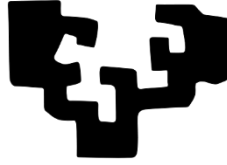


eman ta zabal zazu



Universidad  
del País Vasco

Euskal Herriko  
Unibertsitatea

THE FALL OF CHIVALRY:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF KNIGHTHOOD IN GEORGE R. R. MARTIN'S *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*

Laura Ciriza Martin

Estudios Ingleses – 2019-2020

Tutora: Margarita Giménez Bon

Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana y Traducción e Interpretación

“Honey, you're familiar, like my mirror years ago  
Idealism sits prison, chivalry fell on its sword  
Innocence died screaming; honey ask me, I should know  
I slithered here from Eden just to sit outside your door.”

—FROM EDEN, HOZIER

## ABSTRACT

Traditional ideas of knighthood and chivalry are often related to the knight's duty to his overlord—be it a lord or a king—his devotion to his beliefs and to courtly virtues—especially in the courtly love literature. According to previous research, these three elements are found in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, making it the groundwork upon which every subsequent work of literature including any kind of representation of knights is based. This dissertation considers an analysis of knighthood in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* in opposition to those ideals found in Malory. To do so, I examine how knighthood is defined across the five currently published books of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, and focus on how it applies to the knights that are considered to be without equal in the Seven Kingdoms, both for their skills and their virtue; that is, the knights of the Kingsguard. I contend that while the foundation upon which the vows of every Westerosi knight are built is one of pure virtue and unquestionable honour, the practice of those vows—and thus, the representation of knighthood across the series—is, at the same time, deeply flawed. This dissertation shows that this flaw in the very code of knighthood in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is predominantly found in the figure of the members of the Kingsguard. By doing this, Martin ironically appears to turn around an institution that is supposed to be the culmination of everything a knight should aspire to be. Therefore, the finest knights in the Seven Kingdoms, tasked with the protection of the royal family, turn into a representation of the ultimate corruption of both the ideals of knighthood and knighthood in itself.

KEYWORDS: *A Song of Ice and Fire*, knight, knighthood, Kingsguard.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .....	5
1.1 THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING.....	7
2. THE SEVEN-POINTED STAR .....	12
3. KNIGHTS AND KNIGHTHOOD .....	15
4. THE WHITE SWORDS .....	17
4.1. THE SWORD OF THE MORNING .....	21
4.2. THE KINGSLAYER .....	22
5. CONCLUSION .....	24

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I aim to analyse the idea of knighthood as represented in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-). Indeed, I shall argue that, in his knights, Martin presents the ideal of knighthood as something impossible to uphold. In order to do that, I will focus on the Westerosi<sup>1</sup> order of the Kingsguard<sup>2</sup> and on the knights that form it. Therefore, I will first present the literary background and literary tradition that influenced *A Song of Ice and Fire*. As the literary background could become too much to handle—both for its depth and for its complexity—for a dissertation such as this one, I shall mainly make reference to Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485), taking a close look not only to his representation of knighthood but also to how his knights embody those ideals. Secondly, I will explain the ideals of knighthood represented in Martin's work and their origin. Indeed, the understanding of the beginning of knighthood in Westerosi culture is important to comprehend its importance in Westerosi society. Thus, thirdly, I shall dive into the analysis of the Kingsguard, to which paramount knights are said to belong, by focusing on several of its members. In this context, I will explain how the knights of the Kingsguard are, if not in direct opposition to the knighthood ideals in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, at least, struggling to uphold them.

First, we must understand that modern understanding of what knighthood is and what chivalry represents comes both from historical medieval times and from the literary record of the Middle Ages. In origin, the term *chivalry* meant 'horsemanship', from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Old French word *chevalier* and, in turn, from Medieval Latin *caballarius* (*Etymonline.com*). *Chevalier*, which was originally used to describe "a man of aristocratic standing, and probably of noble ancestry, who is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of heavy cavalryman and who has been through certain rituals that make him what he is" (Keen 1) evolved and changed during the Middle Ages. In turn, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, chivalry started to be used to refer to the moral code of behaviour followed by the ideal knight in the chivalric romance literature, which became popular during the 12<sup>th</sup> century and which "transformed the knight from a mere warrior into an idealized figure" (Saul 38). In any case, the fact was that knights were meant to act in a chivalrous manner in any aspect of

---

<sup>1</sup> Westerosi: belonging to Westeros, which is one of the four known continents in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Most of the area of Westeros is covered by a kingdom known as the Seven Kingdoms.

<sup>2</sup> Kingsguard: the protectors of the king and the royal family.

their lives, be it love, war or religion. Moreover, due to the Holy Crusades, war and religion became entangled and inseparable in time.

Furthermore, the combination of story and song in knightly tradition caused knighthood to become something deeply idealistic. These knights would have to face different challenges and trials in order to prove themselves capable before their king and before God, since they had sworn allegiance to both of them. What's more, once those trials were overcome, once they had successfully avoided temptation, these knights became the epitome of righteousness, something to be imitated. Since chivalry was present in literature for several centuries that meant that it was forced to evolve with the changing social and political climate, especially since it was present at court, which was the centre of power at the time. Naturally, it was in court that the first changes happened when it came to the chivalric nature of the loyalty of knights. Instead of the knights being loyal only to God and to the king, they now had someone else to whom they owed their loyalty—that is, their ladies. By this point, “[b]esides being able to hew his enemies apart, the knight had to sigh like a furnace (and, most important, to be seen to do it) for his lady love” (Rudorff 116). This change meant the foundation for courtly love and a new era to the chivalric tradition.

The origin of courtly love can be traced back to Ovid, a poet living in Rome during the reign of Emperor Augustus, and wrote several poems—*The Art of Love*, *The Cure of Love* and *Amours*—that dealt with the subject of love. In these works, which represented a flirtation between two people that was not to be taken seriously, the love relations happened out of marriage, and are often not intended as monogamous. Indeed, the concept that “[l]ove is a kind of warfare, and every lover is a soldier” (Capellanus 5) that influenced the conception of courtly love, was first found in Ovid's work. Nevertheless, the term ‘courtly love’ appeared for the first time in an essay written by Gaston Paris in 1883. Among other things, courtly love is mainly considered, in literature, to be an “elaborate literary and/or cultural game—that is, an art of love” (Morgan 163). This practice of courtly love first originated in the Duchy of Aquitaine, in the southwest of France, and the troubadours were in charge of writing and singing the chivalric poems. Eleanor of Aquitaine then brought those ideals to the court of France, when she married the French king and became Queen of France, then to the English Court, after divorcing the French king and becoming Queen of England. Actually, the troubadours, in their songs, considered the ideal lady to be one of high status, who would be able to hold and

keep the household when her husband was away—to the Crusades, perhaps—then keep that strength and power once he got back, dominating both him and those around her. One could argue that Eleanor of Aquitaine herself was the inspiration for such poems, since she—who had been wife to one king, then left him for another, then ruled the Duchy of Aquitaine on her own—represented that very idea of a lady (Castor, 405). Due to this, most works in the courtly love tradition would have the knight being faced with several tasks in order to please his lady. But, in the end, the desired lady would be—like a dream—out of his reach. Moreover, in courtly love tradition, the lady in question would be praised for her power to inspire goodness on his lover, even while behaving in a distant manner with his intended, almost as if with cruelty (Morgan 164-165).

