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High and Mighty Queens of Westeros

Kavita Mudan Finn

“Courtesy is a lady’s armor,” advises Septa Mordane, governess to Lady Sansa Stark, who, early in *Game of Thrones*, is engaged to the crown prince of Westeros, Joffrey Baratheon. Sansa is the perfect aristocratic girl, versed in courtesies, songs, and good behavior, unlike her tomboyish younger sister Arya. But Sansa and the viewer quickly learn that being a perfect lady is far from being a perfect queen. Queens in Westeros, like their real-world historical counterparts, have a dirtier and more complicated job than is generally acknowledged, and they are under attack in subtler ways than by the sword.

The cultural standards in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones* hew closely to traditional fantasy tropes, themselves a product of J. R. R. Tolkien’s training as a medieval literature scholar. While Tolkien focuses on plotlines that largely exclude women, George R. R. Martin includes six women among his fourteen major point-of-view (PoV) characters.¹ Instead of telling stories of kings, as is traditional in medieval romance and modern fantasy, Martin focuses on the people surrounding the king: his advisors, his family, his servants—and sometimes his queen.

The first queen whom viewers encounter is Cersei Lannister, the consort of King Robert Baratheon. Even before she appears, she is defined first and foremost as a *Lannister*, more loyal to her blood relations than she will ever be to her husband. Royal marriages in medieval and early modern Europe were founded on military and diplomatic ties, so a married queen was expected to maintain a relationship with her family—within certain limits. King Edward IV of England (r. 1461–1470, 1471–1483) faced this problem when he secretly married the beautiful Elizabeth Woodville (c. 1437–1492). The introduction of Elizabeth’s large and ambitious family at Edward’s Yorkist court upset the balance among the established families and led to a resurgence of civil war.² Within several years, Edward lost his throne to the rival house of Lancaster and had to invade his own country to get it back. Controversy over the marriage also contributed to the chaos after Edward’s death in 1483, the disappearance

(and probable murder) of his two sons, and his younger brother's usurpation of the throne as King Richard III (r. 1483–1485).³

If all this sounds familiar, so it should. *Game of Thrones* makes no secret of its medieval roots—it's a short step, after all, from York to Stark and from Lancaster to Lannister. Even though the series includes direwolves, fire-breathing dragons, and the walking dead, its complicated plot hinges on a quintessentially medieval problem: a disputed succession that leads to civil war. Historically, the fifteenth century saw civil wars erupt in England, France, Burgundy, Spain, and the Italian Peninsula—wars that only got worse after the sixteenth-century Reformation. During this turbulent period, a queen's role was especially important and often controversial. Studying the queens in *Game of Thrones* and their historical sources of inspiration can tell us a great deal about how women were perceived then—and are now.

The Making of a Queen

Prior to Robert's rebellion 15 years before *Game of Thrones* begins, almost all the queens of the Seven Kingdoms came from the Targaryen family.

The line must be kept pure [...] theirs was the kingsblood, the golden blood of old Valyria, the blood of the dragon. Dragons did not mate with the beasts of the field, and Targaryens did not mingle their blood with that of lesser men.⁴

The practice of incestuous brother–sister marriage sets the Targaryens apart from the rest of Westeros, while also giving each child born to the family a fair chance of turning out insane, thanks to generations of inbreeding.⁵ *The World of Ice and Fire* (2014), which provides a detailed history of Westeros, includes instances of Targaryens marrying outside the family, usually to shore up alliances or to gain additional territory, but the overall tendency was to preserve the royal bloodline. In short, Targaryens make their own rules, and those rules do not apply to any other family, whether in Westeros or in medieval Europe.

Medieval nobility commonly negotiated multiple marriage agreements for daughters who might potentially become queens. When Robert Baratheon takes the Iron Throne from the Targaryens, he chooses for his queen Cersei, the only daughter of Lord Tywin Lannister, the richest man in the Seven Kingdoms. Although Tywin had delayed supporting Robert until the last moment, his seizure of King's Landing secured Robert's victory. Viewers learn later that Cersei had already been offered to the last Targaryen prince, but the “mad” king, fearful of Tywin's growing power, had refused. When Cersei marries Robert, she is therefore fulfilling the promise that she would become a queen—a promise she had made in her youth.⁶ Following a similar succession

of marriage arrangements, Margaery Tyrell, a wealthy daughter of Highgarden, states her ambition unambiguously: “I don’t want to be *a* queen. I want to be *the* queen.”⁷ She marries first Renly Baratheon, then King Joffrey (if only for a few hours), and finally King Tommen.

