

## ABSTRACT

Legacy and Loyalty: An Application of Machiavellian Politics  
to George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*

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This thesis analyzes George R.R. Martin's fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* through the lens of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, relating the treatise's amoral political philosophy to the kings and queens of fictional Westeros. I particularly argue that, while Martin's cynical series advocates many of *The Prince*'s practical and pragmatic tenets, the author disagrees with the famous assertion that a ruler is safer feared rather than loved. Martin applies the politics espoused within *The Prince* to a multigenerational view and reveals the instability of rulership built upon fear, showcasing conversely the strength of a subordinate's loyalty when garnered by love. I provide a brief historical background of both *The Prince* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* and showcase the similar contexts in which the works were written, before analyzing in-depth the politics and ideologies of several of Martin's fictional rulers and exploring his theme of political legacy.

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LEGACY AND LOYALTY: AN APPLICATION OF MACHIAVELLIAN POLITICS  
TO GEORGE R.R. MARTIN'S *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### The Context and Parallels of Machiavelli and Martin

First appearing on bookshelves in 1996, George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* took the fantasy genre by storm and achieved critical acclaim. The first book in Martin's epic medieval fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the installment garnered praise for its grounded take on politics within a gritty and well-realized world, as well as earning a reputation for gleefully killing its characters within a narrative propelled by warring royal families and political intrigue. As the series found greater success with each installment in the ensuing years and impacted a larger audience, comparisons were drawn between the series' famously gritty approach to the prospect of rulership and the school of modern political theory, particularly the utterly practical *realpolitik* first espoused by the Italian politician Niccolò Machiavelli in his political treatise *The Prince*. By analyzing these works in tandem and applying *The Prince's* politics to the rulers and events of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Martin's opinion of Machiavelli's theories becomes apparent and demonstrates a unique interpretation of the cynical philosophy. But to better understand the relationship between the written works and the ramifications of Martin's incorporation of Machiavelli's political theory, one must examine the context within which *The Prince* was written and the treatise's historical influence on the school of political philosophy.

First distributed by Niccolò Machiavelli during the Italian Renaissance in 1513, *The Prince* arguably began the school of modern political philosophy and shocked the world with its cynical approach to the prospect of rulership, as well as to the qualities

most useful to political leaders<sup>1</sup>. The book mirrored the style of *mirrors for princes*, a type of reference work meant to provide “princes” (rulers) with instruction and guidance on how to conduct themselves while ruling their domain. These works illustrated examples of rulers that the reader should embrace to imitate or avoid at all costs, drawing on history to showcase the proper way for one to rule. Before Machiavelli’s time, the majority of these *mirrors* espoused that men governed well by demonstrating qualities such as grace, honesty, and otherwise adhered to the virtuous lifestyle of Christian men. *The Prince*, however, defied this precedent and instead advocated for pragmatism in the place of any ethical principles, arguing that notions of morality often served as untenable restraints on effective rulership. Cruelty, deceit, and ruthlessness all hold their places amongst a ruler’s repertoire if they intend to rule for long, and they must not balk to commit any manner of deed that would ensure stability of power. Machiavelli asserted that not all “virtues” are welcome to a ruler, with generosity of wealth and unrefined honesty driving many a prince to face contempt from their people and greater support for their enemies; some “vices,” conversely, can be well-utilized and give the edge to an effective ruler, such as holding tightly to one’s wealth for times of hardship and breaking one’s word opportunely to play to every advantage.

Whereas the *mirrors for princes* advocated that a ruler live up to an abstract political ideal, Machiavelli advised on rulership only in terms of what was practical; rather than approaching political theory by describing *what rulership could be* or *what rulership ought to be*, the Italian diplomat ignored the ideal and offered advice only on the basis of *what rulership is*. By examining the events that defined Machiavelli’s career

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<sup>1</sup> Soll, Jacob. *Publishing The Prince*. (University of Michigan Press, 2011) 22-24.

within diplomatic office as well as the historical context of Italy when his political treatise was written, one may better understand why *The Prince* so radically defied the abstract and moralistic nature of its preceding political writings, just as *A Song of Ice and Fire* would adopt a similarly cynical approach to governance centuries later.

During the majority of the fifteenth century and the entirety of Machiavelli's lifetime, Italy resided not as a unified nation but as a fragmented powder keg of warring city-states and external countries constantly vying for control<sup>2</sup>, with political acts of deception and cruelty proving commonplace amongst the most powerful families struggling to hold on to their power. As a noble boy growing up immersed in the political sphere, Machiavelli proved no stranger to the violence and dangers that arose in the midst of ruler instability. From a young age, his experience surrounding politics was defined by ruthless acts amongst the elites that often spread to the populace on the streets, with Machiavelli recognizing firsthand the dangerous nature of political intrigue and the thoughtless cruelty exhibited when the party in power fears its abdication. This political climate may be exemplified by events such as the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478, in which members of the Pazzi family conspired to assassinate Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici in order to displace the family as rulers of Florence. During High Mass in the cathedral church of Santa Reparata, Pazzi conspirators walked arm-in-arm with the Medicis before desecrating that holy place in a flurry of violence, leaving Giuliano fatally stabbed but Lorenzo still breathing. The city of Florence quickly rose up in arms and turned on the failed conspirators with unmitigated ruthlessness, hanging five conspirators from the windows of the Palazzo della Signoria and eventually condemning seventy-five citizens

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<sup>2</sup> De Grazia, Sebastian. *Machiavelli in Hell*. (Princeton University Press. 1990) 16, 31.



to death for their alleged role in the conspiracy<sup>3</sup>. Nine years of age and only three blocks from the Palazzo at the time of these killings, young Machiavelli may have already begun adopting a cynicism for politics and concern for the turbulent nature of Italy<sup>4</sup>.

In the next decades Machiavelli gained valuable fiscal and diplomatic experience in the political offices of Florence, eventually rising to the office of Florentine Secretary, and observed the machinations of Cesare Borgia in his bids to conquer the remaining Italian territory. Wiping out the enemy Orsini and Colonna families to convert their followers to his side, the military leader's tactics were ruthlessly pragmatic and proved highly effective, ruling his new state of Romagna with an iron fist while scapegoating the local minister to escape the populace's hatred. His political struggle and pursuit of power proved to be a large source of inspiration for the policies promoted within *The Prince*; Machiavelli professed to learn the merits of political deception and the lengths to which well-managed cruelty can ensure a stable rule, writing of Cesare in *The Prince*, "whoever...judges it necessary to rid himself of enemies, to conciliate friends...to make himself feared yet not hated by his subjects...can find no brighter example than in the actions of this Prince" (Machiavelli 68-69). With the dissolution of the Florentine republic and the loss and regaining of power by the Medici, however, Machiavelli lost his political office and became implicated under false charges of conspiracy, leaving him briefly held in captivity and tortured by the government to which he dedicated his life. Newly affected by the machinations of Italian politics in addition to possessing decades

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<sup>3</sup>Bartlett, Kenneth R. *Florence in the Age of the Medici and Savonarola*. (Hackett Publishing Company, 2018) 37-39.