We must take into account, though, that these two faces of chivalry—the warrior knight who served his lord and the courtly knight devoted to his lady—were not perpetuated in the very same way. While the former was present in both literature and real courtly life, the latter was mostly present in literary works. This caused a clear divide between what a knight was and what a knight was believed to be due to literature. This new concept of knighthood dashed with a romantic element is what we find in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

### 1.1 THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

*Le Morte D'Arthur*, written in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century by Sir Thomas Malory, during the beginning of the demise of the concept of the knight, is the most complete and known work from the Middle Ages revolving around the tale of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. In his work, Malory presents a chivalric portrait of King Arthur's court in which the knights quest in the name of chivalry, are fiercely loyal to their king, and honour their ladies. The chivalric code present in this literature work

offered ideals of behaviour, and it was thus impossible to attain. One could aspire to perfection, but attainment of perfection is ever elusive. Further, from its inception, the chivalric code was fraught with complications and ambiguities that test the knight who strives to abide the rules (Jamison 11).

This conflict between an unattainable perfection and the actual practice of chivalry, especially when related to courtly love, is represented in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, and while the book is, in turn, made out of several books depicting different

yet interlacing stories, the most relevant ones are certainly Lancelot, Gareth and Tristram. It is important to notice the order in which these knights' stories appear in Malory's work.

The first knight to be mentioned is Lancelot in 'The Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot Du Lake'. This tale is a perfect blend of traditional chivalry literature and courtly love, since it shows Lancelot's devotion to King Arthur and his loyalty to Queen Guenivere. The combination of these two qualities—his loyalty to both king and lady—makes Lancelot into the embodiment of knighthood. Furthermore, throughout this tale he is shown to possess great martial prowess, making him stand apart from every other knight in King Arthur's court. This first part of Lancelot's tale serves to show his code of honour, to let the reader know that Lancelot believes knights must abide by that code and to let themselves be led by a higher calling every knight should aspire to achieve—which he does (Benson 91). It is also meant to establish Lancelot's relationship with Queen Guenivere and how the love he bears her "[in] loving Guenivere from a distance and in performing all his great deeds in her honour, Lancelot remains a truly chivalrous knight, loyal to his lord, his oath of knighthood, and his lady" (Kennedy 112). In this moment, then, Lancelot is set apart from every other knight, since he fits into the high standard of a perfect knight.

After Lancelot's tale, we find the story of Gareth in 'The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney'. In a way, Gareth's story is the proverbial rags to riches story. At the beginning of his tale, Gareth is introduced not as one of King Arthur's knights, but as the king's guest, and lives with the kitchen staff, uncaring of what others might think of it. In fact, he even dismisses Lancelot's and Gawain's interest in his fighting skills. When, a year after Gareth's arrival at the castle, Lady Lyonet arrives asking for someone who would rescue her sister, Lyones, Gareth asks King Arthur to allow him to go on this quest and help the lady. The king, who owes Gareth this favour, agrees. Furthermore, after defeating Kay and Lancelot to prove he is ready for the quest, Gareth reveals his true identity to Lancelot. In truth, Gareth is no common man, but the son of King Lot and Queen Morgause, which makes him brother to Gawain. The fact that he had hidden this truth, and chosen to work in the kitchens and then prove his skill and worth in order to be knighted instead of using his family for it, is one of the first displays of Gareth's humility. After this revelation, Lancelot knights him. Nevertheless, Lady Lyonet still does not find Gareth worthy of the title or of having given the task of saving her sister. Indeed, during their journey, she does nothing but demerit his winning against the foes they encounter



and even comes to cheer on those foes, since she would be rid of Gareth. In spite of this, Gareth claims that “[she] may say what [she] will” (Malory 127), showing not only his patience in the face of the lady’s scorn, but also his determination to see the lady rescued and his humility in how he approaches the matter. Both of these are examples of his chivalric nature. Moreover, at every turn Gareth is seen to show mercy to his enemies and devotion to the lady he is to protect, reinforcing his perpetuation of courtly love. When he finally manages to rescue Lyones, though, the lady is cold towards him, showing none of the gratitude and love he expected. Therefore, Gareth must choose if he decides to accept her as she is, or refuse her. The choice is all but made for him when the lady decides to test him, assuming the identity of another lady who shows interest in him and makes him forget there had been another woman he was already committed to. Gareth falls for Lady Lyones’ new identity, even kissing her many times (Malory 151) and it is then that she reveals her true identity. Instead of finding the revelation shocking or feeling horrified for Gareth’s unfaithfulness—since he had broken his loyalty towards Lyones in loving someone else—both lovers feel happy about the situation and decide to consummate their love before they are even married. After this, Gareth’s tale forsakes the courtly love narrative and goes back to a previous version of chivalry, with a great tournament being held to show the knights’ strength, and while the ending of his tale is a happy one with his marriage to his lady, it is not one in which the ideals of knighthood prevail. Gareth’s forsaking of his lady, the one he had fought to rescue and had sworn to protect, for another woman due to his lady’s cold attitude towards him shows a break in his code. Even if he and Lady Lyones marry, the fact that Gareth fell for her feigned identity in the first place portrays a knight that, for a moment at least, was disloyal to the oath he had made.

