incident depicts a violent, painful action and Jaime's suffering is clearly seen when Locke suddenly chops off his hand. The second moment of *pathos* is Joffrey's death. Although Joffrey is monstrous, the incident is portrayed in such a way that the audience sees a kid painfully dying with a look of terror in his eyes, begging for help (Martin). The murder of Myrcella also signifies *pathos*, as the young girl dies in a gruesome fashion. Just after telling Jaime that she is glad to have him as her father, Myrcella's smile fades and her nose starts to bleed. She collapses and dies in her father's arms. The last moment of *pathos* in the downfall is Cersei's humiliating walk of atonement, which brings the Queen Mother to her lowest point. Stripped naked and hair cut short, she walks the streets of King's Landing while the angry, abusive crowd shouts insults and throws dirt at her.

All these incidents of *pathos* are also reversals. They surprisingly change the direction of events and thus make both plotlines complex.

### **3.2.2. Reversal**

A reversal (*peripeteia*) is "the change of the kind described from one state of things within the play to its opposite" (Aristotle, "Poetics" 2324). This change to the opposite direction of events must take place in accordance with probability or necessity. Although reversal happens contrary to expectation, it should not be causally inexplicable. The audience must not anticipate it yet they should see the causal antecedents of the change when they reflect back on previous incidents.

In a tragedy, reversal occurs when an agent's action fails to achieve the intended result and arrives at an opposite one. For example, Pelias' daughters boil

their old father to restore his youth.<sup>18</sup> Their intention is saving the father, not killing him. This action, which is voluntary in the beginning, turns out to be involuntary because the actual result is not intended. The same effect is produced when the clever villain is outwitted or the brave rogue defeated. A clever man intends to deceive others but arrives at the opposite result when he himself is deceived. Similarly, a brave man intends to win when he attacks but instead produces his own defeat (Aristotle, "Poetics" 2330).

Aristotle states that a simple plot is an imitation of a continuous action in which change occurs without reversal or recognition. Thus complex plots break the continuity of action by means of reversal. An action is continuous only if it reaches its endpoint without hindrance. The simple plot moves through a straight line from points A to B, each continuous action representing a segment of that line. On the other hand, motion between A and B is not so straightforward in complex plots with reversal. It changes direction one or more times. For example, Oedipus faces a transition from good (A) to bad (B) fortune. When the Messenger comes to deliver the news of his father's death, Oedipus joyfully thinks he has evaded fate and the action turns towards A. His father Polybus died due to natural causes and Oedipus is finally free of the prophecy of patricide. Now he must avoid marrying his mother, hence he must stay away from Corinth. However, the Messenger intends to comfort Oedipus and tells him that Queen Merope, the widow of Polybus, is no blood relation so he can safely come back to Corinth any time. This information makes Oedipus question his origins. He eventually finds out the truth and *pathos* takes place. The messenger's revelation arrives at an opposite end and the action turns towards B (Belfiore 147-148).

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<sup>18</sup> In Greek mythology, Pelias usurps the kingdom of Iolcus from his half-brother Aeson. He then sends his half-nephew Jason on a dangerous mission to retrieve the Golden Fleece from Colchis and promises to restore the kingdom to Aeson if Jason is successful. Jason completes the mission but Pelias does not return the kingdom as he had promised. Therefore, Jason enlists his wife Medea's help to destroy Pelias. Medea persuades Pelias' daughters to cut up and boil their father, falsely claiming this will recover his youth (Thorburn 296-298).

In Cersei and Jaime Lannister's plotlines, the first reversal is Bran's discovery of the incest. The twins intend to keep their relationship secret so they naturally choose a secluded place, the top of a tower, to have intercourse. However, their action fails to achieve the intended result and the plot changes direction when Bran sees them. Jaime's action once again arrives at an opposite end when he pushes the boy but fails to kill him. This act has life-changing consequences for the Lannisters. Jaime intends to kill Bran to protect his family but he unwillingly triggers events that result in his and Cersei's downfall.

The second reversal is Ned Stark's execution. After Ned finds out her secret, Cersei arrests him on treason and threatens him with his daughters' lives. Her plan seems successful when Ned falsely confesses treason and gives her a reason to exile him. Yet the plan backfires because Joffrey triggers the war by ordering Ned's beheading. The execution is a major moment of reversal as it is an unintended consequence of Cersei's actions. She only wants to exile Ned but fails to predict Joffrey's reaction.

Another important reversal occurs when Jaime's attempt to bribe Locke fails to achieve the intended result. At first, Jaime believes he has convinced Locke. He does not see the disaster coming so is caught unaware when Locke outwits him and takes his greatest weapon. The reversal changes the direction of his life. Before losing his hand, Jaime was considered as one of the best swordsmen in Westeros. His identity was built upon his physical prowess. After the loss, Jaime feels weak, embarrassed and deserted. He continues to serve in the Kingsguard yet is mocked and tormented by others including his family.

Like Jaime's mutilation, Joffrey's death is both a moment of reversal and *pathos*. The twins watch their eldest child draw his last breath before their eyes. It comes as a shock because the boy dies at his own wedding where there are several guards that protect him. The loss devastates Cersei most, as she has devoted her entire life to the advancement and protection of her children, particularly Joffrey. Yet she is unable to help her son when he needs her most. Driven mad with grief, she truly

believes Tyrion is guilty. In reality, Joffrey's death is an unintended consequence of the alliance made with House Tyrell.

Cersei's insistence on destroying Tyrion costs her father's life. As a reversal, Tywin's death is another unintended consequence of Cersei and Jaime's actions. The former does not foresee that her twin can help Tyrion escape. Meanwhile, the latter does not predict that his brother would kill their father. In the long run, the murder is a consequence of the war started and triggered by the Lannisters, which respectively leads to their alliance with the Tyrells, Joffrey's death, the trial of Tyrion and his death sentence.

Myrcella's death is also a long-term consequence of the war, as she is sent to Dorne to strengthen the hands of House Lannister against their enemies. The girl finds herself in danger after Ser Gregor kills Oberyn Martell yet Prince Doran, who wants no conflict, allows her to leave. However, Ellaria's poison takes effect on her way back to King's Landing. The incident is a reversal because it occurs just when Jaime believes his daughter is finally safe.

With Joffrey and Myrcella dead, Cersei uses all her means to protect Tommen, who is under the influence of his wife Margaery Tyrell. Another reversal takes place when Cersei's scheme to undermine the Tyrells backfires on her. In an unanticipated moment, the High Sparrow arrests the Queen Mother based on a testimony given by her cousin and former lover Lancel. The incident changes the direction of Cersei's life. She loses her immense power and suffers terribly in prison. Furthermore, she gets publicly humiliated and tormented during her walk of atonement.

After this horrific experience, Cersei becomes more vengeful than ever. Rather than attending her trial, she chooses to blow up the courtroom filled with all her enemies. However, this decision brings another unintended consequence. Tommen's suicide is the final reversal in the downfall and a result of his mother's actions. Cersei prevents the boy from attending the trial but fails to avert his suicide.

These incidents of reversal display the twins' change from good to bad fortune. They strike at unexpected times and stem from two pivotal moments of recognition: Bran and Ned Stark's discovery of the incest.

### 3.2.3. Recognition

Recognition (*anagnorisis*) is a change from ignorance to knowledge about the character's situation. Like reversal, it should occur in accordance with probability or necessity. Recognition bears on the character's change of fortune and moves the plot in a new direction. Due to the acquisition of information, it produces love or hate between the ones destined for a change of fortune. It can reveal family ties, cause friends to become foes and vice versa.