<sup>4</sup>De Grazia, Sebastian. *Machiavelli in Hell*. (Princeton University Press. 1990) 9, 13.

of experience within political office, Machiavelli at once embarked to make his contribution to intellectual political theory and penned *The Prince* with its incendiary approach to rulership, ostensibly gifting the work to the Medici family in an entreating bid to unite Italy under a stable and effective regime at last.

In the years after its official publication in 1532, *The Prince* created a stir amongst the political elite of Italy and across Europe as a whole. Met with praise and scholarly appreciation by some and indifference by many, the work slowly grew in prominence throughout Italy and the nations surrounding it, resulting in a major outcry by some Italian contemporaries to censure and condemn the work even years after Machiavelli's death. Particularly amongst the clergy, the work's dismissal of virtue and personal morality seemed akin to promoting blasphemy; many religious leaders famously named the book's creation as something evil, and argued that Machiavelli had shown himself as both an atheist and enemy of Christianity<sup>5</sup>. Other political theorists at the time held more secular complaints as well, claiming that *The Prince* called for tyranny and for the justification of ruler-led cruelty. Most famously, Frederick the Great of Prussia espoused Enlightenment ideals centuries after Machiavelli's death and composed a scathing chapter-by-chapter rebuttal of the work, titling his political essay *Anti-Machiavel* and reasserting the belief that rulers are destined to act as moral exemplars for the good of their subjects. Meant as a response to the similar works of its past and in departure from the aspects that typically characterize its genre, *The Prince* prompted a new public regard for the merits of political office and those who hoped to attain it, condemned by some critics as merely a work of immorality and baseless cruelty. In light

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<sup>5</sup> Giorgini, Giovanni. "Five Hundred Years of Italian Scholarship," *The Review of Politics* 2013: 629–632.

of the work's array of complexities and its true purpose of uniting Italy, these detractions prove exaggerated and plainly unjust; such an extreme aspect of criticism remains, however, dogging *The Prince's* footsteps.

Just as Machiavelli spent his life within the realm of politics and composed his trailblazing work on the realities of his experience, George Raymond Richard Martin lived immersed within the realms of historical nonfiction and fantasy, beginning to sell speculative fiction stories at the age of twenty-one and earning his bachelor's degree *summa cum laude* from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. A lifelong fan of medieval fantasy and harboring a healthy respect for J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings'* influence on the genre, Martin nevertheless considered Tolkien's work to be unduly idealistic in comparison to the gritty realities of actual political history, a common theme that he felt unfortunately saturated the fantasy genre as a whole. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Martin explained that *Lord of the Rings* "had a very medieval philosophy: that if the king was a good man, the land would prosper. We look at real history and it's not that simple. Tolkien can say that Aragorn...was wise and good. But Tolkien doesn't ask the question: What was Aragorn's tax policy?" ("Rolling Stone Interview", 2014). Wishing to compose a work that defied the morally simplistic and idealistic nature of its predecessors, Martin began writing the novel *A Game of Thrones* in 1991, drawing from historical events such as The War of the Roses to realistically portray the horror, deception, and barbarism of medieval warfare and politics.

As Machiavelli and *The Prince* are often credited with the rise of cynically-perceived politics and the modern school of political theory, so is Martin and *A Song of Ice and Fire* often credited with the rise of "Grimdark fantasy," modern fantasy writing

that refutes the idealistic good-and-evil morality epitomized by Tolkien<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, just as Machiavelli received his share of criticism for ostensibly adopting a harmfully destructive and tyrannical philosophy, so has George R.R. Martin for his bleak political series, with detractors claiming the work to be reveling in its cruelty and unjustly punishing its honorable and valiant characters. These critics judge Martin's series wrongly, however, just as early critics did *The Prince*, as the series does not advocate ruthless evil at all; Martin merely couches his rulership and political systems in a realistic and historically accurate framework, incorporating the tragedy and despondency that so often occurs in real life.

With both works released in response to the idealized forerunners saturating their genre, relying on history for lessons in practicality, and giving little thought to theoretical examples or the abstract, *The Prince* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* share notable parallels with their developments and contexts, both revolutionizing their genres and weathering critiques of moral outrage. Both showcase the virtues of pragmatism and occasional ruthlessness to ensure political advantage, decrying as well the obtrusive ethics and unattainable ideals that so often leave a ruler's hands tied. Yet, while *The Prince* applies its theories to the life of merely a single ruler, *A Song of Ice and Fire* broadens its scope to that of entire royal families and their succession, expanding Machiavelli's philosophy across several generations and, in the process, refutes the Florentine's famous maxim: "it is far safer to be feared than loved" (Machiavelli 123). While Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* could be read on its face as advocating Machiavelli's amoral political philosophy, condemning honor before reason and praising pragmatism, the parallels are not altogether

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<sup>6</sup> DuBois, Shana. "How *A Game of Thrones* Changed Fantasy Forever," 2016.

absolute. The series showcases the merits of securing a constituents' love to gain stability and the far-lasting effects of a ruler acting as moral exemplar for the people, taking *The Prince's* notions that selfishness and fear ultimately drive humanity under rule and revealing their inadequacy when placed upon a multigenerational view. By examining key political figures within the series—particularly Tywin of House Lannister and Eddard of House Stark—one may recognize *A Song of Ice and Fire's* incorporation and refutation of *The Prince's* politics, expanding the treatise's limited scope in order to explore the critical component that is a ruler's legacy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Machiavellian Ideal in Tywin Lannister

In regard to the personal qualities that ensure the effective attainment of power and stability of rule, Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* advocates that a ruler possesses pragmatism and an adherence to the belief that the end justifies the means. A penchant for adaptability, cunning, ruthlessness, and calculated cruelty all strengthen a ruler's capability to maintain his or her power. An amateur historian himself, George Martin looks to history much like the Florentine and largely agrees with Machiavelli's condemnation of morality and idealism in politics, showcasing the effectiveness of pragmatism for the political rulers throughout his series. However, even as Martin rewards those in Westeros who exhibit shrewd politicking, he demonstrates on a generational level that a political legacy cannot last without the love of one's subjects. No character in *A Song of Ice and Fire* better exemplifies Machiavelli's tenants of practicality—as well as the long-term unsustainability of rule through fear—than Lord Tywin, head of the powerful House Lannister.

Lord Tywin Lannister never desired the love of his constituents. He believed he knew its ineffectuality, and told his offspring the same. His daughter, Queen Cersei, ponders once that “[h]e never wanted love... ‘You cannot eat love, nor buy a horse with it, nor warm your halls on a cold night,’ she heard him tell [her brother] once” (Martin, *Feast* 100). Born in his family's holdfast of Casterly Rock, Tywin grew up in a House that had become the laughing stock of the Westerosi nobility. His father, Tytos, wanted only to be loved and proved genial to an absurd degree, taking no offense and disliking

all conflict; he let his vassals walk over him and disobey his commands without consequence, and so the once proud and exceedingly rich House Lannister grew toothless and derided<sup>1</sup>. Even as a young man, however, Tywin recognized that the influence of his house could only be assured from a position of strength, and that the constituents that harbored contempt for their liege lord needed to be brought to heel with force. Machiavelli spoke of this necessity of ruthlessness to quickly snuff out defiance, that “he who quells disorder by a very few signal examples will in the end be more merciful than he who from too great leniency permits things to take their course and so to result in rapine and bloodshed” (Machiavelli 122-123). In his first act on the larger political stage, young Tywin sought to regain the respect and loyalty that House Lannister so deserved.