The next tale, ‘The First and the Second Book of Ser Tristram de Lyonesse’, portraying the story of Tristram, which begins with showing your Tristram’s merciful nature in the sparing of his stepmother, who had tried to murder him. Afterwards, Tristram becomes trained in arms and shows great skill in the area of chivalry. This is seen when his uncle asks him to fight against a knight none of his knights would fight, and Tristram proves his martial prowess by defeating him. Notwithstanding, Tristram mostly shines apart from Lancelot and Gareth in that, as he himself says, his fighting is done in order to bring prestige to himself (Malory 178). Up until this point, Tristram excels at traditionally knighthood values—martial prowess, great feats and an honourable attitude—and it is not

until he meets La Belle Isode that he is introduced to courtly love. The two of them fall in love and Tristram even comes to win a tournament in her honour. In spite of this, Tristram is forced to flee the country and he does not again see Isode until his uncle, King Mark, sends Tristram to fetch her, as he intends to make her his wife. Their fate is sealed, though, when they drink a love potion that had been meant for Isode and the king, a fact later on proven by Isode's writing to Queen Guenivere of how "there be within this land but four lovers, and that is Sir Lancelot and Dame Guenivere, and Sir Tristram and Queen Isode" (Malory 201). This parallel between the two great romances in Malory's work is, I believe, drawn in order to show how these stories are mirrors of each other. Indeed, Tristram is seen to care more about himself, his honour and his pride than he does about Isode, as he claims to have been shamed when she is taken, instead of crying for the danger she is surely in. Therefore, this shows how Tristram's reasons for following the path of knighthood are filled with personal interest, instead of genuine will to become an ideal knight. Moreover, when Tristram chooses to marry another woman—also called Isode, as if he were trading the white swan for the dark one—Lancelot calls him out on his forsaking of La Belle Isode. Even as Tristram claims he is not being untruthful to her, he is doing just that in the eyes of Lancelot (Malory 207-208). The shame he feels upon having been reprimanded makes Tristram try to regain his honour by committing chivalric deeds, once again using chivalry as a means to an end. By the time Tristram meets La Belle Isode again, it is absolutely clear that Tristram's code of loyalty has always been angled to achieving his own purposes. While he justifies his marrying another woman, seeing nothing disloyal in it because he still claims to love La Belle Isode, he considers La Belle Isode a traitor to him as he finds she had written a letter to another knight (Malory 212). This event causes Tristram to abandon chivalry altogether, as he vanishes into the wilderness, where he lives with the animals and plays the harp. While that is not the end of Tristram's tale, it represents an unmovable change in his love story with La Belle Isode.

By this point in Malory's work we find that Gareth has deserted courtly love for another kind of love he has found and suits him better. Tristram has not only twisted the meaning knighthood in a way that he could use to rationalise his actions, but has also broken with what knighthood represented by using his knightly deeds only as a way of exalting himself, and not because they were the honourable thing to do. Throughout both 'The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney' and 'The Book of Sir Tristram of Lyonesse', though, Lancelot has appeared as the voice of reason and the epitome of what a knight and a

champion of knighthood should be. Notwithstanding, the order in which these tales are told, bringing Lancelot back into the story at the end—and the parallel drawn by La Belle Isode in between herself and her lover and Queen Guenivere and Lancelot—suggests a turning point in the knight’s story.

In ‘The Tale of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenivere’, Lancelot, who has just returned to court, must handle the fact that, while in practice he does all he can to honour God’s glory, in his mind he is consumed by Guenivere. Indeed, in order to avoid Guenivere, Lancelot leaves court again, only to return when Guenivere’s honour comes into question and she needs someone to champion her. Lancelot comes to understand his love for Guenivere to be a result of his loyalty to Arthur; therefore, in his mind, his needing to protect the queen is only a way of protecting the king. Despite this, Lancelot still persists on avoiding Guenivere, to the point where he wears another lady’s favour in a tourney, and gets harmed in it, as if the betrayal to his lady had been in need of divine punishment. In this moment, the fight that brews in Lancelot is up to a scalding point. When the queen is later, again, in need of rescuing and Lancelot sets out to save her, he realises that his love and loyalty for Guenivere have made him unable to love anyone else. That is, in itself, a betrayal to Arthur, since he is Lancelot’s king and Guenivere is his wife. This realisation shakes the very foundation Lancelot’s beliefs are built upon, as he comes to reject every loyalty but the one he owes Guenivere, distorting knighthood to rationalise his new belief in the same way Tristram did before him. Thus begins the fall of both Camelot and chivalry, as the tale of Lancelot comes to an end with the collapse of knighthood and the ideal of the perfect knight.

Therefore, the conclusion that can be drawn from Malory’s work is that, “[r]ead dialogically, *Le Morte D’Arthur* is not simply a tragedy of characters; it is a tragedy of ideas. Chivalry is not intrinsically evil, nor do the best characters fundamentally fail to live up to some true code; rather, chivalry is noble but fatally flawed, fatally unstable, and so too must be its practitioners (Hodges 2)”. That does not mean that the knights themselves are at fault for their inability to keep to knighthood’s standards, but rather that knighthood in itself is built in a way that proves unable for any individual to attain and uphold.

Such is the case, also, in George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which represents a society that might have easily been influenced by Malory’s work—as the

works representing kings and knights often are—since both seem to hold their characters to certain standards that happen to be, in the end, the cause for their fall.

## 2. THE SEVEN-POINTED STAR

In George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the concept of knighthood is believed to have arrived to Westeros due to the crossing of the Andals<sup>3</sup> from Essos<sup>4</sup>, fleeing from the expansion of the Valyrian Freehold<sup>5</sup> in an attempt to keep their freedom and their faith. Therefore, the choice of many Andals was to cross the Narrow Sea<sup>6</sup> to reach and settle a new land. When arriving upon Westeros, though, and finding that the First Men<sup>7</sup> would not give up their land freely, a war ensued that lasted for decades. In the end, while the First Men were more numerous than the Andals, they were unable to push their forces back, and all the southern kingdoms of Westeros fell to the Andals, as well as the Iron Islands to the west. Despite this, the North<sup>8</sup> managed to keep the invaders at bay and maintained their customs and faith, keeping the Old Gods<sup>9</sup> while the rest of Westeros was forced to accept the Faith of the Seven<sup>10</sup> (*The World of Ice and Fire* 40-44).

The long duration of this conquest made the first Andal knights zealous to the point they would carve a seven-pointed star on their skin to show their devotion to the Seven “and swore by their blood and the Seven not to rest until they had hewn their kingdoms from the Sunset Lands” (*The World of Ice and Fire* 41). Indeed, they believed—if not from the beginning, at least by this point—that it was their Gods given duty to conquer and settle Westeros, and to spread the Faith of the Seven, bringing any unbeliever into the Faith by whatever means necessary.

Furthermore, areas in which Andal culture was never assimilated, such as the North and the Iron Islands<sup>11</sup>, do not share this devotion and do not consider knighthood to be important to show a warrior's strength or honour. Notwithstanding, the North possesses a cavalry that would, due to their loyalty and fierceness, as well as martial

---

<sup>3</sup> Andals: one of the three major ethnic groups in Westeros; originated in Essos.