The objects of recognition can be inanimate objects as well as a person's identity and actions. In *Poetics* Chapter 16, Aristotle enumerates and ranks different kinds of recognition. The first is discovery by signs: the recognition of bodily marks or external tokens. For example, when Odysseus arrives at Ithaca after the Trojan War he disguises himself as a beggar but is recognized by means of his characteristic scar. Second come recognitions invented at will by the poet. This happens when the poet makes a character reveal his identity in order to advance the plot. The third kind of discovery is through memory. It occurs when a man's consciousness is awakened by something he sees. Fourth is recognition through reasoning. An example is Iphigenia's recognition of her brother Orestes just when she is about to sacrifice him.<sup>19</sup> Orestes says, "My sister was sacrificed and I am to be sacrificed like her". This is a natural reflection for Orestes to make and allows Iphigenia to logically deduce his identity. The fifth kind of recognition arises from the incidents themselves. Aristotle

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<sup>19</sup> In Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Iphigenia narrowly avoids death when the goddess Artemis saves her from the sacrificial altar. Artemis then makes Iphigenia a priestess at her temple. As a priestess, it is Iphigenia's duty to sacrifice the strangers who land the kingdom of Tauris. When Taurian guards capture Orestes, she almost sacrifices him. Yet recognition takes place and the *pathos* is averted (Patterson 427-428).

considers this as the best of all discoveries. For instance, the Messenger in *Oedipus the King* unwillingly brings about the revelation of Oedipus' real identity. When he tells Oedipus that Queen Merope is not his real mother, Oedipus naturally gets curious and digs out the devastating truth. Here recognition is completely integrated into the plot as the great surprise comes through a probable incident.

There are two moments of recognition in Cersei and Jaime Lannister's plotlines. Both arise from the incidents themselves. In the first one, Bran acquires crucial information that bears on the twins' change of fortune. His discovery is surprising yet natural, as he regularly and skillfully climbs the towers of Winterfell. However, one day he ends up in the wrong place at the wrong time and spots the twins. The second moment of recognition is Ned's discovery of the incest while investigating Jon Arryn's death. This one is also integrated into the plot, as Ned receives a letter from Lysa Arryn telling the Lannisters murdered her husband. Thus it is natural for Ned to get suspicious and question the motive behind the murder. He digs into the matter, finds out the twins' secret and automatically assumes that they killed Jon Arryn. However, the murderer is actually Lysa Arryn. Without realizing the truth, Ned and Cersei confront each other. Ned's revelation of his knowledge of the incest leads to his execution and the major war, which causes the decimation of the Lannister family. While Bran's discovery marks the beginning of the downfall, Ned's triggers the change of fortune. Hence both moments of recognition play a crucial role in Cersei and Jaime Lannister's tragedy.

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Mainly, the twins' downfall reflects Aristotle's understanding of a successful, well-organized tragic plot. It is complex as it involves all three elements: *pathos*, reversal and recognition. Although these events occur unexpectedly, they are not contrary to reason. In other words, they follow the law of probability or necessity and make both plotlines causally plausible. Aristotle argues that the moments of reversal and recognition are particularly successful in arousing pity and fear in the audience. Through these incidents, the audience can attend the suffering of the Lannister twins

and fear what may befall them. This paves the way for the catharsis of pity and fear and the pleasure resulting from seeing a tragedy.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CATHARSIS**

The term catharsis is central to Aristotle's understanding of tragedy and its effect on the audience. It is mentioned in Chapter 6 of the *Poetics*, where Aristotle includes it at the end of his definition of tragedy. This is the only passage in the work that explicitly mentions catharsis and has been widely debated by commentators for centuries. Due to the lack of an account of catharsis in the *Poetics*, commentators examined Aristotle's other works (particularly the *Politics*) to clarify the term's meaning.

According to Aristotle's definition; tragedy is the imitation of a serious action complete in itself, employing the means of language and rhythm successively in a dramatic form, with incidents arousing pity and fear to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. The use of catharsis in this definition indicates that it is the main end and peculiar effect of tragedy, which stems from the interaction between this particular mode of mimesis and its audience. The statement also points out that catharsis first requires the arousal of pity and fear. Therefore, Aristotle's account of pity and fear in *The "Art" of Rhetoric* and *Poetics* is indispensable for understanding the successful tragic plot that achieves catharsis.

#### **4.1. ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF PITY AND FEAR**

In *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines fear as "a painful or troubled feeling caused by the impression of an imminent evil that causes destruction or pain" (201). It arises when we feel threatened; something has great power to destroy or harm us while causing us pain. For example, one fears the enmity and anger of people who have power over him, as it is a terrible thing to be at another man's mercy. Additionally, one fears those who have been wronged because they are always looking for their opportunity to retaliate. Aristotle states that it is the quiet and

dissembling, not the passionate and outspoken, whom one has to fear as they never clearly reveal their intentions. In other words, one fears danger coming from unexpected people at an unexpected time.

Mainly, fear is associated with the expectation that something destructive will happen to us. Hence an insolent person, who enjoys great prosperity and believes nothing can happen to him, shall not fear. Someone who has experienced every horror and is callous about the future is also not afraid. There must be an expectation of escape to feel the anguish of uncertainty (Aristotle, “The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric” 201-207).

On the other hand, pity is caused by some destructive or painful evil that befalls one who does not deserve it and which we might expect to befall our loved ones or us. Therefore, pity has a self-regarding aspect as the undeserved suffering of another reminds us our own vulnerability. Both those who are completely ruined or immensely insolent do not feel pity because they either suppose the worst has already happened to them or believe the impossibility of evil striking them.

Aristotle lists certain evils that excite pity such as death in its various forms, bodily injuries and afflictions, diseases, friendlessness, deformity, weakness and mutilation. He says what we fear for ourselves excites pity when it happens to others close to us. Thus, in usual circumstances, we cannot feel pity for disasters that happened a hundred centuries ago. However, tragedians can excite pity by putting these disasters before our eyes and make them seem close to us (Aristotle, “The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric” 225-231).

While pity is both retrospective and prospective, fear is exclusively prospective. The former is felt when we witness undeserved suffering, which can make us think misfortunes we had in the past or might have in the future. The latter is felt when we encounter something with great power that is capable of harming or destroying us in the future. Both pity and fear are grounded in reason. They are always intentional and directed towards a target.

Tragedy takes us outside ourselves and directs our emotions towards the characters. Hence Aristotle modifies *The “Art” of Rhetoric’s* account in the *Poetics*

and allows fear to be felt for tragic characters and not merely for oneself. In order to feel pity and fear for the tragic character, the audience must realize that the character's situation conforms to an abstract pattern of human experience. For instance, although Oedipus is a fictional character, the audience can relate to him through the universal themes of fate and free will. As the plot unravels, the audience realizes that Oedipus prepares his own doom and is unable to escape from his fate. They feel pity and fear for Oedipus because his suffering is undeserved and it destroys him.

There seems to be a contradiction between Aristotle's accounts of pity and fear in *The "Art" of Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. In the former, Aristotle states that pity and fear are painful emotions involving the expectation or remembering of critical harms. Yet in the latter he says that the poet should create the pleasure that comes from pity and fear through mimesis.