After the Reynes and the Tarbecks refused once again to repay gold debts to House Lannister, Tywin personally commanded a garrison without his father’s leave and marched on these disloyal vassals, ordering that their people be put to the sword and their castles be torn down to rubble. Regardless of any personal qualms for killing women and children, Tywin slaughtered every member of these houses even as they fled his soldiers, flooding Castamere’s gold mines where the last Reynes huddled inside and ensuring that none escaped<sup>2</sup>. With the death of Lord Tytos soon after and the ascension of Tywin to head his House’s cause, the Lannisters of Casterly Rock once again regained their reputation as a noble house to be feared and respected. These ruthless events mark Tywin’s political life and carry their influence into the series proper, when he resides as

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, George R.R., Elio Garcia, and Linda Antonsson. *The World of Ice and Fire*. (Bantam Books, 2014) 201.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, George R.R., Elio Garcia, and Linda Antonsson. *The World of Ice and Fire*. (Bantam Books, 2014) 202-203.

an older man; almost forty years later, it is well known that the man “did not suffer disloyalty in his vassals. He had extinguished the proud Reynes of Castamere and the ancient Tarbecks of Tarbeck Hall...[their shattered castles] still stood as mute testimony to the fate that awaited those who chose to scorn the power of Casterly Rock” (Martin, *Storm* 223). Martin demonstrates the effectiveness of intentional ruthlessness and disregard for traditional morality from the onset of Tywin’s political career, starting the lord from a position of unquestionable authority and respect with the destruction of these houses and demonstrating his character’s penchant for political practicality.

While Tywin Lannister may decimate an entire House and salt the earth to impart a message, he does so with intentionality and always with the regard that it makes his political position stronger; he does not fall into the trap of utilizing force at every opportunity, recognizing the dangers of garnering hatred in addition to the fear and respect he desires. Not privy only to using overwhelming force, he is able to use cunning and deceit as well to achieve his goals; as *The Prince* advises, “since a Prince should know how to use the beast’s nature wisely, he ought of beasts to choose both the lion and the fox...[he must] be a fox to discern toils, and a lion to drive off wolves” (Machiavelli 128). Indeed, with the guile of two timely betrayals, Lord Tywin wins two separate civil wars—both times placing his family on the upper cusp of their power.

After the ascension once more of House Lannister to prominence and the regaining of their respect amongst the nobility, Tywin gained the office of Hand of the King from the current king of Westeros, King Aerys II Targaryen, overseeing the concerns of the kingdom on a day-to-day basis and administering to royal matters when the king was indisposed. Yet, King Aerys grew violently paranoid during his rule and his



mental health quickly deteriorated, firing Lord Tywin after years of loyal service and accruing a penchant for burning men alive; after a long list of atrocities and the murder of two northern lords, half the realm rose in rebellion to abdicating him. As Westeros remained embroiled in civil war, however, Tywin held his armies quietly at his holdfast and professed allegiance to neither side, building his strength and watching for an emerging victor. Machiavelli spoke of the dangers of neutrality during wartime, stating, “[a] Prince is likewise esteemed who is a staunch friend and a thorough foe, that is to say, who without reserve openly declares for one against another, this being always a more advantageous course than to stand neutral” (Machiavelli 159). Tywin understood this, however, and as the rebels gained a strong foothold and pressed closer to victory, he finally marched his men decisively to the capital just days ahead of them. At the gates of King’s Landing, Tywin professed to come to the king’s aid, to act as his faithful servant once more and protect him from the oncoming rebel army. Aerys believed him, delirious, and opened the gates wide—where then Tywin and his men sacked the entire city, catching its inhabitants completely by surprise.<sup>3</sup> He spelled the Mad King’s doom and slaughtered the remaining Targaryen family members, two babes of one and three, and presented their bodies before the usurper, Robert Baratheon.

Cunning and cruel, Tywin considered the monstrous act essential for his families’ political position, explaining, “[w]e had come late to Robert’s cause. It was necessary to demonstrate our loyalty. When I laid those bodies before the throne, no man could doubt that we had forsaken House Targaryen forever” (Martin, *Storm* 594). Betraying his king to gain favor with the next, Tywin deftly adapted to the changing political landscape and

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Game of Thrones*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 96.

ensured his family's prominence under the new regime, with two murdered royal children proving a necessary evil for his political security.

Within the timeframe of the book series, another civil war for independence and abdication brews to the surface, with Lord Tywin this time standing firmly behind the crown and serving steel to the rebelling vassals. While handily dealing with several pretenders, Tywin finds considerable more trouble with the Northern lord Robb Stark, shouldering consecutive military defeats and facing the possibility of a years-prolonged war. Understanding that overcoming the rebel in the field seemed unlikely, Tywin looked instead to turn his allies against him. For as competent a martial leader as Robb Stark proved, the young lord conducted his diplomacy with little tact, breaking an oath of marriage to allied House Frey early in the war and offending Lord Frey. Knowing the House to be prickly and prideful by nature, Tywin extends a letter of allegiance in the midst of this fallout, promising an end to the war and sweet vengeance against the Starks who jilted the Frey legacy. While a cunning move in itself, the true gall of Tywin's scheme came with the carrying-out of the Northern betrayal. Lord Frey hosted Robb Stark at his holdfast for a consolation wedding, swearing friendship and serving the northmen wine, before locking the doors and slaughtering his unarmed guests during the wedding feast.

More than the betrayal of a liege by a vassal, the "Red Wedding" violated Westeros' most sacred tradition of guest right; offering guests food and safety under one's roof and subsequently bringing them harm proves an act even the basest men deem indefensible.<sup>4</sup> Lord Tywin cares only that the act effectively crippled the Stark cause and

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<sup>4</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Storm of Swords*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 631.

ended the war, however, allowing Lord Frey to shoulder the blame while personally holding no qualms regarding the massacre at all; when criticized for his brutality, he flippantly responds, “[e]xplain to me why it is more noble to kill ten thousand men in battle than a dozen at dinner” (Martin, *Storm* 595). Achieved without regard for honor, nobility, or traditional notions of morality, the final “battle” in the war against House Stark showcases both the brutal lengths of Tywin’s pragmatism as well as the depths of his cunning.

