

# Prejudice Against Dwarfs as Depicted in Game of Thrones

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## Abstract

Game of Thrones is a series popular not only because of its fascinating universe and dramatic plot but also for the diversity depicted through its colourful characters, from the different dynamics of gender to giants and dwarfs. The focus of this paper will be to analyse and interpret how dwarfism is illustrated in the series. Dwarfism as we know is a physical deformity where the growth of the body is stunted. This abnormality and its consequences are shown through one of the most admired characters of the show, Tyrion Lannister. This paper aims to critically study the incidences from Tyrion's life and analyse how George R.R. Martin has represented dwarfism, an often side-lined and misrepresented trait. The paper also intends to examine how Tyrion was treated by his family and others characters from the series and his reactions to them. Furthermore, we will also observe the character development of this fans' favourite figure.

**Keywords:** Dwarfism, Tyrion Lannister, Game of Thrones, deformity, representation, George R.R. Martin.

## INTRODUCTION

In the world of 21st century, the advancement of scientific temperament, technological advancement, socio-political advancement, and even a greater social-economical stature hasn't led to the development in a particular arena, which as a human being holds a very important prominence in our day-to-day existence, that is the stigma associated with the people suffering from bodily disability may it be: Dwarfism or uncontrolled bodily growth. That is why this paper will look into a critical aspect of dwarfism as represented in Game of Thrones. There has been a vast representation of characters with mental and physical deformities including that of Quasimodo in Hunchback of Notre Dam and Rochester in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. What we find clearly evident is the fact how, the people of deformities still do have to find professions other than supposed normal

men. For example: By placing a dwarf in the show, the egos of other artist remain intact as it is a reminder of their top position in the food chain or the chain of economical stature. What needs to be understood is the fact that although these men/women merely become a way to impress or inflate the ego and cater to our thinking of being better than them in every way we could imagine. Even in ancient history, we do find examples of mistreatment: "In the courts, from ancient Egypt, through the 18th century, dwarfs were collected, indulged sometimes abused and sent to royals as a gifts... monarchs in all nation sent missionaries far and wide to gather dwarfs: although some may have been free; it is likely that other have were held in some degree of bondage (Stella Young, 2013)".

Moreover, the condition in which they were treated was neither any better but in a plain

usage of the world would be referred to as barbaric. In the excerpt from the article published in, *The Guardian*: “a combination of highly prized, but the property of an owner, were among the defining characteristics of dwarfs lives nearly 5000 years they are known to have been present in the courts of Africa, Asia, Europe, and Central America – in all periods they were assigned to wait upon or amused others (Betty M Adelson, 2013)”. The above stated statement is an easy reminder of the inglorious past, which is reflective of today’s society in general. More and more people related to dwarfism tend to opt for ‘showbiz’ itself a recurrent image of stigma related to clowns and dwarfs. They are supposed to laugh and we as insensitive humans are supposed to laugh at their existence and feel good about ourselves when we had nothing to do in achieving that. The reason for joining the showbiz doesn’t develop from the fact that they love their job but their continuous struggle as they strive to achieve the social acceptance and status that being short-statured might exclude them from the notion of being athletic or a masculine body type. When we look into the trail and tribulations related to dwarfism, we understand the pain of being a misfit and always being considered a misfortune. Michael Oliver, a professor of disability studies, in his theories regarding disability in health practices and research, talks about the influence of implicit and explicit theories on interventions and studies on people having disabilities. In this theory, he tried to bring out the experience of being disabled. The problem here arose from the fact that disability is not only a medical issue it is now much worse than that as it has become a social and political issue as well. Moreover, this theory stresses the fact and need for positivism. Positivist attitude as a social medicine to recognize the social context of disability as it does have a better effect on their mental health. Moreover, considering postmodern theory in regards to this, we understand disability and its effect does have the different approaches in different personality, for example, a dwarf born in a slum will surely have it tougher to deal with the prejudice and bullying but that doesn’t mean the dwarf of social standing have it any

easier, the only fact is their differences and problem will test them at a different scenario. Finally, Oliver concluded how the disabled have the idea for their voices needed to be heard along with the other research and analytical questions raised which don’t hold relevance in this paper. The one character that might help us bring forth the point is none other than the much-loved character of Tyrion Lannister, from the popular sensation *Game of Thrones*.

He grew up crippled, the victim of his father’s scorn, and the victim of his sister’s cruelty to an extent that she wanted him to be executed. The reason for their hatred is the death of their mother during the childbirth of a cripple, who could have died rather than the woman bearing him. Throughout his life he was called a ‘monster’ and we find him continuously ignoring and giving a sarcastic reply to such rebukes from his loved ones. But he could have never betrayed them. He loved them as much as he loved himself.

In spite of being the rightful heir, he was neglected by his father, Tywin Lannister, just because of his deformities. After the induction of his elder brother, Jaime Lannister into the king’s guard, he could have easily become the highest lord in the entire Westeros, but due to the discrimination he faces and the rejection he suffered at the hands of his sister Cersei Lannister along with his father, he ended in a dark cell. George R.R. Martin’s characterization of Tyrion Lannister is masterful in all its ways. He did indeed succeed but still, the stigma that he had to endure didn’t end with it. Tyrion did fight with the rebellion against Stannis Baratheon’s army but after the war was won, he only got rebukes for being a failure.