Decades of war in medieval Europe created a multitude of widows and many found themselves remarried, with or without their consent. Elizabeth Woodville, for instance, was the widow of a Lancastrian knight before becoming the wife of the Yorkist king, Edward IV. Roughly a decade later, Edward’s brother Richard married Lady Anne Neville (1456–1485), who was previously married to the son of the Lancastrian king, Henry VI (r. 1422–1461; 1471). Unlike Elizabeth, Anne was from a prominent noble family, with a massive dowry and substantial landholdings in the north of England. Some chroniclers even hinted that Anne’s money and family influence made it possible for Richard to claim the throne later.⁸

She is not the most extreme case, however. Lady Margaret Beaufort (1443–1509), whose bloodline gave her a complicated claim to the English throne, was constantly being married off in order to either advance or control that claim. She was briefly married to the Lancastrian Edmund Tudor, who died in prison of plague and by whom Margaret had her only child. When the Yorkists came to power in 1461, she was married to one of Edward IV’s supporters. After he died in battle, Margaret married for the last time, and her third husband’s talent for double-dealing and raising large armies made it possible for her son to become King Henry VII in 1485. As queen mother she set her stamp on the English court and took charge of her royal grandchildren, including the future King Henry VIII. As far as we know, Margaery Tyrell’s ferocious grandmother Lady Olenna had only one husband, but her influence on her children and grandchildren certainly evokes Margaret Beaufort, who would never be queen in her own right but was nonetheless a force to be reckoned with.

In *A Storm of Swords* and during the second season of *Game of Thrones*, Sansa Stark’s elder brother Robb, declared “King in the North” after his father’s execution, contracts a secret marriage not unlike that of King Edward IV, and with similarly bloody results. In the book, Robb sleeps with and impulsively marries a young woman named Jeyne Westerling, despite being betrothed to a daughter of the irascible Lord of the Crossing, Walder Frey. Although this marriage is the “honorable” thing to do in one sense (because they had had sexual relations), the breaking of his word to his betrothed leads to Robb’s murder at the hands of Lord Frey and his allies. We later learn that even Robb’s initial encounter with Jeyne was a deep-rooted conspiracy begun by Tywin Lannister, liege lord to Jeyne’s parents, and designed to destroy the northern alliances from within.⁹ The television series replaces Jeyne with a lady physician from Volantis named Talisa, who, while similarly unsuitable, has no connection to the rest of the characters. Unlike Jeyne, she is murdered at the Red Wedding alongside her husband.

Some queens in *Game of Thrones* claim thrones in their own right rather than through marriage. The most significant is Daenerys Targaryen, who possesses the only three living dragons in the world and intends to use them to take back her inheritance. Unfortunately, Daenerys is forced to rely on men for her armies and her councils, and it remains to be seen whether or not she will succeed. Another woman, Asha (or Yara) Greyjoy, claims the Seastone Chair of the Iron Islands through force of arms as well as through lineal succession, but fails when faced with her more powerful uncle Euron. Conscious of the danger Euron represents, Yara flees the Iron Islands and makes an alliance with Daenerys, who promises to support her claim. Lastly, Arianne Martell, daughter of Prince Doran Martell of Dorne, is recognized throughout the region as his heir—although this detail was changed between the books and the television series, where Doran is murdered by his brother's paramour Ellaria Sand, who takes control of Dorne. These, however, are exceptional cases in *Game of Thrones*, just as there were only a few queens regnant in medieval Europe. Princess Isabella of Castile, for example, played a major role in the unification of Spain. Several marriage contracts came and went before she wed Prince Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469. When she inherited Castile (r. 1474–1504) and he inherited Aragon (r. 1479–1516), they together created a united Spain they passed on to their children and grandchildren. She herself actively ruled, at times leading her own armies. Fortunately queens did not need to rule in their own right to be a dominant force. Queen consorts, although dependent on men (whether husbands, sons, or other family members), could still wield considerable power within those limits.