<sup>4</sup> Essos: the largest of the four known continents in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

<sup>5</sup> Valyrian Freehold: a great territory that spanned much of the continent of Essos.

<sup>6</sup> Narrow sea: the sea separating Westeros and Essos.

<sup>7</sup> First Men: one of the three major ethnic groups in Westeros and the first to set foot on the continent.

<sup>8</sup> The North: one of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. Takes up the northern half of the continent.

<sup>9</sup> Old Gods: the faith of the First Men.

<sup>10</sup> Faith of the Seven: the faith of the Andals. A polytheist faith that praises seven deities.

<sup>11</sup> Iron Islands: one of the regions of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros.

prowess, be the equivalent of a southern knight, though lacking its prestige (*A Game of Thrones* 687-693). At the same time, one would be able to find knights on the southern region of the North, since there are several noble houses there that keep the Faith of the Seven and, therefore, are influenced by southern customs. On the other hand, while the Iron Islands were invaded by the Andals, the Faith of the Seven never managed to take root there, and the Ironborn<sup>12</sup> managed to keep their worship of the Drowned God. That said, several Ironborn who were born in the mainland did manage to become knights.

Another exception would be Dorne, in the southmost part of Westeros. While House Martell—its ruling house—was of Andal blood in the beginning, since Andal invaders had founded it, that changed when Princess Nymeria of the Rhoynar<sup>13</sup> landed in Dorne with her people and her ten thousand ships, fleeing the dragonlords of Valyria (*A Feast for Crows* 843). Princess Nymeria married Mors Martell and helped him conquer the entirety of Dorne—which was at the moment divided into warring kingdoms—uniting it under the rule of House Nymeros Martell. Nymeria’s arrival meant a change in the customs of the united Dorne, since Rhoynish tradition now coexisted with Andal customs. While this change did not erase the influence of the Faith of the Seven in the region, however, it did culturally alienate Dorne from the rest of Westeros. Therefore, even though there have historically been great knights of dornish descent—such as Prince Lewyn Martell and Ser Arthur Dayne—it is not necessary for a warrior to seek knighthood. In this sense, Dorne is more akin to the North than to the other Westerosi kingdoms that keep the Faith (*The World of Ice and Fire* 51-53).

Moreover, the clearest example of the tight relation between the Faith and knighthood is found on the creation of the Faith Militant in the early years of Andals rule. The Faith Militant answered to the High Septon—the head of the Faith, whom they believed spoke with the voice of the Seven—and was his to command as he saw fit. It was composed of two orders: the Poor Fellows and the Warrior’s Sons. While the former consisted of commoners who travelled across Westeros in pilgrimage to spread the word of the Seven, the latter was an order of anointed knights (*The World of Ice and Fire* 79). “Most had been household knights or hedge knights [before joining the military order], but a handful were of higher birth” (*A Feast for Crows* 764 ). Unlike every other knight,

---

<sup>12</sup> Ironborn: the people of the Iron Islands.

<sup>13</sup> Rhoynar: one of the three major ethnic groups of Westeros, originally from the banks of the Rhoyme in Essos.

who might still keep land and hold titles, the Warrior's Sons left their previous lives behind when they took their vows, and became the High Septon's swords, first and foremost. Those first Warrior's Sons are said to have been extremely devout, to the point that they would consider anyone who disagreed with any of the doctrines of the Faith to be an enemy in need of being eliminated (*A Feast for Crows* 602-603).

Their devotion for the Seven was so great that when King Aenys Targaryen<sup>14</sup> declared that his eldest daughter would marry his eldest son—as was usual among Valyrian royalty—the Faith Militant rebelled against him, with the Warrior's Sons managing to drive the king and his family out of the capital. Following the death of the king and the coming of the throne of his brother, King Maegor Targaryen<sup>15</sup>, the captain of the Warrior's Sons challenged his claim and the matter was agreed to be resolved in a trial by combat—seven men against seven men, to honour the Seven Gods. Once the battle was done, only King Maegor was left standing. This event caused the Faith Militant to lock themselves in the Sept in prayer, asking the Seven for guidance. After all, while the acts of House Targaryen<sup>16</sup> went against the doctrine of the Faith and allowing Maegor's rule would go against the High Septon's orders, if the Seven had granted Maegor victory in holy combat, then, surely, they must have considered him blessed. In the end, all that were in the Sept were executed and King Maegor set in place several laws that, on the one hand, outlawed the orders of the Faith Militant and, on the other, forbade holy men from carrying arms. Thus began the end of the Faith Militant, that would be officially and completely disbanded by his successor (*Fire and Blood* 70-71, 77).

Nevertheless, in spite of the Faith Militant and, most importantly, the Warrior's Sons becoming unlawful and, in the following decades, being regarded as something of the past, the close relationship between the Faith and the idea of knighthood that had begun with the first Andal wars was not only still latent in Westerosi society but it was also booming. The high regard with which knights were perceived—as protectors of everything that was good and instruments of the Seven—caused children all over Westeros to dream of becoming knights one day.

---

<sup>14</sup> Aenys I Targaryen: son of Aegon the Conqueror and Queen Rhaenys.

<sup>15</sup> Maegor I Targaryen: known as The Cruel, son of Aegon the Conqueror and Queen Visenya.

<sup>16</sup> House Targaryen: the only surviving family of the Valyrian Freehold, rulers of Westeros for 300 years.

### 3. KNIGHTS AND KNIGHTHOOD

Contrary to nobility titles and the ownership of land, knighthood is not something that can be inherited. In fact, for a son of a noble to be knighted without being able to fulfil the necessary requirements would not only be seen as a disgrace in the eyes of the Seven but would also bring dishonour and ridicule upon the house they belonged to. That means that while a knight could possibly knight another man in exchange for money or favours, such motives would bring dishonour upon him, and since honour is a very important part of Westerosi culture, that could mean ruin for any knight (Westeros.org).

Usually, for a man to be knighted, he must have first come of age, which in Westeros means that he must be over sixteen, but exceptional fighters might be granted knighthood sooner. This is the case with Ser Jaime Lannister who was knighted at just fifteen (*A Storm of Swords* 158), and of Daemon Blackfyre<sup>17</sup>, who was knighted at just twelve years of age (*The World of Ice and Fire* 164). It is also the case that young squires might be promised knighthood once they come of age after having proven themselves in battle (*A Clash of Kings* 911). Nevertheless, not every squire with enough skill to achieve knighthood must become a knight.