Angela Curran questions the coexistence of pain and pleasure in the experience of tragedy and emphasizes the role of plot in facilitating this distinctive experience. As she points out, the tragic plot imitates universal patterns of human experience through its incidents, which must display a sequence of cause and effect. This structural unity gives the audience pleasure even the incidents imitated are pitiable and fearful. The audience derives pleasure from understanding the connection between incidents and seeing how they gather into a coherent whole. For example, a murder between family members can easily make the audience experience horror and pity. Yet the same audience can also derive pleasure from this incident once they understand it as a result of preceding events and part of an intelligible plot structure (Curran 246-247).

This logical presentation of incidents can provide the distinctive pleasure of tragedy by ensuring the catharsis of pity and fear in the audience. Different root meanings of catharsis in ancient Greek provide a basis for its interpretations within the context of the *Poetics*. Three main interpretations associate the term with the purgation, purification or clarification of emotions. However, none of these

interpretations adopt a structural perspective and highlight the primary role of plot in the production of tragic catharsis and pleasure.

#### **4.2. CATHARSIS IN ANCIENT GREEK**

Prior to the *Poetics*, one usage of catharsis in ancient Greek indicated purgation. This meaning derives from a medical context of healing and curing that removes diseases and impurities in the body through evacuation and expulsion. In this sense, catharsis is therapeutic.

The second usage of catharsis in ancient Greek relates to the ritual purification of people. It indicates the ritualistic practice of cleansing the spirit and sublimating the emotions. This meaning has moral overtones.

The third usage of catharsis in ancient Greek is clarification, which signifies clearing up a physical or mental state that is an impediment to proper functioning. It can be the physical clarification of a river or the intellectual clarification of the mind and soul.

These three root meanings of catharsis are not mutually exclusive. They all refer to eliminating some impure state of the body or soul and can be read in the context of *Poetics*.

#### **4.3. CATHARSIS IN THE POETICS**

Based on the *Poetics*, interpreting catharsis as purgation implies tragedy as a cure for an emotionally pathological condition. This approach suggests that tragedy helps the removal of unhealthily pent-up emotions just as medical purgation does to harmful elements in the body. Excess and noxious emotions of the audience are drained away at the theater by means of tragedy. Consequently, the audience is left with a sense of enjoyable relief.

The purgation theory was first proposed in the mid-nineteenth century by Jacob Bernays. Bernays' evidence comes from Book 8 of the *Politics*, where Aristotle discusses the catharsis music produces. Here Aristotle makes a distinction between ethical and cathartic melodies. While the former is educative, the latter can excite the soul to mystic frenzy and then settle it down by first releasing and then purging excess emotions including pity and fear. For example, those who were carried away by the enthusiasm of Dionysiac mysteries were brought to their senses with the application of wild and restless music. Priests used music as a homeopathic remedy to cure movement by applying movement (Myers 286).

Supporters of this theory argue that tragedy, like cathartic melodies, excites and then purges the emotions of pity and fear. An excess amount of these emotions poses a threat to the physical and psychological wellbeing of the spectator. Tragedy, similar to a doctor who removes noxious substances from the patient's body, helps one to expel these pent-up emotions. As a result, one feels relief and pleasure.

The purgation theory was in favor for many decades, yet recent commentators reject this interpretation. Jonathan Lear questions how an emotion is capable of being purged. According to Aristotle, emotions are not simply feelings or bodily states. They involve a cognitive orientation directed at the world such as a belief, thought or perception. For instance, we fear because we believe that some evil may strike us in the future. Thus the emotion of fear requires the belief that one is in danger and the mind treating danger as worthy of fear (Lear 317). Lear asks how someone purges or drains off a feeling that involves a cognitive attitude directed towards the world.

The second reading of catharsis as purification analyzes the *Poetics* from an educative and moralistic perspective. It suggests that tragedy can teach the audience to curb harmful emotions by giving examples or counterexamples. Emotions are not purged from the mind but rather readjusted to their proper balance. This theory of moderation is based on feeling the right emotion at the right time towards the right person.

Supporters of this second approach, such as Humphrey House, argue that tragedy educates and habituates the audience to feel pity and fear in response to incidents worthy of these emotions. The emotions are evoked in proper circumstances so the audience is less likely to experience them inappropriately. In other words, emotions get refined and purified. Tragedy can be considered as part of an ethical education because virtue consists giving the right emotional response under right circumstances.<sup>20</sup> What the audience experiences at the theater prepares them to act moderately in similar future situations.

The purification theory is also based on Book 8 of the *Politics*. Here Aristotle discusses how imitations in music help the development of a virtuous character. For him, music involves imitations of states of character such as courage. Listening to music is effective in developing courage because imitations set up a response in the soul as the listener would experience in real life if he were courageous (Curran 195).

According to Jonathan Lear, the purification theory is problematic because what it suggests is not the main end of tragedy. Unlike comedy, the target audience for tragedy is the virtuous person who is in no need of ethical education. An objection against Lear is that a moral life requires endless training in correct feeling and judgment. Yet Lear rejects this idea and states that the character of a virtuous person is formed and settled by ethical training when growing up. Thus the virtuous spectator of a tragedy does not need the ethical education catharsis offers. While education is for youths, tragedy is for cultivated adults.

The third interpretation of catharsis as clarification is proposed by Leon Golden and has a cognitive dimension. Golden refers to Chapter 4 of the *Poetics*, where Aristotle states the pleasure of poetry is that of learning. He also points out Chapters 6 and 14, in which Aristotle says the pleasure of poetry is derived from pity

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<sup>20</sup> According to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, a virtuous person is found in the intermediate state between excess and deficiency. For example, the courageous person experiences fear to a degree that is appropriate to his circumstances. He is neither a coward who flees every danger nor a rash person who judges every danger worth facing and experiences little or no fear (Kraut).

and fear. Thus Golden draws the conclusion that tragedy, as a species of poetry, must involve learning about pity and fear (Waters 80).

Golden mainly argues that catharsis signifies the intellectual clarification of pitiable and fearful events, which makes the audience better contemplate the universal aspects of human condition. According to this interpretation, cathartic experience involves understanding the universal truths represented in a particular plot. This process of learning and inference gives the audience pleasure. For example, seeing a person blinding himself is horrifying in real life. Yet this experience becomes pleasurable once the audience contemplates the universal truth of human suffering represented through this particular action.

Jonathan Lear rejects the clarification theory as well because he argues that catharsis is primarily an aesthetic concept rather than a cognitive one. The term is indispensable to the definition of tragedy and hence should be read within the context of art and aesthetics. All other parts making up the definition, the means and manner of imitation, are structural concepts that imply the nature and composition of this specific kind of artwork. As the main end of tragedy, catharsis should also be analyzed from a structural perspective. Purgation, purification and clarification theories of catharsis do not allow that.

According to Aristotle's definition, tragedy aims at the arousal and catharsis of pity and fear through mimesis. Therefore, catharsis signifies what tragedy does to an experiencing audience. Mainly, it transforms what would be painful in real life into something pleasurable in the context of art. A good tragedy is one whole coherent action made pleasurable by artistic formulation. In other words, successful tragedians intelligibly organize pitiable and fearful events, which are repulsive in real life, to produce a distinctive type of pleasure (Aristotle, "Poetics" 2326). Thus tragic pleasure as audience reaction is directly connected with the structure of the artwork and its presentation of events. This pleasure is neither purely emotional nor purely intellectual. It is an aesthetic response because it can only happen to someone who has his emotions transformed while understanding what the work adds up to. The

audience is shaken by fearful and pitiable events, but at the same time they derive pleasure from seeing what these events come up to. It is the meaningful, causal connections between incidents that make this experience enjoyable (Schaper 141).

