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GAME OF THRONES AND THE QUINTESSENTIAL IMMORALITY OF MORALITY

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ABSTRACT

*Game of Thrones* is an American fantasy television show based on George Raymond Richard Martin's '*Song of Fire and Ice*' chronicles which revolves around the kinsmen of seven kingdoms warring over militaristic control of the Iron Throne, which represents absolute power in a similar vein to the One Ring in the *Lord of the Rings* by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. '*Cripples, Bastards and Broken Things*' is the title of one of the episodes of the uber-famous *Game of Thrones*. It is an appropriate label for the intergenerationally renowned show which depicts the browbeaten toppling the existing hierarchy in an *Animal Farm* vein. Like the ubiquitous George Orwell suggested power corrupts everyone. Eventually, we are all prey. Predators merely exchange/trade roles. Thus, what materializes is the fact that everyone is portrayed as fallible. The immortality that the titular throne represents only belongs in and to stories. This paper explores the inventive (re)definition of morality presented by the iconoclastic show which has been widely hailed as a modern-day classic.

Bran Stark's declaration as the King of the Seven (Minus One) Kingdoms reiterates the fact that even in a world where everyone is broken, hierarchies can and will be maintained. The labyrinth of subjugation, oppression and persecution is the only remnant of immortality that the world, be it real or imaginary, possesses. This version of reality survives when nothing else does. The story remains long after the characters and the storytellers are gone. The show can be taken as a swan song to this ephemeral world.

Rob Stark's death and Jon Snow's fate further underlines the fact that a seeming underling can emerge as a hero. The hierarchical order cannot be utterly destroyed. However, the twenty-first century can and has certainly shaken it up, a bit. Arya Stark's slaying of the brutal Night King, rather than the more conventional alternatives of Jon Snow, Jaime Lannister and Jorah Mormon, further disseminates the notion that women can be brilliant warriors. Even Lady Brienne would have been a slightly more conventional than the minuscule yet deadly Arya. Not only does *Game of Thrones* rip apart the age-old notion that only men can be heroic warriors, it also destroys the subtle yet underlying preconception that those who are slight in stature cannot be excellent soldiers. Tyrion Lannister, the dwarf, proves to be more resilient and pervasive than his seemingly invincible and tougher and certainly bigger siblings, Cersei and Jaime Lannister. Various misconceived notions have been challenged by the groundbreaking show. Sansa Stark emerges as the quintessential woman, beautiful and proud while Daenerys Targaryen, in a shocking twist, as the anti-thesis of one. This naturally caused a near mass-hysteria as the seemingly invincible Daenerys had initially emerged as an iconoclast for feminists. Although the radical turn taken by the character is criticized, it was not entirely unexpected for the distinct critic. The transition

supports the claim that there is not much difference between a revolutionary unchecked and a terrorist. There are exceptions to prove the rule (Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi) etc. However, non-violent protestors are few and far in between.

Rob Start, the conventional hero meets a decidedly unheroic end, thereby elaborating upon the prevalent theory that things are not always what they seem. Although it cannot be considered ground-breaking, it is characteristic of twenty-first century disillusionment. Jaime Lannister, the golden and proud lion, loses his arm, justifying the use of the word 'cripple', re-emphasizing that everyone is fallible. The titular "Cripples, Bastards and Broken Things" suggests a refreshing change to the long-held illusions about perfection and grandeur.

Morality is skewed, subjective and debatable in a volatile and immoral world. In this respect, Game of Thrones can be considered a microcosm of the macrocosmic world. It raises a deeply pertinent question: Is it ethical to raise a moral child in an immoral world or is it equivalent to directing a lamb to slaughter. Teaching them how to defend themselves and stand their ground is essential in this morally ambiguous world. The character who amalgamates the requisite need to be powerful in a world which only respects dominance and control is Arya Stark, the younger Stark daughter. The lamb is exemplified by Sansa Stark, the older girl. She learns all the lessons that she has to the hard way. Arya Stark and Sansa Stark are polar opposites. They can be called each other's counterparts as well. Sansa is demure, gentle, peace-loving and romantic while her foil, Arya is cynical, tough, hardened and an excellent warrior. She is a formidable enemy and earns the respect of people the good old-fashioned way. Many of her actions are questionable. However, the question raised by the symbolic character is deeply profound: How does one define morality in an immoral world? The twenty-first century is emblematic of a world in which there are no black and white answers or people. Morality and perception are intermittent and subjective. Sansa Stark's harrowing journey is the result of raising a gentle princess in a world over-run by big bad wolves. A proportionate and decent amount of aggression is needed for the sake of self-preservation. Jon Snow and Rob Stark are iconoclastic examples of this fact. The former is reviled since birth, dismissed by his family due to his illegitimate stature. The latter is the pampered prince, the illustrious heir. By ignoring him, Catelyn Stark, his assumed stepmother inadvertently hands him all the tools that he needs to survive. By adoring and cherishing Rob, she instills in him an idealism that eventually leads him to his doom. Another set of siblings that highlight this trait of love proving disastrous are Theon and Yara Greyjoy. Theon is raised by the honorable Starks. He is torn due to his love for his biological family and his adopted family. The belief that people are inherently good and reliable instills a gullibility in him that proves to be extremely self-destructive. Yara, on the other hand, raised in a cruel and unforgiving land where women are considered commodities and dismissed as ineffective, proves that she can hold her own to any man. Her far-from-perfect family and countrymen involuntarily introduce her to grim realities that cannot be ignored. Thus, she emerges as a stronger, smarter and better version of her unfortunate sibling. Thus, this show revolutionizes and re-defines concepts of honor, morality and virtue like none other.

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