

Free Folk: Female Sexual Autonomy and Wildling Society in A

Song of Ice and Fire (1996-)¹

‘These are wildlings. Savages, raiders, rapers, more beast than man,’ (Martin, 2012: 608), says Bowen Marsh to Jon Snow in *A Dance with Dragons* (2011). This is just one example of the ‘othering’ of the wildlings in George R.R. Martin’s epic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-).² Wildling culture and society are separate from those of the Seven Kingdoms, and the contrast in ideals and customs leads to the marginalisation of the wildlings, considered inferior to their more ‘civilised’ ways. Bowen Marsh others the wildlings in this example by comparing them to criminals and wild beasts, as is similarly done by Old Nan, a servant at Winterfell, near the beginning of *A Game of Thrones* (1996). Indeed, Bran Stark recalls her terrifying tales in which she describes them as dangerous, lawless, immoral and uncivilised, associating with evil beings and stealing away children:

The wildlings were cruel men, she said, slavers and slayers and thieves. They consorted with giants and ghouls, stole girl children in the dead of night, and drank blood from polished horns. And their women lay with the Others in the Long Night to sire terrible half-human children. (Martin, 2011a: 11)

The stereotypes of the wildlings as criminal and beastly are continued here, yet othering is further achieved in that the wildlings form part of Old Nan’s extensive tales, which seem comparable to ‘old wives’s tales’. In this case, her claims, like those of many old wives’s tales, seem exaggerated and superstitious in nature, and

¹ This paper is adapted from a section in Chapter Two of my Master of Arts thesis (2018), entitled ‘Subverting Patriarchy and Appropriating Power into a Female Perspective in George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) and Maurice Druon’s *Les Rois maudits* (1955-77)’. The section is entitled ‘Savage People, Savage Attitudes?: Progressive Sexual Politics and the Wildlings (*ASOIAF*)’. The thesis is cited in the References, though it is under embargo until September 2020.

² At the time of publication, *A Dance with Dragons* (2011) is the latest installment in the series.

based on little evidence. One can equally surmise that this reputation as a savage people is so pervasive and disturbing that it forms part of Westerosi legend, as told by Old Nan. Resultantly, the wildlings are not seen as real, living people, but instead as monsters and as legendary beings. Considered savages, the wildlings are an outsider class in Westerosi society, and are separated from the Seven Kingdoms by the Wall, which confines them to the icy north. Their savagery poses a threat to the security of the Seven Kingdoms and to the integrity of its patriarchal structure.

The ‘othering’ of the wildlings in this way is equally achieved through Martin’s general omission of wildling point of view characters in a series that takes place through the eyes of its major and minor characters. Indeed, in the currently published volumes, only one wildling character, Varamyr Sixskins, has had this privilege, as the prologue character of *A Dance with Dragons*. This said, he is still marginalised even as a point of view character in his placement as the prologue character of a novel; unlike the main chapters of the novels, which are typically named after their focalising character (e.g. ‘Tyrion’, ‘Arya’, ‘Daenerys’ etc), prologue and epilogue chapters omit names. This depersonalisation moves the focus away from the character itself and its unique personality and experiences, and instead towards their importance in signposting the broader events of the series. This further devalues wildling culture, presenting their stories as significant merely in terms of what they contribute to the dominant Westerosi narrative. Thus, the lack of wildling narrative characters presents a perhaps intentional ideological bias to favour the Seven Kingdoms, automatically creating a sociocultural distance and emphasising this feeling of difference between both societies. This biased presentation of the wildlings enables Martin to pre-emptively shape the reader’s views of them.