Jonathan Lear emphasizes that pity and fear are the causal antecedents of the pleasure peculiar to tragedy. Their arousal is an indispensable step along the route to the proper effect, which is the catharsis of these emotions. To feel pity and fear, the audience must believe that they are vulnerable to the events staged. This explains why tragedy uses universals, as they can portrait what might happen to certain people in terms of probability or necessity.

Still, for the occurrence of catharsis, identification with the characters must remain partial and the spectator must not lose sight of the fact that he is part of the audience. This draws a line between life and fictional presentation. It makes the emotional involvement different than the one experienced in real life. Although the spectator believes tragic events can happen to him, he also knows the possibility is too remote. Otherwise, the pleasurable catharsis of pity and fear can turn into the painful experience of these emotions (Lear 334).

#### **4.4. CATHARSIS IN GAME OF THRONES**

Both Cersei and Jaime Lannister's plotlines involve several pitiable and fearful events and their causal organization can provide the audience a cathartic experience. In coherence with Aristotle's understanding of an effective tragedy, moments of *pathos*, reversal and recognition are especially able to excite pity and fear in the audience.

The audience can first pity and fear for Jaime in the scene where he loses his sword hand. Unlike previous times, Jaime commits a noble, selfless act and saves Brienne from being raped. He then crosses the line and arrogantly tries to secure his own release. When Locke unchains Jaime, the audience may initially think that the captor is convinced. Yet Locke also offers Jaime food. The audience can start to fear

at that moment because Locke's act is unexpected and his intention does not seem clear. As Aristotle emphasizes, one must fear those who never clearly reveal their intentions. Fear continues to arise when Locke knocks Jaime down and puts a knife to his eye. Now the audience can expect some destructive evil to strike Jaime very soon. Locke has the power to destroy Jaime and cause him pain. He is not interested in Jaime's wealth. Hence Jaime is at another man's mercy, a terrible situation according to Aristotle ("The 'Art' of Rhetoric" 203).

Reversal and *pathos* occurs when Locke suddenly cuts off Jaime's sword hand. This incident is pitiable as Aristotle states that mutilation, weakness and bodily afflictions are among certain evils that excite pity ("The 'Art' of Rhetoric" 227). Still, the main reason for the arousal of pity is Jaime's undeserved suffering. Jaime acts viciously, but out of necessity, when he pushes Bran out of the window. The audience can see he is not entirely a villain when he takes a selfless risk to help Brienne. Yet he goes too far and annoys Locke with his sense of superiority, which disproportionately costs him his hand. The audience can relate to this moment of suffering as it represents a universal theme, the loss of identity. Jaime loses a very significant part of his body that defines his life as a knight.

Joffrey's murder is a pitiable incident as well. In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, Martin has stated that his intention was to evoke the complex feelings of the audience and not just cheering. He "tried to provide a certain moment of *pathos* with the death" by pointing out that Joffrey is still a 13-year-old kid suffering terribly (Martin). The TV series faithfully depict Joffrey's final moments. As the villainous boy painfully chokes to death, the audience is reminded that he is still a child who begs for his mother's help. The universal truth this incident represents is the loss of a child, a horrible thing for any parent to go through. The audience can especially feel pity towards Cersei because her grief and despair as a mother is shown in a very visceral way (Taylor 130-131).

Another pitiable and fearful event is Myrcella's untimely death. On the journey back to King's Landing, the girl tells Jaime that she is glad to have him as her

father and the two hug each other. However, just after this emotional moment, she turns pale and collapses into her father's arms. This sudden moment of reversal is fearful as it demonstrates that a destructive evil, death, is about to strike the Lannister family very soon. Myrcella's death in the arms of her father can make the audience pity Jaime, who loses his daughter seconds after she accepts him. According to Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, the scene is touching because with Jaime is "so moved by emotions he didn't even know he had" and he shares "such a brief, brief, brief moment" with his daughter (Hibberd, "Game of Thrones team on that fatal Jaime twist"). Unfortunately, there is nothing Jaime can do except helplessly watching Myrcella die.

Cersei's naked walk of atonement, which depicts an angry crowd physically and verbally humiliating her, is also a pitiable incident. The commoners throw food and bodily fluids at the Queen Mother while yelling insults. This moment of *pathos* inspires pity because Cersei's punishment is so cruel that it challenges the audience's feelings about her. Although the scene represents the consequence of Cersei's vicious schemes, the audience can still pity her because she is dehumanized and humiliated in a brutal way. According to showrunner David Benioff, the audience viscerally feels the horror of that moment. Benioff says, "It is almost impossible not to feel for her because she is a human being and tormented. So what we hope is, by the last shot, is you are almost rooting for her, in a way, and hope she gets her revenge on those who have mistreated her" (Hibberd, "George R.R. Martin, producer explain Cersei's punishment"). Television writer Jeremy Egner also states that Cersei's emotional collapse and fall from grace makes the character an object of pity ("Game of Thrones' Finale Recap").

The last pitiable event in the downfall is Tommen's death. The universal theme of the loss of a child is represented once again, this time by a suicide. After seeing his beloved wife and hundreds of others are dead, the young king takes off his crown without hesitation, calmly climbs onto a window ledge and jumps to his death. This moment of reversal is pitiable as the audience sees an innocent child silently

taking his own life after witnessing a catastrophe. Dean-Charles Chapman, who plays Tommen in the series, says that his character feels worthless to the world because he is constantly manipulated by others and unable to control any situation despite being the king. When he sees the explosion, he knows his mother is behind this. There is too much violence for him to bear anymore and he gives up (Chapman).

At the end of Season 6, Cersei and Jaime lose their children and father despite everything they do for the protection of their family. Their change of fortune involves pitiable and fearful events, which pave the way for a cathartic experience in the audience. The intelligent, causal connection between incidents demonstrates how the twins prepare their own downfall with their own hands. This logical sequence can provide the catharsis of pity and fear by enabling the audience to contemplate how events gather into a meaningful whole. In other words, the audience can derive pleasure from understanding the organization of Cersei and Jaime's tragedy even the events portrayed are pitiable and fearful.

Mainly, Jaime pushes Bran out of the window due to necessity yet his choice triggers a series of events that result in the deaths of his father and three children. Interestingly, Jaime's story runs parallel to Bran's. He cripples Bran and is himself mutilated when he loses his sword hand. In addition to that, his son commits suicide by jumping out of a window. Like Jaime, Cersei makes crucial decisions to protect her family. However her rashness and poor political judgment change the course of events in unexpected ways. Rather than fleeing with her children, Cersei chooses to kill her husband and install Joffrey on the throne. Joffrey's execution of Ned Stark sparks the war, which leads to the decimation of the Lannisters. Furthermore, Cersei's insistence on destroying Tyrion and the Tyrells eventually brings about the death of her father, daughter and younger son. These relationships of cause and effect show nothing occurs by chance and can give the audience the cathartic pleasure of understanding.

As Aristotle emphasizes, the catharsis and peculiar pleasure of tragedy are rooted in the actions of the characters. Cersei and Jaime Lannister prepare their own

downfall by making deliberate choices. Both characters undergo a change from good to bad fortune due to their own acts and hence can be considered as tragic heroes.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE TRAGIC HERO

The tragic hero, who is the protagonist of a tragedy, ensures the arousal of pity and fear in the audience through his actions. Aristotle analyzes the tragic hero in Chapters 13 and 15 of the *Poetics* by listing his main characteristics and explaining how he experiences a change of fortune. As tragic heroes, Cersei and Jaime Lannister face a downfall due to some *hamartia*, which they are responsible for.