Responsibilities of Queenship

The Targaryen queens held a great deal of power since, as blood relatives to the king, their bloodlines were equal to his. More importantly, they had dragons. Dragons are a gender equalizer, as queens and kings, princes, princesses, and royal bastards alike ride their fiery mounts to battle—more often than not to their deaths. This unusual balance of power led to several uprisings during the Targaryens' 300-year rule over Westeros. The most infamous of these, the so-called Dance of the Dragons, raged between Queen Alicent, second wife of Viserys I, who fought on behalf of her young son Aegon, and Princess Rhaenyra, Viserys' eldest daughter by his first wife.¹⁰

Historically, a similar civil war began in England in 1135 when King Henry I declared his daughter Matilda his heir. The aristocracy refused to follow a woman and crowned her cousin Stephen of Blois instead. Eighteen years of brutal civil war followed, during which chroniclers claimed that "Christ and his saints slept." Finally the realm was united under Matilda's son, King Henry II

(r. 1154–1189). The Dance of the Dragons lasted only two years, but “the Targaryen power [was] much diminished, and the world’s last dragons vastly reduced in number.”¹¹ Echoing the resolution of the English Civil War, the war only ended when Rhaenyra’s son Aegon became King Aegon III and married Aegon II’s daughter. The seeds of the Targaryens’ downfall can be found in this conflict, as most of their dragons—arguably their main source of power—were killed during the war.

With the dying out of the dragons, the military function of Targaryen queenship diminished and the role of queens became more ceremonial. “Good” Queen Alysanne, for instance, is revered for her charity and her kindness, particularly to the Night’s Watch, while Queen Naerys, wife to Aegon the Unworthy, survives in song for her beauty and her sadness. The Water Gardens in Dorne were constructed for the Targaryen queen Daenerys. She filled these gardens first with her own children, then with children of the Dornish nobility, and, finally, with the children of all those who served in her household, a tradition that endures into the period in which the series is set.¹² By the time of the War of the Five Kings, the queen’s job is, first and foremost, to provide heirs to the throne and, second, to promote harmony at court. When queens step outside those prescribed areas of influence, as Cersei Lannister repeatedly does, they meet with strong opposition from the surrounding men.

Although Cersei appears to fulfill all the expectations one had from a queen (by providing heirs, being gracious and charming in public, and acting as an intermediary between the Lannisters and the Baratheons), this is only a façade, soon demolished. Viewers quickly discover that all three of her children came from an incestuous affair with her twin brother Jaime and that she would stop at nothing to preserve her royal power. Her dismissive attitude and short-sighted policies—as well as her inability to control her sadistic and bloody-minded son Joffrey—result in her being almost universally despised, both within the story and among critics and fans. Martin, however, gives us Cersei’s point of view in the fourth and fifth books, where it becomes clear that her worst decisions are driven by desperation, paranoia, and frustration with her lack of real power. As she complains early in Season 2: “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!”¹³

Cersei’s flaws are highlighted by her rivalry with her prospective daughter-in-law, Margaery Tyrell. Not only is Margaery the perfect candidate on the surface, she also cultivates the queenly attributes that Cersei abandons:

When she was feeling pious she would leave the castle to pray at Baelor’s Sept. She gave her custom to a dozen different seamstresses, was well-known among the city’s goldsmiths, and had even been known to visit the

fish market by the Mud Gate for a look at the day's catch. Wherever she went, the smallfolk fawned on her, and Lady Margaery did all she could to fan their ardor. She was forever giving alms to beggars, buying hot pies off bakers' carts, and reining up to speak to common tradesmen.¹⁴

Margaery, in short, is gaining public support independently of the king. Queens in medieval Europe were able to sway public opinion through ceremonial interactions with the general population. For instance, when the city of London unsuccessfully rebelled against Richard II in 1392, his queen, Anne of Bohemia, interceded on behalf of the citizens, to spare them from the king's wrath—an incident immortalized in Richard Maidstone's poem *Concordia*. Like Margaery, medieval queens could also wield influence through smaller acts of patronage: buying goods from local merchants and craftsmen or encouraging the cultural life of the court. Eleanor of Provence (1223–1291), wife of Henry III of England (r. 1216–1272), presided over one of the most splendid courts of the thirteenth century. The same held true for Queen Isabeau of France (c. 1370–1435), who patronized many artists and writers, including Christine de Pizan, considered the first professional woman writer in Europe.