In *A Clash of Kings* (1998), however, the reader begins to receive more direct experiences of the wildlings in the text, as opposed to the dominant rumours and smaller wildling cameos seen previously (e.g. Osha). From this point on, the reader is invited to challenge the pervasive views about the wildlings alongside Jon Snow, the narrative character for these chapters. As a man of the Seven Kingdoms, Jon shares many of the dominant attitudes towards wildlings, but gradually we begin to see him struggling to defend these views, as this paper will show. With this in mind, are the wildlings really the '[s]avages, raiders, and rapers' that the inhabitants of the Seven Kingdoms accuse them of being? Whilst our skewed perspective of them makes it challenging to judge this, Martin offsets the bias against the wildlings to portray them in a more sympathetic light when possible, and thus presents the irony and hypocrisy of the dominant ideology. For example, the outraged southerners accuse the wildlings of being rapists on multiple occasions, but Martin never depicts any rapes taking place among them, whilst these actions are ubiquitous in the Seven Kingdoms, punishable by law but sometimes purposefully ignored. Those in power often turn a blind eye to the questionable actions of their best, most loyal soldiers, as is the case with Gregor Clegane. In *A Clash of Kings* (1998), Tyrion Lannister learns that Lannister men have burnt down a lord's keep, raped his wife and killed his peasants. In response, he remarks to himself that he 'smelled Gregor Clegane's work' (Martin, 2011b: 242), so infamous are his actions. Instances such as these draw into question the assumptions that wildling society, and not that of the Seven Kingdoms, is founded upon such violating acts.

That sexual autonomy is an important issue in this series is no secret, particularly considering the popularity of the HBO television adaptation, *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) and its numerous sex-related controversies. Hundreds of articles

published online, for example, call out the record-breaking show for its problematic depictions of rape and for the latent sexism of a medievalist fantasy world: typing ‘Game of Thrones’ and ‘rape’ into Google provides evidence enough of its reputation in this area. Yet the series is equally praised for opening up difficult conversations about gender and sexuality, particularly in relation to its strong, powerful female characters. These discussions are certainly not limited to the women of the series, as Martin shows how different masculinities function in a patriarchal society based on patrilineal primogeniture (inheritance through the firstborn son). For example, Renly Baratheon struggles to navigate his ‘subordinate’ masculine identity (see Connell, 2005: 78) as a homosexual man who wishes to become king, the ultimate patriarchal role that would involve an expectation of producing heirs. However, women are often the central concern, namely because the series depicts women struggling against a deeply ingrained patriarchal structure.

Either way, the discussion of women in the series, both novels and televised, relates predominantly to those central female characters, especially Daenerys Targaryen, Arya and Sansa Stark and Cersei Lannister. The wildlings rarely figure into these discussions, most likely because of their marginal status. This paper hopes to bridge this gap by highlighting the comparatively progressive attitudes towards female sexual autonomy of the wildlings of *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-). This paper hopes to show how wildling society often gives women the power to make their own choices about their bodies, sexualities, reproductive choices, and partners. It hopes to highlight how the wildlings subvert the extensive, restrictive and patriarchal customs of the Seven Kingdoms, and more generally of the medieval European societies that inspired the series. It hopes to highlight the importance of wildling sexual autonomy against the backdrop of recent feminist awareness. Indeed, even in

the 21st century, women around the world are still struggling to achieve some of the levels of autonomy experienced by wildling women.

One of the main indicators of the conflicting ideals of the southerners and the wildlings is evident in the different names these two societies have for the ‘wildlings’, who are known among themselves as ‘free folk’. They differentiate themselves in this way from the citizens of the Seven Kingdoms, who they consider oppressed by their feudal systems and nickname ‘kneelers’. In *A Storm of Swords* (2000), wildling Tormund Giantsbane uses this name to tease Jon Snow, who is spying on the wildlings for the Night’s Watch: ‘I know your kneeler’s knees must be itching, for want of some king to bend to’ (Martin, 2011c: 203). By comparison, we are told in *A Dance with Dragons* that ‘[f]ree folk do not kneel’ (824). Indeed, the wildlings disregard titles and birthright, and instead choose to ‘follow strength’ (ibid: 319) and proven power, and this earns them a reputation as ‘wild’, evident in their name. The word ‘wildling’, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, describes a ‘wild creature’, ‘flower’ or ‘plant’ (*OED*, n.d.). In using this word, Martin signifies a sense of foreignness to the ‘norm’ of the Seven Kingdoms. Entries for ‘wildling’ in other dictionaries emphasise the growth of wildlife freely and without cultivation (see *Merriam-Webster*, n.d.; and *Collins Dictionary*, n.d.). In choosing this word, then, Martin – intentionally or not – implies the liberated existence of the wildlings.