While the systematic destruction of disloyal vassals in his youth threw off the yoke of his father’s weakness from the family name, Tywin understood also that, for a ruler to be feared and respected, they must still not be hated for tyranny. Machiavelli, in spite of the exaggerated scholarly tradition that claims otherwise, understood the same. The Florentine does not advocate baseless cruelty, or encourage the rule of a heinous tyrant; as a stipulation to his famous statement that it is better to be feared than loved, Machiavelli elucidates that “a Prince should inspire fear in such a fashion that if he do not win love he may escape hate...if constrained to put any to death, he should do so only when there is manifest cause or reasonable justification” (Machiavelli 124). Indeed, while rulers who utilize amorality and ruthlessness to get ahead politically characterize Martin’s series, our author emphatically distinguishes between using brutally pragmatic tactics and merely indulging in petty cruelty. Tywin Lannister exemplifies the former, and, in true Machiavellian fashion, despises tyranny just as he does disloyalty amongst his vassals.

Soon within the events of the series, the whole of Westeros comes under control of Tywin’s grandson, the boy-king Joffrey—a petulant and impulsive child who reacts

violently against any threat to his power, without regard for consequences. After the death of the previous king Robert and the imprisonment of the powerful vassal Eddard Stark for treason, the continent hangs on the edge of civil war, with Robert's brothers declaring themselves true heirs to the throne and Eddard's son marching against the crown to rescue his father. The royal councilors advise King Joffrey that Lord Eddard may be spared for his crimes, merely exiled or even released, to pacify the raised levies of the Northern houses. On a whim, however, Joffrey declares that treason shall not go unpunished and calls for Eddard Stark's head,<sup>5</sup> making the brokerage of any peace impossible. Tywin rightly condemns the execution as rash and utterly harmful to their cause, declaring, "[a]live, we might have used Lord Eddard to forge a peace with Winterfell and Riverrun, a peace that would have given us the time we need to deal with Robert's brothers. Dead...' His hand curled into a fist. 'Madness. Rank madness'" (Martin, *Game* 641). He even journeys to the capital and serves as a chief councilor to reign in the boy-king's impulses, though Joffrey continues to flaunt his petty cruelty and despotic attitude.

When surrendering Northern bannermen lay down their swords, Joffrey declares them all to die traitor's deaths, that he is the king and that his vassals should follow his command without question. Tywin chastises this course of action and exemplifies his pragmatic approach even to cruelty, chiding, "Joffrey, when your enemies defy you, you must serve them steel and fire. When they go to their knees, however, you must help them back to their feet. Elsewise no man will ever bend the knee to you. And any man who must say 'I am the king' is no true king at all" (Martin, *Storm* 591). He understands

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<sup>5</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Game of Thrones*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 607.

that the fear he requires must be balanced with respect to garner loyalty; to posture and cruelly utilize force alone is folly and leads only to hatred and instability. Martin evidently agrees with both *The Prince's* encouragement of ruthlessness and its contempt for impulsive tyranny, as Tywin handily maneuvers his political position with precision while Joffrey does little more than wear a crown and undermine his own cause.

A shrewd politician capable of unthinkable ruthlessness when it deems to strengthen his position, Tywin exemplifies *The Prince's* pragmatic and cynical philosophy, as well as the aspect that political stability seemingly proves more readily achievable through fear rather than love. Machiavelli and Lannister both consider the fear of reprisal amongst one's constituents a far more reliable tool than a loyalty garnered by generosity. As the Florentine explains, "love is held by the tie of obligation, which, because men are a sorry breed, is broken on every whisper of private interest; but fear is bound by the apprehension of punishment which never relaxes" (Machiavelli 124). Yet, for as much of an apparent advocate as he is of pragmatism and practical rule within his series, George Martin ultimately disagrees with this sentiment in the end, showcasing through *A Song of Ice and Fire* the true instability of rule through fear. Martin denies Tywin his eternal political legacy, even as he celebrates his power in the short-term. Not only do people regard Tywin hatefully on his death and immediately attempt to take the Lannister's spoils for themselves, but also the ascension of a less competent heir squanders any lessons of pragmatic ruthlessness and shifts Lannister rule so easily into tyranny. Through the fallout in the wake of Tywin's demise, Martin demonstrates that the practice of fear-based rulership proves disastrous when carried beyond the lifetime of a single commanding ruler.

Murdered by his dwarf son after a lifetime of treating his children like political pawns, Lord Tywin Lannister struggles to maintain his commanding presence and legacy of respectability in even the first moments following his death. A royal procession transports his body to the capital's religious cathedral for the funeral service, yet the guards on duty outnumber the commoners in attendance; watching the mourners proceed past the corpse, Tywin's eldest son Jaime suspects that "many and more were secretly delighted to see the great man brought low. Even in the west, Lord Tywin had been more respected than beloved, and King's Landing still remembered the Sack" (Martin, *Feast* 119). Compelling obedience and commanding fearful respect while the man lived, Tywin's acts of ruthlessness only inspire derision now, with Westeros' powerful vassals hoping for recompense and hastening to fill the power vacuum left in King's Landing. Martial powers in the south clamor for war against the Lannisters to bring justice to the Targaryen babes now eighteen years dead,<sup>6</sup> while a royal pretender finds new strength to gather allies in the wake of Tywin's death<sup>7</sup> and Houses in the north plot vengeance for those cruelly slaughtered at the Red Wedding.<sup>8</sup> *The Prince* endeavors to help a ruler adapt to the throes of fortune and find stability in his political office, focusing on the attainment and maintaining of this power; as such, the work gives little consideration to any future matters after the ruler's death, or the fallout possible from a rule that commands loyalty through fear. Martin demonstrates the consequences of such volatile

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<sup>6</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Feast for Crows*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 304; Martin, George R.R. *A Dance with Dragons*. (Bantam Books, 2012) 507-508.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Dance with Dragons*. (Bantam Books, 2012) 128, 132.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Dance with Dragons*. (Bantam Books, 2012) 390.

rulership, tarnishing Tywin's legacy from the moment of his death and showcasing the inevitable repercussions of his brutal pragmatism.

With such precarious circumstances threatening to overthrow the Lannister's power and plunge the ravaged nation into another civil war, a ruler of careful strength and tenacity proves essential; such a ruler is not on hand. With the new king now only a timid boy of eight years old, his regency and command of the realm essentially falls to Cersei Lannister, the queen sharing Tywin's desire for power but lacking half of his competency. She recognizes the other Houses' impetus to influence the crown and strives to command as her father once had, to maintain a strong grip on her constituents through shows of strength. Unfortunately, Tywin's instruction of rulership impressed upon her only the cruel handling of defiance and the efficacy of ruthlessness, without the finer points of cunning or judgment.<sup>9</sup> As the father-murdering dwarf himself describes her, "[s]he never forgets a slight, real or imagined. She takes caution for cowardice and dissent for defiance...[the young king's] rule is bolstered by all of the alliances that my lord father built so carefully, but soon enough she will destroy them, every one" (Martin, *Dance* 281). Terrified by the political vultures vying for her son's ear and for the crown upon his head, Cersei surrounds herself with flatterers and cowards unwilling to argue against her edicts, demands respect from her bannermen while she engenders none, and eventually finds herself abandoned by her father's allies while the kingdom falls to ruin. Without the strength or experience that preceded her, Queen Cersei attempts to maintain the fearful respect her father so carefully manufactured and garners only further hatred;

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<sup>9</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Feast for Crows*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 234, 474.