Most men are knighted after showing great prowess in tourneys (*A Clash of Kings* 908-909) or in battle, such as Ser Jaime Lannister (*A Storm of Swords* 158). That said, as we have already stated, knighthood is open only to those who follow the Faith of the Seven and, thus, there is a holy element to it. Indeed, there are several ceremonies that might be followed when anointing a new knight. Firstly, it is customary for the man who is to be knighted to stand vigil before the Warrior<sup>18</sup> the night before, as to offer himself to the Seven, with his sword and armour laid at the statue's feet (*A Feast for Crows* 176). At times, a man who might want to prove his humility to the Seven might leave the Sept<sup>19</sup> the next day barefoot, and walk that way to the place where he is to receive his knighthood (*A Clash of Kings* 911). Secondly, before the man is allowed to take his vows, a septon would anoint the man with the seven oils. If that were done by the High Septon, the newly made knight would be considered to be a man of great honour (*A Game of Thrones* 30). However, it is possible to forgo all of this when one is to be knighted before or after a

---

<sup>17</sup> Daemon Blackfyre: bastard son of Aegon the Unworthy of House Targaryen.

<sup>18</sup> The Warrior: one of the seven gods of the Faith.

<sup>19</sup> Sept: a place of worship of the Faith.

battle, as long as the knight speaks the knight-to-be's name and touches his sword to the man's right shoulder, alternating it as the vows are spoken. The knight's vows are, after all, the one part of the ceremony that is never allowed to be ignored, while everything else might be dismissed if the situation calls for it (*The Hedge Knight* 58). In a formal knighting ceremony the vows would be as it follows:

'In the name of the Warrior I charge you to be brave. In the name of the Father I charge you to be just. In the name of the Mother I charge you to defend the young and innocent. In the name of the Maid I charge you to protect all women...' (*The Hedge Knight* 58).

While those vows might differ in a less formal setting:

'[...] do you swear before the eyes of gods and men to defend those who cannot defend themselves, to protect all women and children, to obey your captains, your liege lord, and your king, to fight bravely when needed and do such other tasks as are laid upon you, however hard or humble or dangerous they may be?' (*A Storm of Swords* 540).

Once the man who is being knighted confirms that he will fulfil his oath, he is to rise as a knight (*A Storm of Swords* 540).

Overall, the one difference between a common man or an ordinary killer and a knight is the weight of those words a knight makes to the Seven when he is knighted. His very honour—and, thus, his place in the Westerosi society—are dependant of the upholding and fulfilling of those vows. That said, while there might be many men in Westeros who manage to become knights, very few of them achieve to join the brotherhood that is regarded as the epitome of knighthood. That is, the Kingsguard, who are the protectors of the royal family and are considered to be the finest knights in Westeros (*A Game of Thrones* 77).



#### 4. THE WHITE SWORDS

The Sworn Brotherhood of the Kingsguard was founded by Queen Visenya Targaryen<sup>20</sup> after an assassination attempt on King Aegon the Conqueror<sup>21</sup>, ten years after the Targaryen conquest of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. The queen used the Night's Watch<sup>22</sup> vows as inspiration when redacting the oath of the men of the Kingsguard, making them forsake all lands and titles in favour to their duty to the king. She also chose the knights that formed the first Kingsguard herself, picking seven knights to represent the seven kingdoms her brother ruled over and the seven gods of the Faith (*The World of Ice and Fire* 85-86), and bid them serve for life, in spite of age or mental and physical ailments (*A Storm of Swords* 855). Notwithstanding their inability to hold titles they bore before joining the Kingsguard, they can be granted certain titles, such as that of Hand of the King<sup>23</sup>.

“The first duty of the Kingsguard is to defend the king from harm or threat. The white knights [are] sworn to obey the king’s commands [...], to keep his secrets, counsel him when counsel [is] requested and keep silent when it [is] not, serve his pleasure and defend his name and honour” (*A Dance with Dragons*, 807). This means that it is the king’s choice to extend the protection of the Kingsguard to his family or to, instead, keep the Kingsguard for his own protection while choosing others to protect the royal family. At the same time, it is the king’s prerogative to grant the protection of the Kingsguard to a lover, a mistress or a bastard child (*A Dance with Dragons*, 807). In any case, since the queen is bound in holy matrimony to the king, the Kingsguard is also sworn to protect her, though not from the king himself (*A Feast for Crows* 331). That said, the members of the Kingsguard are sworn to never harm any of the members of the royal family (*The Hedge Knight* 61).

Nonetheless, there have been instances in which members of the Kingsguard have left one ruler for another, as it happened when Prince Jaehaerys Targaryen<sup>24</sup> challenged

---

<sup>20</sup> Visenya Targaryen: sister-wife of Aegon the Conqueror, mother of Maegor the Cruel.

<sup>21</sup> Aegon I Targaryen: known as the Conqueror. First Targaryen ruler of Westeros.

<sup>22</sup> Night's Watch: the brotherhood that holds the Wall, an immense fortification on the northern border of the Seven Kingdoms.

<sup>23</sup> Hand of the King: the main advisor of the King of the Seven Kingdoms and executor of his will.

<sup>24</sup> Jaehaerys I Targaryen: known as the Conciliator, son of Aenys I, grandson of Aegon the Conqueror.

Maegor Targaryen's claim for the Iron Throne<sup>25</sup>, and two of Maegor's Kingsguard abandoned him to join the prince (*The World of Ice and Fire* 100). Some even believe that it was a member of Maegor's own Kingsguard who killed him in order to end his tyranny (*A Storm of Swords* 496), though the most widespread notion is that he committed suicide. Most notoriously, during the war of succession known as the Dance of Dragons<sup>26</sup>, the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard broke the oath he had made to King Viserys I and, upon his death, supported the king's son instead of his firstborn daughter, the Princess Rhaenyra, as the king had wanted (*A Feast for Crows* 276). In both cases, those knights of the Kingsguard favoured one royal member over another, and in both cases they believed they were answering to their rightful king—or queen, in Rhaenyra's case. Therefore, as per the Kingsguard's oaths, they were guilty of nothing but following orders. After all, if one pays close attention to the vows made by the members of the Kingsguard, one might see that the oaths of defending and obeying the king without question, go before any other vow, and, certainly, take precedence over the vows sworn when those men first became knights.