One of the foundations upon which Westerosi society is constructed is the institution of marriage, which enables powerful houses to gain and sustain power and support. Yet the importance of marriage means it is often carried out at the price of autonomy. Highborn children are betrothed from an early age and often have little choice in their marriage partner, being forced to break off existing relations for the good of family reputation and suffocating under the pressure of their own extensive

customs. Even in a patriarchal society, this is often the case for men too, who must marry for politics and not love. Robert Baratheon and Cersei Lannister are perhaps the most powerful couple in the realm as king and queen, but the two despise each other. A short discussion between Eddard Stark and Cersei in *A Game of Thrones* (468-471) sees Cersei confessing to adultery, to aborting her pregnancies by Robert, and admitting Robert's tendencies to occupy himself with prostitutes. Catelyn Tully and Eddard Stark are perhaps the most well suited couple in the story, but their bond was not immediate; we learn in *A Game of Thrones* that the two barely knew each other when they wed, as Catelyn was originally betrothed to Eddard's older brother, Brandon (161). This emphasis on marriage at the cost of autonomy was similarly the case in real European medieval societies. Given their political significance, marriages among the upper classes were carefully planned and controlled, leading to a similar forfeiting of agency, especially for women, who could not rule or have any political power. In the words of André Poulet: '[r]oyal marriage was liberticide for women' in medieval societies (1994: 103). The same can ultimately be said for the highborn women of the Seven Kingdoms, who, often through no choice of their own, surrender their little freedom through marriage.

Wildling society, meanwhile, automatically infers a higher level of sexual autonomy for all, as marriage is not an integral construct to their society. In *A Storm of Swords*, Jon quickly learns of the differing ideals between the two societies. When he speaks of being too young to wed Ygritte, a wildling woman with whom he has a budding relationship, he is met with laughter from Tormund, who retorts: '[w]ho spoke of wedding? In the south, must a man wed every girl he beds?' (2011c: 207). The wildlings escape the restrictive forces of heterosexual marriage for political gain. This is crucial for wildling women, as many contemporary gender theorists see

marriage as a restrictive force upon women and their sexual lives, and one used by patriarchal societies throughout history to control inheritance (Bradley, 2007: 121). Especially in a system based on inheritance by firstborn sons, ‘the father needs to know that his heir is in fact his own child, not that of another man’ (ibid). Indeed, marriage is a means through which, according to influential gender theorist Sylvia Walby, female sexuality is ‘directed to one patriarchal agent for a lifetime’ (1990: 124).

The sexual liberation of wildling women is not, however, immediately evident, and at some points the wildlings might even be described as sexually violent. Wildling men, for example, are expected to ‘steal’ away women who they wish to be with as proof of their strength and courage, and this custom may imply an inherent sexual violence against or control over women. In *A Storm of Swords*, for example, Tormund asks Jon why he ‘stole’ Ygritte if he was not planning on being with her (2011c: 208). Wildling society is certainly not perfectly egalitarian in this area, with some inherent bias towards male control. Yet, as Jon Snow learns during his time with the wildlings, wildling women are expected to fight back every step of the way if they are captured by both potential suitors and non-suitors, and do so many times throughout the series. When Jon first captures Ygritte in *A Clash of Kings*, Stonesnake warns him that ‘[s]he’s a spearwife [...] She was reaching for that [axe] when you grabbed her. Give her half a chance and she’ll bury it between your eyes’ (671). Indeed, many of the wildling women are ‘spearwives’ (warrior women), who are always prepared to carry out violent acts in self-defence without hesitation. In *A Dance with Dragons*, wildling princess Val frequently attempts to escape her gaolers, and eventually stabs one of them in the neck during an escape attempt (167). She later makes a show of her capability of violence and fighting spirit when, patting a knife at

her hip, she claims that Jon is ‘welcome to steal into [her] bed any night he dares.

Once he’s been gelded, keeping those vows will come much easier for him’ (819).

The ‘vows’ here refer to those that Jon took when joining the order of the Night’s Watch that protects the Seven Kingdoms from the threats beyond the Wall. One of these vows includes a promise to father no children and take no wife.