#### 5.1. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAGIC HERO

As an object of imitation and a man in action, the tragic hero adopts a certain character that is composed of universal types reflecting what kind of a person he is. For instance, as a universal type the young men have hot tempers, strong appetites and act accordingly (Aristotle, “The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric” 109). The universal characters acquire particular names in tragedies. Oedipus, as an individual tragic agent, belongs to certain universal types. He is a proud leader, a tyrant, a loyal husband, a caring father and so on. These universals display what Oedipus will do in terms of probability or necessity.

In *Game of Thrones*, Jaime Lannister represents chivalry and valiance. When he is introduced in the first episode of the series, the audience initially sees a typical knight in his shining armor. As a universal type, Jaime is foremost a soldier and a warrior. He has no interest in politics even Cersei urges him to become the king’s advisor. Rather than engaging in political maneuvering, he solves his problems by resorting to force and violence. Hence it is highly probable that he violently kills Ned Stark’s men after learning his brother is taken prisoner by Catelyn Stark. As an impulsive knight, Jaime takes few things seriously and does not consider the long-term consequences of his actions.

Unlike her twin, Cersei Lannister seeks to achieve and maintain political power. She embodies the universal qualities of a queen. Known for her great beauty and wealth, Cersei is raised in privilege. Yet being a woman prevents her from gaining the immense political power she desires to have. She belongs to the universal type of women who are excluded from politics due to their gender. Still Cersei refuses to submit to the people around her, including her husband and father. She uses her wits to control a network of spies who carry out the dirty work on her rise to power. Thus it is no surprise that she is in a never-ending power struggle: with Tyrion in Season 2, Margaery in Seasons 3 and 4 and the High Sparrow in Seasons 5 and 6. Besides being a queen hungry for power, Cersei is also a devoted mother who stops at nothing to protect her children. Motherhood is another universal quality she possesses and also a significant motivation behind her worst acts.

For Aristotle, the tragic hero is an intermediate agent between two extreme universals. Similar to the audience, he is neither eminently virtuous nor eminently vicious. This ensures the arousal of pity and fear as the former “is occasioned by undeserved misfortune” and the latter by “that of one like ourselves” (Aristotle, “Poetics” 2325).<sup>21</sup> Yet in Chapter 2 Aristotle says that tragedy represents men as better than in real life. This may seem contradictory. What Aristotle means by this statement is that tragedy deals with men on a heroic scale. The main characters in a tragedy are bigger and better versions of the audience in terms of noble stature. In many cases, they are members of a royal household. Unlike the characters in a comedy, they do not imitate trivial actions of the people of a baser sort.

Aristotle states that the tragic hero must fall short of perfection, so the audience can identify with him, yet be essentially good. However, there are counter-examples to this in Greek tragedy. As Paul Crittenden points out, “there is a good deal more moral ambiguity in Greek tragedy than Aristotle seems willing to

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<sup>21</sup> A man ‘like ourselves’ has an element of universality and shares in the natural tendencies to anger, fear and desire. In other words, the tragedian must portray men as they are, presenting both virtues and vices. This is the basis for the audience’s fellow feeling with the hero (Else 478).

acknowledge” (23). An example is Medea’s slaying of her own children in Euripides’ tragedy *Medea*.<sup>22</sup> Considered as a tragic hero in literary analysis, Medea’s actions seem contradictory to Aristotle’s statement on goodness. A plausible solution to this problem comes from S. H. Butcher, who explains that the success of a tragic hero is not dependent upon his adherence to a moral code but rather to the Greek heroic code. Medea’s killing of her innocent children is clearly not an act of goodness. However, she is not an utter villain as Euripides demonstrates through her monologue before the infanticide. The tragedian shows the audience that Medea is suffering from an inner struggle. In the end, her fear of being ridiculed by her enemies and desire to punish them overrides her maternal instinct. According to Shirley A. Barlow, Medea’s violent reaction against insult and impeachment of honor is an example of adherence to the Greek heroic code, which is different from our understanding of the moral code today. Thus Medea’s deed, albeit horrific and hideous, is not eminently villainous (Asaro 2).

Like Medea, Cersei and Jaime Lannister are not entirely vicious. Cersei’s worst acts are driven by the fear of losing the two things she cares about most: her children and political power. The fear is based on a prophecy Cersei heard when she was a child. It tells that she will marry a king, her children will wear gold crowns followed by gold shrouds and she will eventually be pushed aside by a younger and more beautiful queen. Cersei spends her entire life trying to prevent the prophecy from happening and becomes extremely protective of her children. Therefore her insistence on destroying Tyrion, which triggers her downfall, is understandable. When Tyrion sends Myrcella to Dorne to forge a marriage alliance, Cersei says:

“One day I pray you love someone. I pray you love her so much, when you close your eyes you see her face. I want that for you. I want you to know what it’s like to love someone, to truly love someone, before I take her from you.”

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<sup>22</sup> The Colchian princess Medea punishes her husband Jason’s infidelity by murdering their two sons (“Medea”).

These words demonstrate Cersei's deep attachment to her children. They also explain why her insistence on seeing Tyrion dead is highly probable. She truly believes Tyrion is guilty for murdering her dearest son and vows to crush him, as she does to her enemies.

Cersei is ruthless about gaining political power. Her acts are a rebellion against a world dominated and controlled by men. Compared to other women in Westeros, Cersei is very close to power yet she is unable to wield it. She does not accept the passive role of a queen shadowed by a king. She even resents Jaime to a degree because of her lust for autonomy and power. In Season 2 Episode 9, she tells Sansa Stark about her past and marriage:

“When we were young, Jaime and I, we looked so much alike even our father couldn't tell us apart. I could never understand why they treated us differently. Jaime was taught to fight with sword and lance and mace, and I was taught to smile and sing and please. He was heir to Casterly Rock, and I was sold to some stranger like a horse to be ridden whenever he desired.”

As an ambitious and calculating individual, Cersei constantly makes schemes to increase her power and wipe out her enemies. However, her plans have unintended consequences such as her walk of atonement and Tommen's suicide. It is not contrary to reason that Cersei becomes even more defensive after being humiliated in front of hundreds of people. This is “an understandable response to sexual trauma from someone who has experienced a lifetime of it” (Hudson).

Both showrunner David Benioff and actress Lena Headey state that Cersei Lannister is not entirely a villain in their opinion. Benioff says Cersei is a complicated person who is neurotically protective of her children and a woman who is abused in her relationships with her husband and father. He adds, “She's someone who's furious at the role she's forced to play” (Hibberd, “George R.R. Martin, producer explain Cersei's punishment”). According to Headey, Cersei “is a survivor

and will do exactly what a man would do...murder somebody when you're in a war" (Hudson).

Cersei is not preeminently vicious because, unlike her villainous son Joffrey, she does not do evil for its own sake. Her horrific acts originate in the primal sense of deprivation and fear. Like Cersei, Jaime commits cruel acts but never without a cause. His push of Bran is not an act of pure evil because it is necessarily done for the safety of his family. Jaime's famous line, "The things I do for love", indicates how much he cares about Cersei.