Seeing this, I aim to prove that the clash between the vows of a knight and the oaths of a member of the Kingsguard makes it all but impossible for a knight to remain honourable—that is, to follow his knightly oaths—while also being a Kingsguard member. Indeed, I shall now analyse the behaviour of different members of the Kingsguard and how that behaviour applies to the vows they have sworn. In order to do this, since it would be too complex to delve into three hundred years of Westerosi history, I will mainly focus on several members of the Kingsguard of The Mad King, Aerys II Targaryen, the last of the dragon kings to sit the Iron Throne.

The members of King Aerys' Kingsguard took their oaths to their king to be of the upmost importance, and held them above all else, even when they were morally opposed to their actions. Indeed we see this reflected in the shame and regret of Ser Barristan Selmy, who in spite of regretting his role in allowing The Mad King's atrocities to continue without doing anything to prevent them, firmly believes that it was his sworn duty to do nothing, as per the Kingsguard's oath.

---

<sup>25</sup> Iron Throne: the seat of the King of the Seven Kingdoms, made of the swords of Aegon's bested foes, is a physical representation of the king's authority and power.

<sup>26</sup> Dance of Dragons: civil war for the Iron Throne between the children of Viserys I, Princess Rhaenyra and Prince Aegon.

[...] Jaehaerys had bestowed the white cloak on him when he was three-and-twenty, after he slew Maelys the Monstrous during the War of the Ninepenny Kings. In that same cloak he had stood beside the Iron Throne as madness consumed Jaehaerys' son Aerys. Stood, and saw, and heard, and yet did nothing. But no. That was not fair. He did his duty. [...] He had sworn his vows before the eyes of gods and men, he could not in honor go against them. (*A Dance with Dragons* 805).

It does not occur to Ser Barristan that before having sworn his oath as Kingsguard, he had been honour bound by his vows as a knight.

This same sentiment is present also in Ser Gerold Hightower, Lord Commander of King Aerys' Kingsguard, and in Ser Jonothor Darry's behaviour when Ser Jaime Lannister, the youngest member of the Kingsguard, struggled with the idea of doing nothing and standing in silence while allowing the king to perpetrate crimes against his people.

As for Lord Rickard, the steel of his breastplate turned cherry-red before the end, and his gold melted off his spurs and dripped down into the fire. [...] After, Gerold Hightower himself took me aside and said to me, "You swore a vow to guard the king, not to judge him." (*A Clash of Kings* 798)

[...] Jaime and Jon Darry had stood at guard outside [Queen Rhaella's] bedchamber whilst the king took his pleasure. "You're hurting me," they had heard Rhaella cry through the oaken door. [...] "We are sworn to protect her as well," Jaime had finally been driven to say. "We are," Darry allowed, "but not from him." (*A Feast for Crows* 330-331)

This stance, of course, is not all that surprising when taking into account the Kingsguard's oath. Their duty, as I already mentioned, is to protect and obey the king, to be silent unless counsel is requested from them, and to serve the king's pleasure (*A Dance with Dragons* 807). This is what the members of the Kingsguard are bound to uphold and prioritize, never mind their knighthood oath, personal judgement or morals. Indeed, in the case of Queen Rhaella, even if the Kingsguard, as seen, are also sworn to protect her, since she is part of the royal family, they are first bound to protect and obey the king who forbids them to protect her if he is the one causing her harm. At the same time, this is in

clear opposition of the knighthood oath to “defend those who cannot defend themselves” (*A Storm of Swords* 540). Therefore, as Ser Jaime Lannister states in *A Clash of Kings*, “no matter what you do, you’re forsaking one vow or the other” (796)

One must keep in mind, though, that this is something accepted in Westerosi society. In fact, Ned Stark<sup>27</sup>, who is said to be one of the most honourable characters in the series, never expresses any resentment against Ser Barristan Selmy for standing by and doing nothing as Ned’s father and brother were killed by the king without a trial; instead, he considers him one of the most honourable men he has ever known for keeping his vows. At the same time, Robert Baratheon<sup>28</sup> pardoned Ser Barristan for trying to kill him during the war, saying he would not kill a man for being loyal, and praised him for standing by King Aerys even though that meant he had to do nothing while innocent people suffered, because it was his duty to do so. Still, the fact that the flaws in both the Kingsguard members and in their oaths are accepted by Westerosi society, does not absolve the knight from them. After all, the vows of knighthood are taken willingly, and the man who swears them accepts the duty and responsibility of upholding those vows and of standing up for those who cannot stand for themselves even if to do so meant their own death. Therefore, the use of obedience to the king in order to rationalise going against the oath of a knight buys into the idea that it is justified for men like Ser Meryn Trant<sup>29</sup> to hit and abuse someone like Sansa Stark<sup>30</sup> just because the king told them to do so, even if that went against a knight’s vows and against the moral code of Westerosi society.

Nevertheless, there are instances in which members of King Aerys’ Kingsguard have either subverted or outright gone against their vows to the king, and instead applied their own judgement in the face of the king’s injustice. The clearest example of this are Ser Arthur Dayne and Ser Jaime Lannister.

---

<sup>27</sup> Eddard Stark: Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North at the beginning of *A Game of Thrones*.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Baratheon: King of the Seven Kingdoms at the beginning of *A Game of Thrones*, leader of the rebellion that ended the Targaryen royal line, in the eyes of the Faith father of Joffrey, Myrcella and Tommen.

<sup>29</sup> Ser Meryn Trant: a member of the Kingsguard during the reigns of Joffrey I Baratheon and Tommen I Baratheon.

<sup>30</sup> Sansa Stark: daughter of Lord Eddard, a hostage in King’s Landing during the reign of King Joffrey.

#### 4.1. THE SWORD OF THE MORNING

The former, Ser Arthur Dayne, was to the Kingsguard what Sir Lancelot Du Lake was to Camelot—that is, the best knight there was. He carried the greatsword Dawn<sup>31</sup>, and heirloom of his family, that could only be bestowed to those of greatest martial prowess (*A Game of Thrones* 424), and was the closest and most trusted friend of Prince Rhaegar Targaryen<sup>32</sup>. He was regarded as a valiant and true knight and loved by the common folk. Indeed, when trying to apprehend the Kingswood Brotherhood, he paid the townsfolk for what he and his men consumed, and even took their grievances before the King Aerys. In the end, Ser Arthur defeated the Smiling Knight and brought peace to the Kingswood once more, earning the people’s trust for having fought for them (*A Feast for Crows* 645).