It is important that Martin should present the wildlings and their relative freedom through the eyes of Jon Snow, a man of the Night’s Watch with little sexual freedom. In this case, an ability to carry out one’s duty efficiently is equated with a lack of sexuality or passion, which could be distracting. This juxtaposition of Jon’s repression against the freedom of the wildling women highlights the excessive restrictions placed not only on men of the Night’s Watch, but also on the people of the Seven Kingdoms generally. South of the Wall, by comparison, marriages are comparable to business deals, in which women are sold off to men who they often have no attraction to by their own families. They have no expectation of agency in rejecting this even when potential sexual violence is involved; when Tyrion Lannister is wed to Sansa Stark, for example, he does not immediately consummate the marriage, knowing that she is still young, afraid, and has been forced into a political marriage (2011c: 394). Tyrion’s actions are considered strange and emasculating, his father telling him that he should have married Sansa to a fool instead: ‘[p]erhaps I should have married Sansa Stark to Moon Boy. He might have known what to do with her’ (ibid: 438). This series of events reflects the ideals of medieval European society clearly, in which the dominance of Christianity meant women were largely classified socially according to sexual status, for example as a maid, a married woman, or a widow (Leyser, 1996: 93). This was because of the widespread Christian belief at the time that women’s sexuality should be ‘confined to marriage and subservient to

procreation' (Chandler, 1991: 41). By contrast, the wildlings might seem progressive, if not by our higher contemporary standards, by disregarding these customs and promoting autonomy. Whilst wildling men are in a position of power when they steal away a woman, there is no expectation of feminine passivity for women as there is in the Seven Kingdoms, where women are relatively powerless with regards to their futures. Whilst there is a slight power imbalance, the free folk nevertheless show a progression beyond the medieval beliefs of the Seven Kingdoms.

The wildlings also destabilise these dominant power structures by bestowing reproductive choices on women and presenting other typically marginalised classes as equal. The free folk discuss casual sex without qualms, have no taboos towards abortion or childbirth out of wedlock, and consider women and 'illegitimate children' as equals to men. A conversation between Tormund and Jon Snow makes wildling attitudes clear on this subject:

"You are a free man now, and Ygritte is a free woman. What dishonor if you lay together?"

"I might get her with child."

"Aye, I'd hope so. A strong son or a lively laughing girl kissed by fire, and where's the harm in that?"

Words failed him for a moment. "The boy...the child would be a bastard."

"Are bastards weaker than other children? More sickly, more like to fail?"

"No, but-"

"You're bastard-born yourself. And if Ygritte does not want a child, she will go to some woods witch and drink a cup o' moon tea. You do not come into it, once the seed is planted."

"I will *not* father a bastard." (2011c: 207-208)

Tormund importantly uses the phrases 'free woman' and 'free man' side by side, signalling the equality of the sexes. These values surprise Jon Snow, as they starkly contrast to those learnt during his own upbringing, and he finds himself unable to

answer Tormund's questions coherently out of 'culture shock'. The progressive values expressed here are multifaceted. As already established, among the wildlings there is no shame in sexual contact out of wedlock for men or women – in fact, Tormund even appears to encourage such a union and it is, rather, Jon's pride that makes him reluctant to have a relationship with Ygritte, telling Tormund that he 'will *not* father a bastard'.

On a related note, 'illegitimate' or 'bastard' children are seen as no different to 'legitimate' children. Jon's reluctance to father a 'bastard' is perhaps understandable given his own experience; as the illegitimate child of Eddard Stark, he is routinely shamed. In the Seven Kingdoms, bastards typically have reduced status and inheritance rights, and this status is openly identified by a series of house names given to these children depending on their birth region: Flowers, Hill, Pyke, Rivers, Sand, Snow, Stone, Storm and Waters. Yet for the wildings, these differences in birth status are meaningless, and this indifference is disorienting to Jon, whose stigmatisation has for so long relied on his illegitimate status, making him reluctant to accept these new values. The equality of illegitimate children perhaps relates to the definition of 'wildling' in the freer and uncultivated nature of the wildling population, unlike the carefully monitored and judged population of the Seven Kingdoms.