Lord Tywin's work towards House Lannister's legacy comes to naught with astounding speed.

A man embodying the edicts of pragmatism and practicality, of never allowing personal morality to stand in the way of political security, of holding one's vassals in the vice grip of fear instead of relying on the whims of their love, the implacable Tywin personifies *The Prince's* Machiavellian ideal in his command of House Lannister. With the lord's long and accomplished life, George Martin joins Machiavelli in his adherence to today's cynical political school of thought; with his death, however, Martin expands on *The Prince's* limited scope and demonstrates the insecurity of fear-based rulership when placed on a generational scale. House Lannister's cause fails to maintain its vitality after their ruler and head loses his life—pointedly, a state of affairs completely inverted to that of the honorable and virtuous Lord Eddard and House Stark.



## CHAPTER THREE

### The Appeal to Virtue in Eddard Stark

As a treatise championing the ruthlessness and amoral efficiency of pragmatic politics, Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* abhors the restraints of personal morality and sentimentality that so often affect a prince's decision-making when his power is threatened. Rulers that place honor and duty before their reason prove ineffectual at best when maintaining their position against the throes of Fate; at worst, these virtuous men harm their own cause and bring about their own abdication, halting their political progress in concern for their "principles" and letting adherence to their personal values take precedence over political stability. George Martin agrees with this view that pragmatism best assures political ascension and constancy, showcasing throughout his series the folly of rulers clinging to their principles and adhering too closely to virtuous ideals, punishing characters who refuse to adapt to their circumstances and who doggedly pursue *noble* rather than *practical* goals. Simultaneously, however, Martin disagrees with Machiavelli on the necessity of a rule governed by fear and respect, advocating instead that a loyalty grounded in the love of one's constituents achieves far longer-lasting stability. No ruler of *A Song of Ice and Fire* exemplifies both the pitfalls of virtue and the power of loyalty garnered by love better than the head of House Stark, honorable Lord Eddard.

Called south to the capital on King Robert's command and named Hand of the King by his old friend, Lord Eddard Stark accepts such a proposal only out of a sense of duty and obligation. A candid and honorable character by nature, Eddard holds no

patience for a political court filled with schemers and flatterers, and no desire to subtly navigate the political landscape in order to achieve his ends. Even as he assists in governing the realm on a daily basis and speaks with the king's voice, wielding a power and authority only known to few men, Eddard still refuses to take advantage of his station when it conflicts with his ideals of virtue. *The Prince* warns that a ruler who seeks to be virtuous and good in all things “must be ruined among so many who are not good. It is essential, therefore, for a Prince who desires to maintain his position, to have learned how to be other than good, and to use or not use his goodness as necessity requires” (Machiavelli 116). Nevertheless, Eddard places his honor and decency above all other pragmatic considerations and remains woefully ignorant of any who may indeed take advantage of his scruples. The Hand of the King dictates his actions by a personal code that he refuses to set aside, even if it threatens to cost him his political position and security.

Eddard's personal morality and responsibility as Hand immediately clash in a significant way when King Robert orders the assassination of a pregnant fourteen year-old girl, the daughter of the previous Mad King Aerys, under the threat that her developing child may one day claim the throne by rights and depose him. Outraged, Eddard stands firm in his personal values and alone rebukes Robert for his callousness, refusing to compromise his virtue for the sake of political appeasement and, indeed, even resigns from his position as Hand. Bluntly, he tells his old friend that “I will not be part of murder, Robert. Do as you will, but do not ask me to fix my seal to it...I wish [your new Hand] every success...I thought you were a better man than this” (Martin, *Game* 297). Rather than allow the ruthlessly pragmatic action to take its course, or object to the

king's order yet restrain his emotions and professionally bear the burden of his office, the honorable lord righteously relinquishes his title as Hand and subsequently alienates himself from the ruling power. With the loss of his privileged position on the royal council, Eddard loses his allotted protection in a city crowded with enemies; he is soon after attacked by Lannister guardsmen in a familial dispute, leaving several men in his personal guard dead and a leg severely crippled.<sup>1</sup> The proximity of the violent quarrel allows Eddard and Robert to smooth over their previous disagreement, fortunately, and the Stark lord is even reinstated as Hand; undeterred, however, Eddard takes his reinstatement only under order and stubbornly clings to his honorable values, still refusing to compromise his ideals even as he bears witness to their consequences. Machiavelli decries a man who holds honor before reason; George Martin evidently agrees, as even as Eddard believes his adherence to honor holds him high above the dangerous few who play the game of thrones, he sets into motion the events that spell his doom and the downfall of his House.

During his time in the capital, Lord Eddard investigates the suspicious death of the previous Hand of the King, Jon Arryn, and uncovers the man's trail on the cusp of a monumental discovery—the king's trueborn sons are not his own, born instead from Queen Cersei's unfaithful union with another man, and therefore illegitimate heirs to the throne. King Robert is a wrathful and jealous husband; dispatched for the time on a hunt, he would certainly call for the heads of Cersei and her children on his return. Eddard knows his discovery of illegitimacy devastates the line of succession and threatens to throw all of Westeros into chaos, with the previous Hand even murdered to keep the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Game of Thrones*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 320-322.

knowledge hidden; yet, he does not gather allies in secret, nor leave record of his discovery for insurance, nor quietly return home to safely pursue action. Eddard fears for the queen's children against Robert's wrath, and so instead decides to confront Cersei immediately and offer her a chance to escape the capital, telling her "I know the truth Jon Arryn died for...I do not kill children. You would do well to listen, my lady. I shall say this only once. When the king returns from his hunt, I intend to lay the truth before him. You must be gone by then" (Martin, *Game* 407). This attempt at mercy proves noble, yet Eddard vastly underestimates Cersei's capacity for cunning and her single-minded determination to seat her son upon the throne. *The Prince* pointedly mentions that "Princes who have set little store by their word, but have known how to overreach men by their cunning, have accomplished great things, and in the end got the better of those who trusted to honest dealing" (Machiavelli 127). Indeed, Eddard's warning only serves to place Queen Cersei on her guard and demonstrate to her that he remains a significant hurdle to Joffrey's reign.

Danger draws closer to Eddard and his political situation continues to crumble underneath him, as Robert conveniently returns from his boar hunt mortally wounded and Eddard holds no further leverage; Cersei's son Joffrey now stands poised to sit the throne unchallenged, with Eddard alone posing a threat with knowledge of his illegitimacy. Yet, Lord Stark still fails to understand the danger he placed himself in; remaining utterly ignorant of those working furtively against him, and refusing to humor a single dishonorable or duplicitous course of action himself, the Hand of the King continues ambling blindly along to disaster with his personal virtue guiding his steps. Even the dying king's brother, Lord Renly, recognizes the increasingly dire situation; he entreats

Eddard to cement his authority as Hand during Robert's last night alive, commanding that he "[s]trike! Now, while the castle sleeps...Once we have her children, Cersei will not dare oppose us. The council will confirm you as Lord Protector and make Joffrey your ward...By the time Robert dies, it may be too late...for both of us" (Martin, *Game* 425). Appalled at the thought of dragging frightened children from their beds and dishonoring Robert's legacy, of course, honorable Lord Eddard refuses such a plan of action and contends to take control only once Robert dies, keeping his ideals intact while ensuring that he squanders what little remains of his dwindling political power.