The dichotomy between Jaime's good and evil sides becomes clearly visible during his journey with Brienne. The two begin as enemies but gradually start to understand and respect each other. Jaime heroically saves Brienne twice, once from being raped and once from a bear pit. For the first time in the series, he asks for and gives help and empathy.

In one of the most revealing scenes, Jaime tells Brienne the true story behind the Mad King's death and how he gained his reputation as the "Kingslayer". The scene marks a turning point as it shapes the audience's opinion of Jaime by showing he is not exactly as he appears to be. Until that moment, Jaime is an arrogant and dishonorable traitor who crippled a child and killed his own cousin. Now the audience learns that he has sacrificed himself and saved thousands of lives. Yet this heroic act burdened Jaime with the weight of being labeled as a traitor. He became embittered towards the injustice of the world and trusted no one but his family.

Based on Aristotle's argument, Jaime is a better tragic hero than Cersei because of his gender. For Aristotle, it is better if the tragic hero is not a woman or slave, as they are inferior human beings. Another challenge Cersei poses is her cleverness and manly valor. Aristotle states that both are inappropriate for a woman. Thus Cersei is not the ideal tragic hero Aristotle defines. Still, she possesses the other qualities mentioned in the *Poetics*. She belongs to an illustrious family and enjoys a certain degree of cultivated leisure. On the other hand, Jaime fits into Aristotle's

conception of the tragic hero.<sup>23</sup> As one of the most powerful knights in Westeros and the heir of the Lannister family, he enjoys great reputation and good fortune. Still, whether ideal or not, both characters fulfill the main characteristics of the tragic hero. They experience a change from good to bad fortune and suffer terribly, not because of bad luck but their own agency. Their greatness may seem like an insurance against defeat yet it does not prevent their destruction. They fall into misfortune due to some *hamartia*, a term that has been interpreted differently by scholars over years.

## 5.2. HAMARTIA

In Greek, the root meaning of *hamartia* is missing the mark (*hamartanein*) but the word also covers a broad spectrum of meanings including accident, error, mistake, sin and wrongdoing. Interpretations of *hamartia* can be grouped under three headings: (1) literally missing the mark, (2) failing in some object or making a mistake and (3) doing wrong morally. These interpretations are based on the usage of the word in Aristotle and earlier writers (Stinton 222).

According to Stinton, interpreting *hamartia* correctly requires understanding the full range of the concept and the particular situation it is applied to. For instance, Oedipus fundamentally makes a mistake of fact when he slays his own father without the knowledge of his identity. This example of Oedipus represents just one type of *hamartia*. Aristotle, on the other hand, himself uses the full range.

In a tragedy, *hamartia* occasions the change of fortune experienced by the tragic hero. Pity and fear are excited when the hero voluntarily commits *hamartia* and consequently faces downfall. Therefore, events based merely on misfortune and bad luck (such as lightning striking) cannot produce the tragic effect properly. What engages the audience most is how the tragic hero contributes to his own misfortune.

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<sup>23</sup> The Lannister twins see in each other their own reflection and push the boundaries of gender and sex norms (Barkman ch. 14). Thus they pose a challenge to Aristotle's gender-biased tragic hero.

The hero, who acts according to probability or necessity, brings incurable suffering to himself and his loved ones. It is this failed agency that draws the audience in.

There are different ways of committing *hamartia* and some cases reveal more obvious blemishes of character than others. For example, Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* tries to woo her husband Heracles back after he has taken a mistress. She sends him a robe anointed in love potion, given to her by centaur Nessos, who showed affection towards her and was defeated by Heracles. The potion turns out to be a deadly drug and its poisonous flames kill Heracles. Nessos sets up this plan as a revenge for his defeat. Although Deianeira is tricked by Nessos, she is blameworthy for her *hamartia*. She acts hastily due to her intense jealousy even she senses trouble ahead. She takes a calculated risk and loses (Sherman 190-191). Her action misses the mark. She fails in her object and her jealousy is a motive for wrongdoing. Therefore, Deianeira's tragedy covers the full range of *hamartia*.

Sherman states that Deianeira's imperfections are an admission of her humanity. They remind the audience their own fallibility, as everyone can make significant mistakes. The tragedy can excite pity in the audience because Deianeira's misfortune exceeds the magnitude of her error and she suffers well beyond her deed. However, Sherman also says there are certain cases of *hamartia* that stretch the limits of the audience. An example is Agamemnon's sacrifice of his own daughter Iphigenia (Sherman 191-192).

When Trojan prince Paris abducts Helen, wife of Menelaus, Agamemnon sails to Troy to regain his brother's honor. Before the journey, Agamemnon boasts he is a better hunter than Artemis and upsets the goddess by killing one of her sacred stags. As revenge, Artemis keeps the winds from blowing and becalms the Greek fleet. Agamemnon asks the priest Calchas for help and learns that he must sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to appease the wrath of Artemis. He chooses to do the horrific deed.

Agamemnon commits *hamartia* voluntarily both when insulting the goddess of hunting and sacrificing Iphigenia. His arrogance and desire for victory brings his

doom. After returning from war, Agamemnon is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, who vowed revenge. He pays the price for the bloodshed of Iphigenia when time comes.

Compared to Deianeira's, Agamemnon's act does not involve an ignorance of fact or the failure to calculate the immediate effect. Yet the audience can pity him because he shows a different type of ignorance. He cannot foresee the long-term and painful effects of his action, such as the wrath of a mother. The same goes for Cersei and Jaime. The audience may be reluctant to pardon the twins for their wicked acts but can still pity them, as the ignorance of distant consequences is not unfamiliar to human reason (Sherman 192).

When Jaime commits *hamartia* by pushing Bran, he just considers the immediate effect of this action and not its long-term consequences, such as a possible war. Likewise, when Cersei conspires against her enemies she rarely thinks her actions might backfire in the long run. She shows ignorance and commits *hamartia* by arranging Ned Stark's exile without considering Joffrey's reaction. Hence she fails in her object when Joffrey orders Ned's execution. Cersei's insistence on the elimination of Tyrion, the Tyrells and finally the High Sparrow is also an act of *hamartia*. Her choices miss the mark in all three cases. They cause her humiliation and result in the deaths of her family.

The twins' acts of *hamartia* denote their character. Both embody excessive pride, arrogance and overconfidence. In old Greek tradition, a downfall that results from these states of character is called as 'the hubristic principle'.

### **5.2.1. The Twins' Hubris**

Anglicized from Greek ὕβρις, the word *hubris* means "wanton violence, arising from the pride of strength or from passion, insolence" (Liddell and Scott). In *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, Aristotle states that those who commit *hubris*, particularly the young and rich, take pleasure in harming others as it makes them think themselves

superior. Abusing wealth and political power are the main characteristics of *hubris*. A hubristic person acts immorally because it is what he wants to do, regardless of the lives or rights of others. His overconfidence prevents him from realizing the limitations of his human condition and his presumptuousness often results in retribution. Mainly, *hubris* can be considered as an opposite of *sophrosyne*, which indicates moderation, balance and self-control (Cabrera 5).

Other characteristic manifestations of *hubris* include intemperate eating, drinking and sexual activity as well as disobeying human and divine authority. These acts are directly related to desire and pleasure. As Aristotle points out, we naturally desire what is pleasurable and avoid what is painful. Some things that give pleasure are necessary (physical ones like food and sexual needs) and some are desirable in themselves (such as victory, honor and wealth). For Aristotle, pleasure and desire are concerned with things that are good, bad or intermediate in kind and there can be several ways of pursuing pleasure. Those who do not desire pleasure enough are insensitive. Some indulge in pleasures excessively even they seek the right ones. Others desire the right kinds of pleasures to right amounts. Such people exhibit the character traits of temperance and self-control. Aristotle values this latter type of people most because he believes moderation is essential for a flourishing life.