This acceptance of 'illegitimate' children is particularly progressive in a medievalist setting; indeed in the UK, the labelling of 'illegitimate' children was only removed from the statute in 1987 with the Family Law Reform Act (Chandler: 132). Equality between legitimate and illegitimate children is significant for women's sexual autonomy, removing the shame befalling those who have sexual relations outside of marriage, and providing improved sexual and reproductive autonomy. Wildling women are not, then, considered 'impure' when they are no longer virgins

(‘maids’ or ‘maidens’) as is the common belief in Westerosi society, where maidenhood is a valuable bargaining chip and a signifier of a woman’s moral value before marriage. This is reflected in the dominant Westerosi religion, the Faith of the Seven, whose focus is a single deity with seven aspects, of which the ‘Maiden’ or ‘Maid’ is one, representing innocence, purity and chastity. Catelyn Stark for example prays to the Maiden in *A Clash of Kings*, wishing for her to protect her daughters in their innocence (451-452). The series also presents more explicit examples of premarital virginity being central to a woman’s value. In *A Feast For Crows* (2005), Arys Oakheart, sent to Dorne to guard Myrcella Baratheon, who is promised to Trystane Martell, notes that ‘Myrcella never shed a tear, though it was she who was leaving hearth and home to seal an alliance with her maidenhood’ (Martin, 2011e: 218). This sentence presents the delicacy of betrothals in a relatively matter-of-fact way; the marriage, and all of the political gains that it brings, essentially hangs on the simple fact of Myrcella being a virgin, and few other elements of her identity are important in this matter. Even as an adolescent girl, this huge responsibility falls to her sexual status according to a patriarchal system.

This is reflective of real Western values and practices both historically and currently. Luce Irigaray for example conceptualises the denigration of sexually experienced women both historically and in contemporary society in terms of the commodification of women and their sexual organs (1985: 176), in which the virgin is ‘pure exchange value’ (186) and is most valuable for men. Civilisation, moreover, would collapse without the exchange of women, a fundamental basis of our social order that prevents our descent into, in Irigaray’s words, ‘anarchy’ (ibid: 170). The wildlings, then, seem to represent this ‘anarchical’ sexual equality, and wildling women are relatively powerful in comparison to their southern counterparts.

Tormund's matter-of-fact tone and penetrating questions make the reader question their own sociocultural prejudices. Jon's stumbling responses reveal the incomprehensible beliefs of his own culture, which oppress and declare immoral women's sensuality. He seems ill at ease as he tries to defend customs that have never favoured him, as an outsider himself.

Finally, Tormund also casually brings up abortion, a possibility if Ygritte decides she does not want a child. The ease and simplicity with which he discusses this reveals that it is an accepted part of life and not taboo. Yet he also emphasises Ygritte's bodily autonomy, noting that Jon would have no say in the pregnancy after conception, an interestingly progressive reversal of power from man to woman that removes the patriarchal structures used to control the female body. This makes for interesting, if difficult reading in the 21st century, as many women worldwide, including those in some Western countries, are still battling for the right to access legal and safe abortion. As of September 2019, there are still 90 million women of reproductive age living in the 29 countries globally where abortion is completely illegal, regardless of circumstances (Center for Reproductive Rights, n.d.). Another 359 million women in 39 countries face restrictive laws, which mean the woman's life must be at risk before abortion is considered (ibid). Martin's portrayal of a supposedly 'savage' medieval people with abortion rights is a timely, if worrying reminder of many women's struggles in the 21st century.

The freedom of wildling women is also evident in Ygritte's open flirtation and sexual advances towards Jon Snow:

Every night when they made camp, Ygritte threw her sleeping skins down beside his own, no matter if he was near the fire or well away from it. Once he woke to find her nestled against him, her arm across his chest. He lay listening to her breathe for a long time, trying to

ignore the tension in his groin. Rangers often shared skins for warmth, but warmth was not all Ygritte wanted, he suspected. After that he had taken to using Ghost to keep her away. (2011c: 206).