The treatment of Eddard Stark serves as a cynical response to the archetypal fantasy hero, the honorable and virtuous protagonist whose nobility and larger ideals leave him utterly outplayed by the pragmatic and cunning foes around him; demonstrating the dangers of moralistic politics in concurrence with *The Prince*, George Martin ensures that the honorable man's rule takes him to the wrong end of a sharp sword. Once King Robert dies and Joffrey ascends to the kingship, Eddard confronts Cersei in the throne room and attempts to air her son's illegitimacy before the realm; unfortunately, yet unsurprisingly, Eddard is promptly betrayed, overwhelmed, and arrested for treason.<sup>2</sup> At his lowest point, the deposed Hand of the King finally recognizes the folly of his politics; he dreams of his dead friend Robert berating him, telling him "[y]ou stiff-necked fool...too proud to listen. Can you eat pride, Stark? Will honor shield your children?" (Martin, *Game* 525). On the threat of his children's safety within the capital, Eddard resolves to take the pragmatic option at long last and lie to Joffrey's legitimacy, earning himself the status of a dishonorable traitor but buying the safety of

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<sup>2</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Game of Thrones*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 440-442.

his children still in the clutches of the queen. This false confession proves too little, too late, however, as cruel King Joffrey begins his reign by ordering Eddard Stark's immediate execution, giving the virtuous man a traitor's death and plunging the realm into a bloody civil war.<sup>3</sup> Machiavelli famously imparts that "there may be a line of conduct having the appearance of virtue, to follow which would be his ruin, and that there may be another course having the appearance of vice, by following which his safety and well-being are secured" (Machiavelli 117); Eddard utterly failed to recognize the truth of this philosophy. His disdain for duplicity ensured he remained outmaneuvered by the queen and her followers, and his reliance on virtue to dictate his political maneuverings directly placed his head on the chopping block and his House within a devastating military conflict. Bested at every turn, Lord Eddard Stark showcases Martin's harsh criticism of morality-centered politics and rule.

In his condemnation of idealized politics and the antiquated practice of holding nobility before reason, George Martin illustrates Eddard as a paragon of virtue before demonstrating his mistakes and punishing his political idealism; pointedly, however, our author reveals the merits as well of such a ruler through the fallout after his death. With the Hand of the King publicly denounced and beheaded for treason against the crown, word of Lord Eddard Stark's execution travels quickly throughout Westeros and incites the noble Houses of the north into frenzy. Robb Stark, already traveling south in a show of force to rescue his father and liberate his sisters, considers the news an act of war. An unblooded boy of fifteen years-of-age, however, Robb stands on the brink of a calamitous war with no easy assurance of his allies' loyalty; able to look only to the other northern

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Game of Thrones*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 607.

Houses, Robb must convince his father's vassals to join him to fight and die in the man's memory. *The Prince* notes the danger of placing such trust in others, that "for of men it may generally be affirmed that they are fickle, false, studious to avoid danger, [and] greedy of gain" (Machiavelli 123). Yet, defying the expectations of Machiavelli's shrewd and cynical perspective, the Stark bannermen stand behind Robb almost to a man. Even with their liege lord dead, the vassals do not fall to disarray, squabble amongst themselves, or indulge in pursuits of personal political ambition; they do not vie for power as Tywin Lannister's allies did the moment his blood ran cold. Indeed, the men reaffirm their fealty to House Stark and hoist the young Robb up to fill his father's mantle. When debating King Joffrey's legitimacy and the question of rebellion, Lord Greatjon Umber makes his loyalties clear by drawing his sword and "point[ing] at Robb with the blade. 'There sits the only king I mean to bow *my* knee to, m'lords,' he thundered. 'The King in the North!' And he knelt, and laid his sword at [Robb's] feet...[the other vassals] were rising too...bending their knees and shouting the old words" (Martin, *Game* 665). No mere performance of obligation or a fear of retribution would compel these northmen to stand unequivocally behind the son of their murdered liege; such a passionate allegiance can only come from a fierce love of the Stark name, a force driving these men to rebel against the Westerosi king and to swear fealty to their own.

The vassals of the north stand loyally behind Eddard Stark and his progeny by virtue of a steadfast love that George Martin emphasizes again and again, as these northmen profess their allegiance to the Starks not only in their liege's presence, but also in their absence and when under duress. *The Prince* warns that men are "devoted to you

while you are able to confer benefits upon them, and ready...while danger is distant, to shed their blood...but in the hour of need they turn against you” (Machiavelli 123-124); nevertheless, Martin posits that the kind of loyalty garnered by genuine love and affection proves stronger than most. As Robb Stark wages war in the south to avenge his father, the family’s ancestral home of Winterfell remains guarded by a host of northern levies in protection of newly-styled King Stark’s younger brothers, Bran and Rickon. Betrayed by their southern ally House Greyjoy of the Iron Islands, however, the Starks find their northern levies set upon by Greyjoy pirates and Winterfell seized under cover of darkness. Theon Greyjoy, once childhood friend of the Starks and instigator of the cunning plan, believes the entire holdfast to be under his control—yet the men and women of Winterfell refuse to bow to his conquest, with some preferring to die than being forced to become another House’s subjects.<sup>4</sup> Even unarmed and utterly at the mercy of thirty hardened Greyjoy killers, the people trapped within Winterfell’s walls resist Theon at every turn, assisting the young Bran and Rickon Stark in escaping under his nose and withstanding both threats of punishment and promises of reward in giving information of their whereabouts.<sup>5</sup> Theon becomes desperate and realizes that failure to recapture his hostages would allow the North to rally to the Stark children’s aid and to massacre him and his men with impunity, fearing “[i]f [Bran and Rickon] reach a village... The people of the north would never deny Eddard Stark’s sons, Robb’s brothers. They’d have mounts to speed them on their way, food. Men would fight for the

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<sup>4</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Clash of Kings*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 505.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Clash of Kings*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 545-546.



honor of protecting them. The whole bloody north would rally around them” (Martin, *Clash* 550). When Theon fails to find the Stark children, he kills and flays two farm boys beyond recognition to take their place; he announces to the world that Bran and Rickon are dead, and an ensuing battle with northmen leaves Winterfell burned and gutted, its inhabitants killed and scattered.<sup>6</sup> While an ignominious end to the ancestral seat of House Stark and ostensibly to Robb’s brothers and heirs, the family’s cause lives on even beyond the destruction of its holdfast and the killing of its members; most of the northern vassals maintain their steadfast allegiance in deference to Eddard and his memory, even in the face of much greater hardship that follows.