According to Aristotle, one should beware of pleasure as a temptress because it can make him do bad things. On the other hand, insensitivity can undermine one's flourishing, as he is not enjoying pleasures as much as he should. Thus it is the misdirected desire for pleasure that makes a man intemperate. In case of necessary pleasures, everyone enjoys food and sex but some not to the right degree. Similarly, one cannot be blamed for desiring money, gain, victory or honor but only for doing so to excess (Aristotle, "The Nicomachean Ethics" bk. 7).

Cersei and Jaime's incestuous relationship, the origin of their downfall, is a characteristic manifestation of *hubris* as it stands for misdirected desire and

disobedience to authority.<sup>24</sup> It is also an example of narcissism, which is closely associated with *hubris*. The twins' love for each other is the eroticized projection and extension of their self, the treasuring of their own flesh and blood over everything else. The identification is so strong that Jaime has never had another lover and Cersei substitutes him with their cousin Lancel during his absence in Season 2 (DeCoste 232). In Season 1 Episode 7, she tells Ned Stark:

“Jaime and I are more than brother and sister. We shared a womb. We came into this world together. We belong together.”

In Season 4 Episode 10, Cersei confronts her father about the relationship and says:

“I love my brother. I love my lover. People will whisper, they'll make their jokes. Let them! They're all so small I can't even see them. I only see what matters.”

After Bran's discovery of their relationship, Cersei and Jaime continue to commit *hamartia* through their acts of *hubris*. Believing they are superior to everyone else, the twins abuse their wealth and political power to protect themselves and their children. Their false sense of invulnerability is shown in Season 1 Episode 3, where Jaime says:

“The boy won't talk. And if he does I'll kill him. Him, Ned Stark, the King...the whole bloody lot of them, until you and I are the only people left in this world.”

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<sup>24</sup> In Westeros, incest is a vile sin strictly forbidden by the religion. The Faith condemns the marriage customs of the Targaryens, the former ruling royal house who wed brother to sister to keep their bloodlines pure.

The twins' *hubris* accelerates their downfall rather than preventing it. Cersei, who sees herself as a master strategist, overconfidently makes schemes to undermine her enemies without realizing the limitations of her human condition. Based on her hubristic desire for power, she makes rash and shortsighted decisions that end in calamity. Her presumptuousness results in retribution when her plans to destroy Tyrion and the Tyrells backfire catastrophically.

Contrary to Cersei, the hubristic Jaime is humbled after his journey with Brienne and the loss of his hand in Season 3. In Season 1, he is introduced as the shameless knight who is willing to go any length to protect himself and the few he loves. Arrogant and cynical, Jaime has a sense of superiority and a disregard for social customs and morality. Jaime's *hubris* can be clearly seen in Season 1 Episode 3, where he mocks the grief-stricken Jon Snow for joining the Night's Watch:<sup>25</sup>

“Give my regards to the Night's Watch. I'm sure it will be thrilling to serve in such an elite force. And if not, it's only for life.”

During his imprisonment in Season 2, Jaime loses his freedom and power but still has more to pay. In Season 3, his journey with Brienne has a profound effect on him. Brienne, the honorable and honest warrior, reminds Jaime who he was before gaining his reputation as the Kingslayer and Oathbreaker. She is “a living embodiment of the noble knight Jaime should have been and which he might become if he chooses an honorable path henceforth” (Vaught 103). Jaime acts heroically by saving Brienne from being raped but once again his *hubris* gets in the way of his better judgment. Thinking his clever use of words might save him; Jaime commits *hamartia* and tries to bribe Locke. He is blinded by his own certainty in himself and does not acknowledge that Locke has the upper hand.

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<sup>25</sup> The Night's Watch is a military brotherhood that defends Westeros against the enemies across the northern border of the continent. It is mostly composed of social outcasts such as criminals avoiding punishment, bastards and disgraced nobles.

According to actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, the loss of his sword hand forces Jaime to find who he really is. The understanding of people and morality, which have been repressed inside him since the death of King Aerys, is now coming to surface (Taylor 135). For instance, he sends Brienne off to finish her mission, which is finding and protecting Sansa Stark who goes missing after Joffrey's death. During Tyrion's trial, he sacrifices his future by agreeing Tywin's conditions in exchange for a promise on his brother's safety. The most noble and heroic act of Jaime occurs at the end of Season 4, when he saves Tyrion's life. It is a difficult choice for a man who is caught between loyalty for a brother he knows to be innocent and a sister whom he still loves.

Jaime is humbled after the loss of his hand yet this does not change the fact that he is, alongside Cersei, primarily responsible for the tragedy that befalls him and his family. Both characters prepare their own doom through their own agency and the critical choices they make.

### **5.3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DOWNFALL**

Responsibility plays a central role in the change of fortune the tragic hero faces. According to Aristotle, human beings are differentiated from other animals by being an originating source of conduct and change. Man is the source and controller of what is in his power to do or not to do, and that makes him responsible. Praise or blame are given on account of things man is responsible for.

Aristotle makes a distinction between voluntary and compelled actions. He states that a voluntary action has its originating source within the agent, who has power to do or refrain from doing. On the other hand, something is compelled if the origin is external to the agent. The agent contributes nothing in this case, such as a sailor who is carried off by the wind and does nothing. Nothing involuntary occurs here because the person undergoes a change but does not act at all. Aristotle is not interested in this situation as his theory of the voluntary and involuntary deals with

action. The situation of the sailor would be involuntary if he struggled to stay afloat yet found himself on a deserted island. He could have tended the tiller and reefed the sails, and these actions would be voluntary. Still, ending up on a deserted island is involuntary because the sailor is forced by an external cause (Cooper 281).

Aristotle also analyzes the situation of an agent who acts under coercion. For instance, high seas can coerce a captain to ditch the cargo in order to save the lives of those on the ship. Here Aristotle questions if the action is voluntary or not and if the origin is internal or external to the agent. He decisively argues that all cases of coerced action are voluntary. These are different from actions that are compelled, as the originating cause is internal to the agent. When the captain throws the cargo overboard, he knows what he is doing and does it for a reason. His action is unwished yet voluntary as he makes a decision that he is responsible for. Basically, Aristotle's theory of voluntary action is rooted in the causal condition, which defends that we are responsible for what we cause to happen.

In a tragedy, the tragic hero faces alternatives, chooses wrongly, commits *hamartia* and consequently experiences downfall. His choice arises from internal sources such as his passions, interests, past judgments and so on. Thus he acts voluntarily when he makes the choice that eventually leads to calamity. For Aristotle, the tragic hero is responsible for the choices he makes because unlike a child, he possesses the full power of practical reasoning and knows what is right or wrong.