This patronage extended to religion. Queens in medieval Europe would give generously to monasteries and abbeys, fund a variety of church projects, and sometimes even retire to convents late in life. Whatever their personal beliefs, they had to conform to what the church deemed to be appropriate behavior. Queen Isabella of Castile, for instance, encouraged the Spanish Inquisition and expelled both Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula on the pope's orders. In season 6, Margaery Tyrell ingratiates herself with the powerful and deeply pious High Septon (who had been the High Sparrow) in order to protect her family and her status as Tommen's queen. This again contrasts her with Cersei, who pays for her antagonism against the High Septon with the public humiliation of a walk of shame (although her fiery revenge by burning down the Great Sept has no historical basis).

Royal women sometimes exercised power by serving as regents for their young sons, as Cersei does to a limited extent. When those sons reached the age of majority, married, and had children of their own, queen mothers were expected to retire gracefully and allow their successors to rule unhindered. Most of them did. Some kings, however, saw fit to keep their mothers close, even at the expense of their wives. The redoubtable Eleanor of Aquitaine (1124–1204) ruled as regent in England while her son Richard I joined the Third Crusade (1189–1192). It is she who is forever associated with "the Lionheart," rather than his wife Berengaria of Navarre. King Louis IX (r. 1226–1270), canonized as Saint Louis, brought his mother, Blanche of Castile (1188–1252), out of a convent to rule France when he led the Seventh Crusade (1248–1254). Louis' wife, Marguerite of Provence (1221–1295), accompanied her husband

and, when he was imprisoned in Egypt, took charge of the French army, briefly becoming the only woman ever to lead a crusade.

A crusading queen earned herself a reputation for piety and courage. A queen during a civil war was lucky if her reputation survived the conflict. Isabeau of Bavaria had been married for seven years to Charles VI of France (r. 1380–1422) and had borne him four children before he manifested signs of insanity. When Isabeau took over the kingdom as regent, she was repeatedly accused of adultery and mismanagement, though she was likely innocent of both.¹⁵ Similarly, Margaret of Anjou (1430–1482) had been married for eight years when her husband, Henry VI of England (r. 1421–1461, 1470–1471), fell into catatonia in 1453, one month before their only son was born. Margaret was slandered in diplomatic letters, in attempts to discredit her son's claim to the throne.¹⁶ These accusations first appear in sources hostile to the queen's party and were almost certainly untrue. Although the accusations of adultery brought against Cersei Lannister happen to be true, several other women are falsely accused during the series; this is meant either to punish them or to discredit their sons and husbands. Witchcraft accusations were another popular weapon used against queens. Joan of Navarre, wife to Henry IV of England (r. 1399–1413) was convicted of witchcraft in 1419 and forced to hand over most of her jointure to her stepson Henry V (r. 1413–1421) in order to fund his wars against France. There is no indication that anyone believed she was guilty and her relationship with the king remained cordial—perhaps an indication of how dependent she was on his goodwill.

Although Daenerys Targaryen rules in her own name as the Mother of Dragons, she is no less bound by social and cultural strictures—indeed, she refers to her court manners in Meereen as “floppy ears” that she must wear to preserve her position. After a traumatic miscarriage at the end of the first book and season 1, it is prophesied that Daenerys can no longer bear children. This poses an obvious problem for the inheritance of the Iron Throne. Historically, Isabella of Castile successfully used her marriage to Ferdinand of Aragon to shore up support against her uncle Enrique, who threatened to divert the succession of Castile elsewhere. But her marriage to her ambitious and frustrated husband brought her other problems, particularly when she tried to ensure that Castile would pass on to her daughter Juana after her own death. Ferdinand conspired with Juana's husband to have her declared mad and imprisoned, so they could split the kingdom between themselves, thus countermanding Isabella's dying wishes. Similarly, Mary I of England (r. 1553–1558), a queen in her own right, found little comfort and many problems in her marriage to Philip II of Spain a century later. Philip constantly nagged her for more power in England, while the English parliament stood firmly against allowing a Spaniard (and a Roman Catholic) to rule over it. It is therefore not too surprising that Mary's half-sister Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) refused to marry and reigned for 44 years as the Virgin Queen.