Moreover, the most painful idea for a child would be coming to terms with the fact that his family wants him to be deported to a far-off place. He was put on a trial for the murder of his nephew, King Joffrey, who was killed by poison. Everyone had already made up their mind to get him killed without a fair trial. To make the matters worse, the love of his life, Shae, a whore of Volantis, testifies against him. Even the representation of his love life is quite

unique in its approach as the conflict of them not being together doesn't come from the fact that he was deformed but due to the profession of the women he loved and the innate scorn that his father had for him. After all this plotting he was supposed to be executed. But he decides not to pay for the sin he never committed. He knew he hated Joffrey, but he couldn't kill him since he was his own family. He loved his sister's children, Myrcella and Tommen more than himself. George R.R. Martin put forth the amount of discrimination that makes a 'monster' of a loving man. He is filled with almost vengeance when he finds his supposed lover in his father's bed but after strangling her to death, he kills his own father with a crossbow while he was in the restroom. It shows how the amount of disregard and hatred he received at the hand of his loved ones that he is insinuated to an unimaginable end to kill his own father, leave the place of his birth, the Kings Landing, and join the conquest of Daenerys Targaryen, the mother of dragons who have decided to take over her rightful throne. Amidst all this misfortune, we need to understand the fact that unlike other examples of literature, Tyrion Lannister isn't only a character to satisfy the need of the audience to have a hearty laughter but he was a strong man with the wits and intelligence that could even match the sharpness of Valyrian steel or fire of a dragon for that matter. It is his personality traits that keeps him going through the thick and thin in his life. He believed to "Never forget what you are, the rest of the world will not. Wear it like armor and it can never be used to hurt you." It is clearly understood that he is attributed with the qualities of a conventional hero since he is the only sane person in the entire Westeros who is actually caring for the people residing in it, unlike the gory, bloodthirsty rulers of Kings Landing. What he might lack in matters of swords, he is able to make up for in the aspects of wits and intelligence. This in a way is actually used as a grab to cover his physical disability. Thus, saving himself from being a little less hurt in the process. The depiction of his character and his sensibility have led him to be an ultimate fan favorite. He is the one character who holds the tendencies of being human unlike Cersei's

idea of winning or dying in the game of thrones when he comments that "when you tear out a man's tongue, you are not proving him a liar, you are only telling the world that you fear what he might say (Michael Slovis, 2011)".

His love for books and the importance of knowledge doesn't stem from the fact that he wasn't a good fighter but because he knew where he lacked. He never overestimated his self-worth. He recognized, the greatest thing about reading is that it broadens one's life. He knew that once we have accepted our flaws, no one can use them against us. That is why we find dwarf jokes by Bronn or Lord Varys were all taken in a sporting spirit by him. More than anything he was a person with a compassionate soul. He believed in Daenerys Targaryen as she didn't want to be the queen of ashes but the queen of living. Hence, he believes that she will make the world a better place. Ironically, he is striving to make a better place for the people of Kings Landing, who were the same bunch of ungrateful citizens making a mockery of him and degrading him for the sins he never committed. He believes in the power of books when he comments "my brother has his sword, and I have my mind. And a mind needs books like a sword needs a whetstone (Alan Taylor, 2011)".

It is this never-say-die attitude that enabled him to be the hand of the queen and rise to the height that no man could ever achieve. He did what he believed in; his physical deformity could only act as a deterrent in his way but could never stop him from achieving the respect of the queen he served. Even after being disgusted by his own family, we still find him trying out to work on a truce so that his entire family isn't erased forever. Thus, we can say that George R.R. Martin through the depiction of Tyrion Lannister tries to shun the already existing prejudices against dwarves. He tried to portray their every aspect and does it quite convincingly too. Even in our Indian culture, we do find stigma and taboo associated with dwarf people. From their birth being considered as inauspicious to the point of them being rebuked to face, the harshest reality and ruthlessness of the world, humanity has never been kind to them. This paper also deals with

how our existing premonitions pass on through generations and finally become a part of us. This in a way becomes our own prejudice and it's our duty as an individual to overcome it and make a better individual of ourselves.

At the end, we can say that the visual medium although stereotype isn't quite different or unrelated from the depiction of dwarves or disabled for that matter. Even though we find a tragic depiction of dwarfs but rather than sympathizing we should empathize with their pain because that would be the only thing that could make them feel included in the world of the common folks.

Finally, as we culminate the arguments of this particular research paper, we need to understand that Tyrion Lannister is aware of his shortcomings and this awareness actually comes handy as it helps him to withstand whatever life has to offer him. Even the representation does point out the fact that it is because of the bodily deformities that he has to go through unwarranted trials and tribulations and had he been born without such deformity he could have had a relatively easier life. But it is this obstruction that actually pulls him through the mill and helps him understand the power of the mind. Thus, enabling him to be the biggest mind in the entire universe created by George R.R. Martin. Also, Tyrion's awareness leads him to make an extra effort that gives him a lead over others, therefore it is clearly evident that he has made his shortcomings his power. We should understand that the visual medium has stereotyped the depiction of a dwarf as a clown and an instrument to evoke laughter among the audience except for a few exceptions for example, Tyrion which we saw in the paper earlier. But if we give it a deeper glance, what we see is why it is so and it is because that is what we as an individual have been doing over our life. The acceptance that we provide to our fellow beings sooner or later finds its voice in visual graphics or any other medium for that matter. Moreover, such representation holds immense significance for those who are rarely given platforms where their grievances and narratives of victimhood and subalternity is brought into prominence. Although, the

treatment of Dwarfism would need a lot more nuance for us to understand the true picture of their subjectivity, the representation of Tyrion in Game of Thrones can be viewed as a welcome change.

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