Based on Aristotle's theory, both Cersei and Jaime Lannister are responsible for their voluntary actions constituting the downfall. As the act that initiates a causal chain of events, Jaime's push of Bran is voluntary and also coerced. Jaime, like the captain of the ship caught in storm, has to make a critical decision at that moment. He can take a huge risk and let Bran go but this would put his, Cersei's and their children's lives in great danger. Hence the situation coerces him to choose the brutal way. As Lena Headey says, "The Lannisters are survivors. If they have to play a sneaky hand, they do, and they don't see anything wrong with that" (Cogman 120). Another coerced situation occurs in Season 6 when Tommen forbids the practice of

trial by combat. Knowing she has no chance of acquittal in court, Cersei is cornered and forced to make another critical decision. She voluntarily blows up the courtroom to save her own life and destroy her enemies at once. However, what Cersei does afterwards is not a result of coercion. She chooses to torture Septa Unella when Tommen needs her most, which triggers his suicide. Therefore, Cersei's not one but two voluntary acts put responsibility on her for Tommen's death.

Other main acts that cause the downfall are not coerced. Jaime deliberately chooses to bribe Locke and prepares his own doom. He has two options lying before him after saving Brienne: keeping silent or trying to secure his own release. Thinking he can easily outwit Locke, he makes a wrong judgment. His *hubris* prevents him from realizing that Locke is actually a very smart man playing stupid. Therefore, Jaime is responsible for pushing Locke's boundaries and bringing about his own downfall.

Like Jaime, Cersei triggers her own downfall through her voluntary, non-coerced actions. Blinded by her hate for Tyrion and the Tyrells, she makes crucial and risky decisions that lead to calamity. She is the one who manipulates Tyrion's trial, and the injustice in the court provokes Tyrion to demand a trial by combat. Her insistence on destroying Tyrion makes her partly responsible for the deaths of Tywin and Myrcella, which are the unintended consequences of the combat. Cersei also deliberately chooses to make an alliance with the radical High Sparrow without thinking its further dangerous consequences. So certain of herself, she voluntarily gives authority to religious fundamentalists and seals her own fate. She goes through a terrible ordeal when the High Sparrow accuses her of committing incest with Lancel, another act she is responsible for.

Cersei and Jaime's voluntary actions, whether coerced or not, make it clear that the tragic hero is not a passive victim of circumstances. In other words, cases of bad luck are not the stuff of tragedy. This chapter has demonstrated that the noble and prosperous twins experience a change from good to bad fortune due to their own acts of *hamartia*. As Aristotelian tragic heroes, both are responsible for the calamity they

face because it stems from their deliberate and hubristic choices. At first, the twins may seem as villainous characters because they commit cruel acts that are not easy to pardon. However, neither Cersei nor Jaime does evil for its own sake. They are not preeminently vicious as there is a rationale behind their worst acts, which is the protection and survival of their family. However, these acts miss the mark and unintentionally bring the decimation of the Lannisters. Therefore, the twins reflect the Aristotelian tragic hero who experiences a downfall due to his own agency.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation has been to interpret Cersei and Jaime Lannister's plotlines in terms of the *Poetics*. Reflecting Aristotle's theory of tragedy, the twins' downfall displays how both characters end up in misery due to their own agency. As tragic heroes, the noble and prosperous Lannister twins intend to protect themselves and their family but their acts bring unintended and fatal consequences. This change from good to bad fortune occurs through a chain of surprising yet plausible incidents, fitting into Aristotle's conception of a well-organized tragic plot.

As stated in Chapter 1, the twins' tragic downfall is an imitation that depicts the darker side of human nature and society. This allows the audience to relate to the plot even it takes place in a medieval fantasy universe. Both Cersei and Jaime's actions originate from their very human flaws, which add realism to the narrative. They are driven by a false sense of entitlement and the excessive fear of losing power. Their worst acts, including deception, violence and murder, are part of the world we live in today.

After their incestuous relationship is discovered, Cersei and Jaime use all their means for the survival and protection of their family. However, events turn in the opposite direction and the twins undergo an ordeal. Their downfall consists pitiable and fearful moments, particularly Jaime's loss of his sword hand and Cersei's walk of atonement. These incidents would be undesirable and repulsive to witness in real life but the audience can derive pleasure from seeing them in the context of a tragedy, due to the intelligible structure of the plot.

Chapters 2 and 3 have emphasized the significance Aristotle attaches to the plot. Both Lannister plotlines employ the qualities Aristotle looks for in a tragedy. They are complex yet organized according to the law of probability or necessity. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the incidents of the downfall follow each other as cause and effect. Hence even the most shocking ones, the moments of reversal and recognition, are not contrary to reason. They add up logically and bring calamity step

by step. As a moment of recognition, Bran's discovery of the incestuous relationship leads to a huge war, with catastrophic consequences for the Lannisters. Despite all their attempts to protect their family, the twins make wrong yet understandable choices that bring calamity and suffering. They eventually lose their children, father, power and dignity in moments of unanticipated reversal.

Chapter 4 has emphasized the moments of reversal and recognition in both plotlines, as they are most able to excite pity and fear according to Aristotle. For him, the catharsis of these two emotions provides the distinctive pleasure of tragedy. The chapter has questioned how to interpret catharsis, a term heavily discussed among commentators. Based on Jonathan Lear's analysis, it has argued that catharsis results from understanding the organizational structure of a tragedy. In other words, seeing a tragedy can become a pleasurable experience once the audience comprehends the causal sequence of incidents. The chapter has shown that the relationships of cause and effect in the Lannister plotlines can produce a cathartic pleasure.

The Lannister twins experience a downfall because they do not foresee the long-term and life-changing consequences of their actions. Their rash decisions, especially Jaime's push of Bran and Cersei's political alliances, miss the mark and cause more harm than good. Their plotlines show how they contribute to their own misfortune through these acts of *hamartia*. As argued in Chapter 5, the twins commit *hamartia* because of their *hubris* and false sense of invulnerability. Both voluntarily exploit their power regardless of others. They deliberately make bold, risky choices and thus are responsible for the unintended yet catastrophic consequences. Still, the chapter has argued that Cersei and Jaime are not entirely vicious individuals. They commit horrific deeds but unlike villainous characters, they never do evil for its own sake. Therefore, both are in accord with Aristotle's description of the tragic hero. They are noble and prosperous figures who are neither eminently just nor eminently vicious and who experience a downfall due to some *hamartia*.

In conclusion, the two Lannister plotlines correspond to Aristotle's understanding of tragedy because they exhibit how the twins cause their own

downfall in a shocking yet causal chain of events. This main argument of the dissertation makes it clear that bad luck is not the stuff tragedy. As Aristotle points out, agency plays a central role in the change of fortune the tragic hero faces. Hence Cersei and Jaime Lannister face a downfall essentially because of their own actions. The organization of the plot makes their actions intelligible. Therefore, from the first episode of the series to the end of Season 6, the audience can derive pleasure from understanding why the downfall occurs. Mainly, Cersei and Jaime Lannister's tragedy displays what Aristotle values most in this particular mode of imitation: the intelligible representation of human action and its unintended consequences.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

As the analysis in this dissertation is limited to Seasons 1-6 of the TV series, it can be further developed with the addition of Seasons 7 and 8.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Aristotle's theory of tragedy can be used to analyze the plotlines of certain other characters in *Game of Thrones*. An interesting example might be Theon Greyjoy, who also faces calamity because of his own critical actions. The theory can be adapted to other TV series and movies with characters that experience a similar downfall. Such research allows for the integration of classical philosophy with television and film studies.

Essentially, further study in this area can permit a better understanding of the dramatic representation of human action and life in cinema. It can demonstrate how Aristotle's ideas, offered more than two thousand years ago, still stay relevant to our understanding of fictional television today. This will highlight the timelessness of tragedy as well as the precariousness of human condition.

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<sup>26</sup> The eight and final season of the series is expected to premiere in 2019.

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