The Unmaking of Queens and Other Cautionary Tales

A queen's position, while potentially powerful, was by no means invulnerable. Many kings found excuses to rid themselves of unwanted wives. Most infamous is Henry VIII of England (r. 1509–1547) with his six wives; but he was far from being the first. In 1483, just before he inherited the throne, Charles VIII of France (r. 1483–1498) was betrothed to Margaret of Austria (1480–1530), who was only three years old at the time. She came to the French court as a child and grew up there. In the autumn of 1491, however, Charles repudiated the betrothal and married instead Duchess Anne of Brittany (1477–1514), for blatantly political reasons. Brittany was an important strategic barrier between France and England and Charles' marriage to Anne gave France control over its territories. When he died without an heir, his cousin, Louis XII (r. 1498–1515), inherited the throne. Although Louis was already married to his cousin Jeanne of France (1464–1505) he had the marriage annulled and wed Anne, the previous king's queen. Like his cousin Charles, Louis also died without a male heir, but France ultimately kept Brittany.¹⁷ Meanwhile Margaret of Austria, the jilted fiancée of Charles VIII, went on to marry and be widowed twice and then vowed never to marry again. Her father, Emperor Maximilian I (r. 1486–1519), who had also been betrothed to Anne of Brittany, appointed Margaret regent of the Netherlands, thus giving her a significant political role for the rest of her life. Meanwhile Jeanne of France, the abandoned wife of Louis XII, retired to a convent and was eventually canonized. These women were given no choice in their repudiation and were forced to make the best of embarrassing and potentially damaging situations.

Though Sansa Stark begins the series as the daughter of a powerful lord betrothed to the king's son, she loses much of her value as a potential queen after her father is executed and she becomes a hostage to the Lannisters. The alliance with the Tyrells gives King Joffrey an excuse to repudiate Sansa and take Margaery as his queen instead (while threatening to keep Sansa as an unwilling mistress).¹⁸ As discussed above, Robb Stark's decision to break his betrothal to Lord Frey's daughter proves equally fatal to him and to his wife in *Game of Thrones*. But not all changes in marriage plans were scandalous. What is not reflected in Westerosi politics is the many routine cases of betrothals cancelled or altered for a variety of normal reasons, not least because the parties involved were children. While it is a common belief that child marriage was normal in the medieval period, this is simply not true: royal and aristocratic children were often promised in marriage with the caveat that the marriage itself should not take place before they reached the age of majority.

As mentioned above, queens were sometimes accused of adultery. When these accusations were made for obviously political reasons, they were usually taken with a grain of salt. If, however, they were proven true, the results could

be catastrophic. In 1314, the three daughters-in-law of King Philip IV “the Fair” of France (r. 1285–1314) were tried for infidelity and treason, a turn of events that destroyed the French succession and ushered in the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453). As for the former princesses, one was exonerated—probably owing to her substantial dowry—and the other two were publicly shamed before being sentenced to lifetime imprisonment. A year later, when Philip IV’s successor, Louis X (r. 1314–1316), was unable to obtain a divorce, his unfortunate wife, Marguerite of Burgundy (1290–1315), was found mysteriously strangled in her cell. Henry VIII of England was more vicious. Anne Boleyn (1501–1536) and Katherine Howard (c. 1522–1542) were both beheaded after being convicted of adultery, though it is likely that neither was guilty. Anne Boleyn was even accused of sleeping with her brother George—one possible inspiration for the incestuous relationship between Cersei and Jaime in *Game of Thrones*. In *A Feast for Crows* and in season 5 of *Game of Thrones*, Cersei accuses Margaery Tyrell of adultery and incest, only to find herself implicated in the same crimes—crimes of which she is undoubtedly guilty.

Cersei’s public penance in King’s Landing, which occupies one of her two chapters in *A Dance with Dragons* and a substantial portion of the season 5 finale in *Game of Thrones*, is a conflation and exaggeration of actual medieval punishments inflicted upon women. Convicted for witchcraft in November 1441, Eleanor Cobham, duchess of Gloucester, was forced to walk through the streets of London, wearing only a simple shift and carrying a candle. Nearly 20 years earlier, Eleanor had married the duke of Gloucester after an adulterous affair. His subsequent divorce from his first wife, Jacqueline of Hainault, no doubt contributed to Eleanor’s notoriety long before her trial. Although witnesses did not hurl garbage, her penance was scandalous enough to appear in most English chronicles thereafter.¹⁹ In 1483 Richard III forced Edward IV’s favorite mistress, Jane Shore, to do a similar penance for her involvement in a treasonous plot against him. The punishment backfired, however. Instead of shaming the victim, it confirmed instead that Mistress Shore was more popular in London than Richard III.