After the events of the tourney of Harrenhal<sup>3334</sup>, though, Ser Arthur Dayne proved that, in spite of being a man of honour and living by his knighthood vows, he had broken his oath as a member of the Kingsguard. Instead of standing by the king, protecting and obeying him, Ser Arthur left Harrenhal with Prince Rhaegar Targaryen, becoming his protector and answering to his orders alone. In this sense, seeing the descent into madness of King Aerys and the cruel punishments he would inflict in friends and foes alike, Ser Arthur might have weighed that Prince Rhaegar should instead become king. This way, he would have rationalised the situation to the point where he could apply his Kingsguard oath to Prince Rhaegar—that is, to the man he believed ought to be the actual king—and feel he was doing the honourable thing by it, instead of failing in his duty. While this situation was similar to that of the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard during the Dance of Dragons, it was not exactly the same, since Prince Rhaegar did not, in that moment, technically, hold the same right to the throne as his father.

Still, that change from answering to the commands of one man to following another did not help Ser Arthur stay in the path of a true knight. Indeed, he died at the

---

<sup>31</sup> Dawn: greatsword of House Dayne. Its wielder is given the title of Sword of the Morning.

<sup>32</sup> Rhaegar Targaryen: son of Aerys II Targaryen, known as the Last Dragon.

<sup>33</sup> Harrenhal: the largest castle in the Seven Kingdoms. A ruinous place since it was set afire during the Conquest, but still residence to House Whent.

<sup>34</sup> Tourney of Harrenhal: in which Prince Rhaegar named Lyanna Stark Queen of Love and Beauty, choosing her over his own wife. Soon after, Lyanna Stark went missing, presumably taken by the Prince. These events eventually lead to Robert’s Rebellion.

Tower of Joy<sup>35</sup>, holding and guarding Lyanna Stark<sup>36</sup> inside it by command of Prince Rhaegar, even after both the prince and the king had died. In this case, Ser Arthur Dayne subverted his Kingsguard oath in a way he believed would benefit the people he had sworn to protect as a knight, but ended up showing the same absolute loyalty to one ruler instead of another.

In spite of this, in transferring the object of his obedience from the king to the prince, Ser Arthur shows that there is possibility for the members of the Kingsguard to find loopholes in their oath when weighting that their king's orders go against their knighthood oath of defending those in need.

#### 4.2. THE KINGSLAYER

The latter, Ser Jaime Lannister, became a member of the Kingsguard at the age of fifteen, becoming the youngest knight in the history of the Seven Kingdoms to achieve that honour (*A Feast for Crows* 176). Once the deed was done, though, he soon discovered that King Aerys had only chosen him to be a member of the Kingsguard as an insult to Jaime's father. Not only that, but he also eventually grew disillusioned with the idea of being a member of the Kingsguard after being forced to witness King Aerys' madness and propensity to burn people alive. Furthermore, as I have mentioned before, this situation caused Ser Jaime to question the vows he had sworn and the king he served, for if the king terrorised his people, then surely, it was Ser Jaime's knightly duty to put remedy to it. His brothers, and in special Ser Gerold Hightower, the Lord Commander, deterred him from this line of thought, always reminding him of his first and foremost duty to protect and obey the king. For a time, Ser Jaime followed their instructions, in spite of what he felt was the right thing to do, but when Robert's Rebellion<sup>37</sup> erupted, the situation changed. When the Sack of Kings Landing<sup>38</sup> happened, Ser Jaime was the only member of the Kingsguard left at the capital and, as such, was privy to King Aerys' decision to install barrels of wildfire<sup>39</sup> beneath the city, so that they may be lit in case of

---

<sup>35</sup> Tower of Joy: a tower in the Red Mountains of Dorne.

<sup>36</sup> Lyanna Stark: daughter of Lord Rickard Stark of Winterfell, sister of Ned Stark, betrothed to Robert Baratheon. Her abduction by Prince Rhaegar was the foundation for the uprising known as Robert's Rebellion.

<sup>37</sup> Robert's Rebellion: a rebellion against House Targaryen that resulted in the end of the Targaryen dynasty in the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros.

<sup>38</sup> Sack of King's Landing: the last instance of the rebellion, in which the capital was taken and sacked by the uprising army.

<sup>39</sup> Wildfire: very volatile substance which green flame can burn for a long time once set afire.

defeat. In the king's mind, "the traitors want[ed his] city but [he'd] give them naught but ashes" (*A Storm of Swords* 507). In this moment, Ser Jaime Lannister of the Kingsguard made the choice that would forever brand him as The Kingslayer: he slashed King Aerys Targaryen's throat.

With this act, which he considers his finest (*A Clash of Kings* 798), Ser Jaime broke his Kingsguard oath in a way that brands him as a man without honour for the whole of Westeros. Indeed, even his brother-in-arms, Ser Barristan Selmy, considers Ser Jaime a stain on the Kingsguard and unworthy of ever having worn their white cloak. In Ser Barristan's mind, after all, Ser Jaime should have done his duty, no matter what. Yet, the truth is that no one in Westeros but Ser Jaime, who guarded the king, knew of the king's plan to burn half a million people—that is, the population of King's Landing—alive. So, in breaking his Kingsguard oath and killing the king instead of protecting him, Ser Jaime chose to uphold his knighthood vow instead and, in doing so, became a man without honour. Furthermore, his actions are considered to be a terrible break of loyalty and speak to the fading reputation of the Kingsguard, since he betrayed their oath of swearing their lives to the king and honouring to defend him.

It is clear to see that Ser Jaime found himself in a difficult position, and in the end realised that loyalty to the king, which was a must for a member of the Kingsguard, was something he could not manage to uphold in the face of the king's insanity. Thus, while Ser Arthur Dayne proved that there was a way for a knight to apply his own moral code while maintaining his oaths; Ser Jaime represents the futility of keeping faith in certain scenarios. This line of reasoning is considered controversial amongst his brothers of the Kingsguard.

While serving under King Tommen Baratheon<sup>40</sup>, Ser Jaime, now Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, commands his sworn brothers to answer to his sister, the Queen Regent, and to his father, the King's Hand, as well as to him, their Lord Commander. This is something the other knights do not welcome lightly and they question why they should answer to anyone but the king, to which Ser Jaime replies:

---

<sup>40</sup> Tommen Baratheon: brother and heir to Joffrey I Baratheon, alleged son of Robert I Baratheon.

‘The king is eight. Our first duty is to protect him, which includes protecting him from himself. [...] If Tommen wants you to saddle his horse, obey him. If he tells you to kill his horse, come to me.’ (*A Storm of Swords* 921)

Even though this seems like an easy statement to understand, albeit one the other knights frown at, the logic behind it is quite simple for Ser Jaime, who served through the atrocities of the Mad King and ultimately decided to end him to protect the realm. That is, in protecting the young king from his worst instincts should there be any, the Kingsguard would ensure there was no need to protect the realm from the king in the future.