The loss of Winterfell and the reported deaths of Bran and Rickon shake the North to its core, not merely for the vassals and nobles holding stakes in the war effort but for the common man as well. Lordship under the Starks proved synonymous to times of plenty and chivalry; many of the smallfolk share the opinion that “[w]hen there was a Stark in Winterfell, a maiden girl could walk the kingsroad in her name-day gown and still go unmolested, and travelers could find fire, bread, and salt at many an inn and holdfast. But the nights are colder now, and doors are closed” (Martin, *Storm* 276). From bad to worse, Robb Stark blunders aspects of his diplomatic position and proves no match for the pragmatic and ruthless stratagem of Tywin Lannister; the Machiavellian mastermind orchestrates the infamous Red Wedding massacre that slaughters Robb with the majority of his soldiers and effectively ends the Stark’s war effort. House Frey, host of the Red Wedding and coconspirator with Tywin, gains control of the southern Riverlands for its service and decries any Stark loyalists in its lands to be enemies of the

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<sup>6</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Clash of Kings*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 697-700.

crown— yet, holdouts and survivors refuse to lay down their swords and merely continue their war against Winterfell’s enemies. A roving bandit gang prowls the Riverlands to rob and hang Freys wherever they find them, explicitly as vengeance for Robb Stark,<sup>7</sup> while Stark loyalists in their southern castles defy the Frey’s new authority and goad the crown into removing them by force. A one-handed Lannister commander reproaches a southern lord for remaining loyal to the Stark cause after the Red Wedding, arguing that “[t]his defiance serves no purpose, ser. The war is done, and your Young Wolf is dead...Does it matter how the boy perished? He’s no less dead, and his kingdom died when he did” (Martin, *Feast* 563). The lord merely retorts stubbornly that “[y]ou must be blind as well as maimed, ser. Lift your eyes, and you will see that the [Stark sigil] still flies above our walls” (Martin, *Feast* 563). While the Starks utterly lose their war for independence, their honorable and straightforward nature easily outmaneuvered by the pragmatic cunning of Tywin Lannister and House Frey, their legacy continues far beyond that of their foes and refuses to go quietly; as the end of Tywin’s fearful rule leaves the Lannister name without allies and in jeopardy of falling into obscurity, the Stark cause lives on in those who adore their memory—and in those who seek to avenge them.

Even amongst the steadfast bannermen of the North, not every House proves utterly loyal to the Starks. House Bolton—an outlier from the deferent northern vassals, and whose hatred for the Starks goes back centuries<sup>8</sup>—betrays its liege during the Red Wedding and is subsequently gifted Winterfell by the crown. Issued by royal decree and backed by a considerable military force, the Bolton’s new entitlement nevertheless leaves

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<sup>7</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Storm of Swords*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 923.

<sup>8</sup> Martin, George R.R., Elio Garcia, and Linda Antonsson. *The World of Ice and Fire*. (Bantam Books, 2014) 137.

many people of the north from all levels of society discontent and vying for revenge, galled by the betrayal of their beloved liege and longing for the Stark's return to power.<sup>9</sup> To better cement their authority over the North and ties to Winterfell, Lord Bolton issues a marriage between his son and a northern girl claimed to be Eddard's daughter and Robb's sister, Arya; rather than solidify the Bolton's rule, however, the sham marriage churns the Stark-loyalist northmen into frenzy to rescue the girl, and even the northern lords that swore fealty to their new masters feel unease at "Arya's" obvious distress. Lady Dustin of Barrowtown understands the tenuous façade of the Bolton's authority and advises "Lady Arya" be kept happy for appearances, warning that "[d]ressing her in [Stark colors] serves no good if the girl is left to sob. The Freys may not care, but the northmen...they fear the [Boltons], but they love the Starks...If the [Bolton lord] means to remain Lord of Winterfell, he had best teach his wife to laugh'" (Martin, *Dance* 545). Devotion to the Stark cause proves a yolk hard to shake off, even for the men now ostensibly loyal to their new Bolton liege.

The northern lords openly Stark-loyal join the armed ranks of Lord Stannis Baratheon, brother of the late King Robert and claimant to the throne, with whom they share no common cause but for his similar intention to march on Winterfell and remove the Boltons from power. As a massive blizzard delays their progress drastically, with more men and horses dying every morning for days without progress, some of Stannis' lords name the campaign to Winterfell madness and question why they should die for some girl they hardly know. Northern chieftain Morgan Little shames these men and leaves no doubt to the steadfastness of his loyalty, recalling Eddard Stark by his

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<sup>9</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Dance with Dragons*. (Bantam Books, 2012) 52, 250, 390.

nickname “Ned” and retorting bluntly that they march not just for some girl, but for “Ned’s girl...I would sooner my men die fighting for the Ned’s little girl than alone and hungry in the snow, weeping tears that freeze upon their cheeks...Let me bathe in Bolton blood before I die” (Martin, *Dance* 561-562). Even years after King Joffrey’s call for execution, the subjects of the north feel compelled to march on the behalf of Lord Eddard and his children, possessing a devotion for the Stark cause that keeps them moving forward even as they freeze and die on the road to Winterfell.

Virtuous and honorable to a fault, allowing his personal morality to dictate his politics, Eddard Stark personifies the sort of idealistic ruler utterly disparaged within *The Prince* for naivety and ineffectuality. However, while George Martin agrees with Machiavelli’s tenets that pragmatism and cunning allow for more effective rulership, our author lambasts fear-based rulership and demonstrates the fervent loyalty that arises only from devotion and admiration; the constituents of the north remain dedicated to the Stark cause even as the House loses a civil war and several prominent members of its family. A significant foil to the feared and respected Tywin Lannister, whose constituents quickly desert him in death as they once served him in life, Eddard Stark and his beloved remembrance showcase the endurance of a political loyalty garnered by love instead of fear, and emphasizes George Martin’s larger perspective of what defines effective politics—the necessity of political stability on a multigenerational scale, with careful consideration given to the ruler’s legacy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Power of Legacy and Closing Thoughts

In crafting the disparate political ideologies of Tywin Lannister and Eddard Stark that direct both men's fortunes throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire*, George Martin responds to the cynical school of political philosophy popularized by *The Prince* and shares his own perspective. While largely agreeing to the utility of pragmatism for effective rule, he refutes the assertion that a ruler is safer feared rather than loved, showing the fragility of Tywin's rule after his demise and the strength of Eddard's legacy through the continued actions of his loyal bannermen. As *The Prince* considers the political matters of one ruler's lifetime, Martin's work extends the timeframe to a multigenerational view, examining not only a single ruler's administration but also the legacy that succeeds it. While Machiavelli's treatise taught how to attain power and maintain control through ruthlessness and duplicity, *A Song of Ice and Fire* emphasizes the importance of political legacy; how a ruler is remembered determines the lasting potential of any political power, with a loving remembrance inspiring more loyalty than one merely feared and respected.