In *Game of Thrones* Cersei has no such support during her public penance, as she has antagonized the citizens of King’s Landing at every opportunity. Furthermore, not only is she forced to walk all the way across the city barefoot—as both Eleanor and Mistress Shore did—she does so “clad only in gooseprickles and pride,” having been shaved and stripped beforehand.²⁰ During her walk, she regrets her penance:

*I should not have done this. I was their queen, but now they’ve seen, they’ve seen. I should never have let them see. Gowned and crowned, she was a queen. Naked, bloody, limping, she was only a woman, not so very different from their wives, more like their mothers than their pretty little maiden daughters. What have I done?*²¹

Since Cersei, rightly or wrongly, identifies her beauty as the source of her power, she sees the ridicule and disgust of the crowd as the fulfillment of the curse of the *maegi* of Lannisport whom she had encountered as a child.²²

In addition to the penance, the Faith Militant initially intended for Cersei to have a trial by combat. While trials by combat appear in medieval romance, they rarely if ever happened in actuality.²³ In contrast, such trials in Westeros are imbued with religious significance, and their verdicts cannot be countermanded. Although Cersei appears to have set herself up for success by naming, as her champion, a monster knight raised from the dead, her son Tommen's decision to ban trials by combat late in season 6 forces her to take more drastic measures. Through her master of whisperers Qyburn, Cersei engineers a catastrophic explosion of wildfire beneath the Sept of Baelor, killing most of the Tyrell family, her uncle Kevan, and the High Septon and prompting her own son to throw himself from a window of the Red Keep. When she is named "Queen on the Iron Throne" at the end of the season's finale, clad as she is in a black, high-necked gown in sharp contrast to the flowing dresses she wore earlier in the series, her hair shorn, she bears a closer resemblance—both in expression and in costume—to her late father, Lord Tywin, which suggests that her rule is likely to be as merciless as his.

Cersei's reign may come to an end at the hand of her unknown rival, Daenerys Targaryen rather than Margaery Tyrell, whom she had suspected and tried to undermine. By the end of season 6, Daenerys has taken control of a Dothraki horde, recaptured Meereen, and set sail for Westeros at the head of an enormous fleet, ready to take the Iron Throne for herself. Margaery, unlike Cersei and Daenerys, had the support of the population in King's Landing and the southern regions as well as a network of allies, both men and women. This is unusual. Most of the main female characters in *Game of Thrones* find themselves either the only woman or one of few women surrounded by men in male-centric situations. Cersei, who views other women as competitors, prefers it this way. The women of Highgarden and Dorne represent a different kind of collaborative female power. Margaery has been well taught by her grandmother Olenna, whose nickname "Queen of Thorns" reflects both her cleverness and her ruthlessness. Similarly, the princesses and even the illegitimate royal daughters of Dorne (known as the "Sand Snakes") take an active role in both governance and espionage, and they are given considerably more sexual freedom than their northern counterparts. In contrast, both Cersei and Daenerys suffer as a result of their isolation, as do all three women of the Stark family.

Historically, European queens were able to form networks and alliances, most frequently ones based on blood ties. Marguerite of Provence, wife of King Louis IX, had three sisters who married other European monarchs. Although their relationships were often fractious, they maintained contact with one another and held firm in their allegiance to their native Provence while their

husbands squabbled.²⁴ By the fifteenth century, however, when civil wars overtook wars of conquest, even family alliances came under tremendous strain. Within *Game of Thrones*, the Queen of Thorns, to avenge her lost family and destroy the Lannisters, joins forces with the Sand Snakes and their mother in Dorne, in support of Daenerys. With Yara Greyjoy and the Iron Fleet along with the levies of Dorne and Highgarden at her side, Daenerys has created a powerful alliance of women to take down Cersei Lannister, thus making it almost completely certain that she is the younger and more beautiful queen in Cersei's prophecy.

The queens of *Game of Thrones* are formidable women in their own right, as were their medieval and early modern counterparts in Europe. Queenship was an unpredictable and dangerous undertaking, since the actions of a queen reflected not only upon the king, but also upon the country she adopted through marriage. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the most popular works of Christine de Pizan's during her lifetime and in the century following her death was an advice book addressed to queens and aristocratic ladies, instructing them on how to keep their positions. *The Treasury of the City of Ladies* (c. 1405) was written in the tradition of "mirrors for princes," books intended to teach rulers how to rule. "There is no doubt," Christine observes, "that a lady is more feared and respected and held in greater reverence when she is seen to be wise and chaste and of firm behaviour."²⁵ Calling on the examples of Blanche of Castile and other queens of France and addressing herself not just to queens but to women of all classes, Christine advises patience, prudence, and, above all things, discretion—advice that one might argue Margaery Tyrell follows and Cersei Lannister flouts. Where the institution of queenship is going in Westeros remains to be seen, as the Mother of Dragons can make her own rules. Queens may follow the philosophy of Septa Mordane, that "courtesy is a lady's armor," but it seems more likely that they will take the advice of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth: "Look like the innocent flower,/But be the serpent under't."²⁶