Ser Jaime best presents this dilemma of being both a knight and a member of the Kingsguard sworn to the king in a conversation with Catelyn Stark<sup>41</sup>, where, after having been accused of being an oathbreaker by her, he complains to her that

[t]hey make you swear and swear. Defend the king. Obey the king. Keep his secrets. Do his bidding. Your life for his. But obey your father. Love your sister. Protect the innocent. Defend the weak. Respect the Gods. Obey the laws. It’s too much. No matter what you do, you’re forsaking one vow or the other (*A Clash of Kings* 796).

As a result, Ser Jaime’s character and journey serve for Martin to show how, with so many demands placed upon a knight, whatever attempt they might make to keep one vow would inevitably force them to break another, leading to an unescapable situation filled with impossible choices.

## 5. CONCLUSION

George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*’s knights of the Kingsguard are, in essence, much like Ser Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*’s Knights of the Round Table. They were, in their origin, created in order to serve the king and, like any knight, to keep the realm safe.

The chivalric code found in Malory’s work is one that offered an ideal code of behaviour, making it virtually impossible for a knight to attain this ideal. The knight could

---

<sup>41</sup> Catelyn Stark: wife of Ned Stark of Winterfell.



aspire to perfection, of course, but the achieving of that perfection proved to be difficult, even impossible to attain. Furthermore, once and again in *Le Morte D'Arthur* we find characters being tested in martial ways, having to fight foes to prove their prowess, their bravery and their honour; as well as being tempted and having to resist that temptation in order to uphold the ideal they were submitted to. Of course, as we have already seen, this is not always possible. Sir Gareth promises his love and loyalty to one lady and, after her refusal, falls for another—never mind that it was the same woman because he did not know that at the time. Sir Tristram, in the end, shows more care for himself and his reputation than he does for loyalty towards his lady, La Belle Isode. Even Sir Lancelot, greatest of all of King Arthur's knights, for all his faith and strength and honour, chose one loyalty over another—Guenivere over Arthur—and broke his oath to his king.

In spite of the five centuries that separate it from Malory's work, Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* portrays a similar code of behaviour for the ideal knight, and none feel its weight more so than the members of the Kingsguard. After all, as the reader is told once and again over the course of the five books that, currently, make the series, for a knight to be given a white cloak it means that he is a man like no other, already perfect among knights. That, though, as we have seen, could not be farther from the truth. The fact is that the oaths of the Kingsguard, so carefully crafted by Queen Visenya with only the safety of her brother in mind, invalidate a knight's sworn vows, in favour of the king's safety and the king's commands.

Therefore, because of this, great knights such as Ser Barristan Selmy or Ser Arthur Dayne become men plagued by their shame due to the things they have had to do in the name of duty, while remaining ever-faithful to said duty. Still, they are regarded—or remembered, in the case of Ser Arthur—as some of the greatest and most honourable and loyal men the Seven Kingdoms have ever seen. On the other hand, Ser Jaime Lannister, the one character that, for all his faults, tries his utmost to keep the people safe, as he swore to do when he was knighted, inevitably breaks his Kingsguard vows when killing King Aerys. In both cases, we find that, in practice, none of them is guiltier than the other. While their actions and the way in which they broke faith may differ, the end-result for all of them is the same: in upholding one duty over another, they end up breaking their oath.

This is, of course, an inevitable outcome and one there is no way to scape precisely because Martin seems to have designed it to be like that. The knights of the Kingsguard in *A Song of Ice and Fire* are meant to portray the shallow nature of the ideal of knighthood itself, and how, at its root, it is deeply flawed. It is simply not possible for any knight to remain honourable and to abide by every single one of the oaths and duties that are expected of him when facing such a conundrum. Indeed, the knights that formed King Aerys' Kingsguard, were, in truth, good men who did nothing but their duty and, thus, let injustice prevail. Challenging the king, of course, would have meant to break their oaths, although not doing so meant breaking them, also. Notwithstanding, the knighthood ideal they were supposed to represent would have compelled them to, at least, have tried or die trying. As it is, this means that none of them where, in the end, true knights.

As was the case with Malory, too, this corruption of ideals leading to an inevitable fall of chivalry does not make knighthood a corrupt institution, and neither does it make the men that conform it intrinsically evil. In truth, *A Song of Ice and Fire* presents an order whose code is noble and honourable but also, at its root, impossible to uphold.

## WORKS CITED

- Benson, Larry D. *Malory's Morte Darthur*. Harvard UP, 1976.
- Capellanus, Andreas. *The Art of Courtly Love*. Columbia UP, 1960
- Castor, Helen. *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*. Faber & Faber, 2011.
- Etymology Dictionary Online*, "Chivalry | Origin and Meaning of Chivalry". *Etymonline.Com*, 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/chivalry>.
- Hodges, Kenneth. *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory's Le Morte Darthur*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Jamison, Carol Parrish. *Chivalry in Westeros*. McFarland, 2018.
- Keen, Maurice Keen. *Chivalry*. Yale UP, 2005
- Kennedy, Beverly. *Arthurian Studies XI: Knighthood in the Morte Darthur*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1985
- Malory, Thomas. *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Oxford UP, 1998
- Martin, George R. R. *A Clash of Kings*. Bantam Books, 2012.
- Martin, George R. R. *A Dance with Dragons*. Bantam Books, 2012.
- Martin, George R. R. *A Feast for Crows*. Bantam Books, 2012.
- Martin, George R. R. *A Game of Thrones*. Bantam Books, 2012.
- Martin, George R. R. *A Storm of Swords*. Bantam Books, 2012.
- Martin, George R. R. *Fire & Blood*. Bantam Books, 2018.
- Martin, George R. R. *The Hedge Knight*. Avery Miller Crowell, 2005.
- Martin, George R. R. *The World of Ice and Fire*. Bantam Books, 2015.
- Morgan, Elizabeth. "Gatsby In The Garden: Courtly Love And Irony". *College Literature*, Vol. 11, N.2 (Spring, 1984). Pp.163-177.

*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "Chivalry Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes." *Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.Com*, 2020, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/chivalry>.

Rudorff, Raymond. *Knights and the Age of Chivalry*. Viking, 1974.

Saul, Nigel. *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England 1066–1500*. Pimlico, 2011.

Westeros. Org, "The Citadel: So Spake Martin - Some Info About Knighthood". 2020, <https://www.westeros.org/Citadel/SSM/Entry/1045/>