While Tywin and Eddard most explicitly showcase the crucially different avenues of attaining a subject's loyalty, Martin utilizes his whole host of ruling characters to further underline the importance of political legacy: a ruler's legacy influences not only the attitude of one's constituents but also of one's successor, crucially shaping the behavior and ambitions of the next man wearing the crown. For all of *The Prince's* undisputed contributions to the school of modern philosophy, the treatise's narrow

mission statement ensures that it lacks this critical exploration of both succession and of the external factors that determine subsequent rulership. From the exiled and idealistic princess Daenerys Targaryen to the divisive and unproven commander Jon Snow, Martin details both of these characters striving to set a precedent for their newfound rule while lying under the shadow of their family's political legacy. With the intricate characterization of these young and untested leaders striving to rule, Martin showcases just how formative a ruler's political legacy proves for their successors, underlining the shortsightedness of *The Prince's* rule through fear and emphasizing the importance of considering rulership from a multigenerational timeframe.

Princess Daenerys Targaryen, daughter of the Mad King Aerys II and one of the last surviving members of her House, defines her political ideology on the legacies of the nobility that came before her. Raised by her brother in exile after Robert Baratheon overthrows her father and spending her childhood fleeing the new king's hired assassins, Daenerys possesses no true knowledge of her family's history or the continent to which she holds a claim. Her arrogant brother Viserys falsely fills her head with tales of House Targaryen's glory and the peace and prosperity that marked the Mad King Aerys' rule; wrongly, he promises that the people of Westeros drink secret toasts to the Targaryen name and wait eagerly for the return of King Viserys and his sister. Even these incorrect assumptions prove formative, however, as Daenerys shapes her ideal world on the world her brother painted of their father's reign; when considering the prospect of conquering Westeros with a foreign army, the princess muses that "[she] had no wish to reduce King's Landing to a blackened ruin full of unquiet ghosts...*I want to make my kingdom beautiful, to fill it with fat men and pretty maids and laughing children. I want my people*

to smile when they see me ride by, the way Viserys said they smiled for my father” (Martin, *Clash* 321). An empathetic and loving girl by heart and compelled to make her vision a reality, Daenerys dedicates herself as a queen to defending the weak and saving the helpless<sup>1</sup>, even deferring her journey to Westeros in order to emancipate the slave cities of Slaver’s Bay. Martin highlights how the history of past nobility guide Daenerys’ footsteps and determine the princess’ perceptions of good rulership; even as she considers her own political maneuverings, she asks for stories of her father and siblings to give her insight<sup>2</sup>. Pointedly, her family’s political legacy showcases to Daenerys as well what a ruler should *not* be: namely, her late brother Viserys, whose reign in exile soon amounted to nothing after his cruelty and tyrannical abuse of power gets him killed. When reflecting on the nature of good rulers and their purpose of their reigns, Daenerys considers the “kings” of her own family and ponders that ““Viserys should have protected me, but instead he hurt me and scared me worse. He shouldn’t have done that. He wasn’t just my brother, he was my *king*. Why do the gods make kings and queens, if not to protect the ones who can’t protect themselves?...Justice...that’s what kings are *for*”” (Martin, *Storm* 310). Detailing Daenerys Targaryen forming her political ideals on the basis of her father and brother while striving to live up to the expectations of her family name, Martin demonstrates the crucial role that a predecessor’s political legacy serves in shaping the behavior and goals of any up-and-coming ruler.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Storm of Swords*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 475, 487, 646; Martin, George R.R. *A Dance with Dragons*. (Bantam Books, 2012) 151-152, 282.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Storm of Swords*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 89-91 272-273, 811.

Though sworn into an order that forgoes any claims to family, titles, or legacy, the bastard Jon Snow reveals the crucial guiding influence that shapes his political philosophy during his tenure in command. The illegitimate son of Eddard Stark and serving for life within the military order of the Night's Watch, Jon Snow rises quickly to the office of Lord Commander and gains immediate authority over the lives of several hundred men. A virtuous and noble man himself, Jon looks up to the ideals of his father and constantly recalls his advice regarding the practical details of rulership<sup>3</sup>, tenets that a wall is only as strong as the men behind it<sup>4</sup> or that fear matters only in how one faces it<sup>5</sup>. Martin displays Jon's admiration for Eddard to showcase how the lord's legacy directly affects the bastard's own politics years down the line; notably, Jon retains his father's attitude towards the prospect of rulership, sharing the respect and seriousness with which he approaches his role of authority and taking his obligations of duty just as seriously. When invited to eat and commiserate with his friends like old times, for instance, the lord commander declines, gravely pondering that "those days are gone...They had chosen him to rule...A lord may love the men that he commands, he could hear his lord father saying, but he cannot be a friend to them. One day he may need to sit in judgment on them, or send them forth to die" (Martin, *Dance* 144). The Night's Watch becomes deeply divided when roving bands of wildlings, long-hated enemies of the military order, flee their lands and beg for asylum within the Watch's own territory; newly-elected Jon Snow grants

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Dance with Dragons*. (Bantam Books, 2012) 520, 582.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Storm of Swords*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 339. Martin, George R.R. *A Dance with Dragons*. (Bantam Books, 2012) 106.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, George R.R. *A Clash of Kings*. (Bantam Books, 2011) 72.



their request, drawing considerable ire within his ranks and causing disagreement amongst his host of officers. Compelled by the strong moral code instilled in him by Eddard Stark, however, Jon takes the considerable risk of allowing them passage and refuses to let the thousands of refugees face certain death. When the northman Lord Norrey questions his ability to rule, asking him “if these wildling friends o' yours prove false, do you have the belly to do what needs be done” (Martin, *Dance* 714), Jon speaks to both the honesty and uncompromising justness instilled in him by his father, stating, “[the wildling leader] knows better than to try me. I may seem a green boy in your eyes, Lord Norrey, but I am still a son of Eddard Stark” (Martin, *Dance* 714). Through the characterization of Lord Commander Jon Snow, Martin emphasizes the pervasive effects of a previous ruler’s ideals and underscores the prudence of considering rulership from a long-term perspective.

With both works written in response to the idealized precursors in their genres and providing a refreshingly cynical and realistic perspective of politics for their respective audiences, Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* continue together the conversation within the modern school of political philosophy. Utilizing his written characters to explore the qualities that ensure effective rulership and a stable legacy, Martin demonstrates both the successful applications and shortcomings of Machiavelli’s landmark treatise, displaying both the efficient political ascension of Tywin Lannister due to his pragmatic and ruthless politicking as well as the fierce loyalty and beloved remembrance that follows the virtuous Eddard Stark long after his family’s political ruin. Further, detailing the experiences and role models that influence the politics of Daenerys Targaryen and Jon

Snow, Martin highlights the far-reaching effects of a ruler's political legacy and the generational component that shapes a ruler's behavior and ideals in the first place. By applying *The Prince's* tenets to a multigenerational perspective within his series, extending the scope beyond that of just a single ruler, our author rebuts the assertion that "it is far safer to be feared than loved" (Machiavelli 123) and reveals the instability of fear-based rulership, advocating instead for the dependable type of loyalty garnered only by love.

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