Notes

- 1 Éowyn of Rohan and Galadriel of Lothlórien are the only significant female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. Major female PoV characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* are Catelyn, Sansa, and Arya Stark, Daenerys Targaryen, Cersei Lannister, and Brienne of Tarth. Minor female PoVs are (so far) Asha Greyjoy, Arianne Martell, and Melisandre of Asshai.
- 2 Elizabeth's mother, Jacquetta, was from the royal family of Luxembourg and had been married before to King Henry VI's uncle. After his death, she remarried a young knight named Richard Woodville, against the king's command.
- 3 Richard died at the hand of rebels two years after his coronation, in the Battle of Bosworth Field, and has the dubious distinction of being the only king of England whose body wound up buried beneath a car park.

- 4 George R. R. Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire, Book One: A Game of Thrones* (New York: Bantam, 1996), 26.
- 5 In order to preserve bloodlines and territories, royal families throughout Europe intermarried during the medieval and early modern periods. Although marriages between close relations (often within four degrees) required papal dispensation, such sanctions were usually easy to obtain. The consequences are on display in the last generations of the Hapsburgs, who suffered from a variety of illnesses as a result of being too closely related or the Wittelsbachs; it may be disputed that “Mad” King Ludwig II (r. 1864–1886) of castle-building fame was actually insane, but his brother Otto certainly was.
- 6 George R. R. Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire, Book Four: A Feast for Crows* (New York: Bantam, 2005), 360–362.
- 7 “The Ghost of Harrenhal,” directed by David Petrarca, written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, in *Game of Thrones*, season 2, HBO, first aired on April 29, 2012.
- 8 Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459–1486* (London: Alan Sutton, 1986), 175.
- 9 Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 660–663.
- 10 George R. R. Martin, “The Princess and the Queen,” in *Dangerous Women*, edited by George R. R. Martin and Gardner Dozois (New York: Tor, 2013), 703–786.
- 11 Martin, “Princess and Queen,” 703.
- 12 George R. R. Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire, Book Five: A Dance with Dragons* (New York: Bantam, 2011), 505–506.
- 13 “The Night Lands,” directed by Alan Taylor, written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, in *Game of Thrones*, season 2, HBO, first aired on April 8 2012.
- 14 Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 424.
- 15 See Tracy Adams, *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).
- 16 For Margaret of Anjou, see Helen Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003). On her reputation and on slanders against her, see Kavita Mudan Finn, *The Last Plantagenet Consorts: Gender, Genre, and Historiography, 1440–1627* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 22–24.
- 17 Owing to the lack of direct heirs, the French crown passed to François of Angoulême (1515–1589), Louis’ cousin. See Sharon L. Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 56–62, 83–96.
- 18 George R. R. Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire, Book Three: A Storm of Swords* (New York: Bantam, 2002 [2000]), 662.
- 19 Eleanor Cobham’s afterlife is both fascinating and complicated. See Kavita Mudan Finn, “Tragedy, Transgression, and Women’s Voices: The Cases of Eleanor Cobham and Margaret of Anjou,” *Viator* 47.2 (2016), 277–303.
- 20 Martin, *A Dance with Dragons*, 855.
- 21 Martin, *A Dance with Dragons*, 858.

- 22 “Queen you shall be [...] until there comes another, younger and more beautiful, to cast you down and take all that you hold dear” (Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 179; see “The Wars to Come,” directed by Michael Slovis, written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, in *Game of Thrones*, season 5, HBO, first aired on April 12, 2015).
- 23 For trials by combat, see Carlyne Larrington, *Winter Is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 39–42.
- 24 Marguerite’s sisters were Eleanor, married to Henry III of England; Beatrix, married to William of Sicily; and Sancia, married to Richard, king of the Romans. See Nancy Goldstone, *Four Queens: The Provençal Sisters Who Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin, 2007).
- 25 Christine de Pizan, *The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, translated by Sarah Lawson (London: Penguin, 1985), 76.
- 26 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 5, lines 65–66.