Her overt display of her sexual desire for Jon, moving closer to him and making her intentions clear, defies both the myth of impurity of sexually experienced women, and the passive stereotypes of female sexuality that many feminists see as central to women's oppression. In *The Female Eunuch* (1970), for example, Germaine Greer argues that rejecting the concept of a uniquely responsive (as opposed to active and agential) female sexuality is key to the liberation of women (2006: 10-11). An expectation of female sexual passivity, and stigmatisation based on sexual experience, enables patriarchy to better control female sexuality to its own ends. Ygritte's acts, both in the Seven Kingdoms and in Western society, might provoke name-calling and accusations of promiscuity. Yet, as a wildling, Ygritte is sexually liberated, her sexual agency defying patriarchal structures.

Her physical proximity to Jon in this scene also constitutes an assertion of power over him, specifically over a man whose ideals are formed by patriarchal society. In this scenario, Ygritte reclaims power over a man by defying feminine expectations and stereotypes by taking up 'his' space. The relationship between femininity, women's oppression and space is one frequently explored by feminists. For example, in her essay entitled 'Throwing Like a Girl', Iris Marion Young explains that women are more likely to reduce the physical space they take up than men, whether by carrying items close to their chest or by sitting with their legs together (2005: 32). Men, meanwhile, are more willing to carry items at their sides or spread their feet and legs apart when sitting (32-33). Young later explains that this is ultimately due to the status of the female body in patriarchal society, which is viewed as an object and not as a subject, and as a mere 'thing' of aesthetic value (44). This

reduction in physical space, then, is associated with a lower status, and is evidence of the control exercised by patriarchy over the female body. What Young identifies when she explains that men typically spread their legs when sitting is understood in contemporary media under the term ‘manspreading’, a term now included in some dictionaries to denote this phenomenon (‘Manspreading’, 2015). In feminist awareness, women’s personal space is seen as respected less than men’s, and is frequently smaller and prone to invasion, the most extreme example being the threat of rape (Young: 45). An element of claiming power as female, then, could include taking up more space where possible, and Ygritte’s sexuality enables a reclamation of power from Jon in this scenario through her invasion of his space. By taking Jon’s space, Ygritte reclaims power and makes clear her active pursuit of sexual fulfilment, in stark contrast to the oppressed women of the Seven Kingdoms. That Jon decides he needs to place his dangerous direwolf between him and Ygritte is evidence of the perceived threat to his masculine power.

In *A Storm Of Swords*, moreover, Ygritte is fearless and unashamed when she announces to her male peers that she and Jon are sexually involved (2011c: 218-219). Though this is a lie at this point, she is not considered outspoken or uncouth for declaring her sexual activity outside of marriage. Her announcement even saves Jon from potential harm by providing him with protection as her lover. That the wildlings place value in Ygritte’s choice of partner is evidence that wildling women are not unjustly judged based on sexual status, and that their voices are valued and heard: ‘[f]ar be it from me to separate two hearts that beat as one’ (218) says wildling leader Mance Rayder to Ygritte’s pleas for mercy towards Jon. Ygritte even boldly uses this as a seductive invitation to Jon, a further defiance of the passive stereotype of female sexuality: ‘[f]ind another place for Ghost to sleep tonight, Jon Snow’ (219).

Jon feels hopelessly drawn in and powerless to resist Ygritte, and justifies his sexual relations with her as a necessity to keep his cover and maintain the trust of the wildlings. Yet the line between façade and reality soon becomes blurred and Jon questions his true feelings: '*[i]f this is so wrong, he wondered, why did the gods make it feel so good?*' (366). By seducing Jon, Ygritte further exercises power over him, which is significant given the sociocultural tensions between them. Jon belongs to a culture that claims to be more civilised than wildling society, and Ygritte's seduction of him – at least temporarily – might constitute a conquering of the outsider class over the dominant southern man, and a victory for her culture, in which women are not marginalised. In Ygritte and Jon's union, the marginalised and oppressive classes are briefly reconciled and made equal. What seems like a sweet love affair takes on political meaning when examined against the contexts of the two characters and their respective societies. Jon is forced to doubt the beliefs taught to him since birth, beginning to realise, however reluctant he is to show it, that the wildling way of life is far from the savagery that the majority perceive it to be.

In conclusion, the wildlings empower their women to make their own decisions about their bodies and sexualities in a range of ways, and are undeserving of their reputation as 'savages' particularly according to a contemporary, feminist perspective. Whilst the series is set in a medieval-inspired world, the huge popularity of the series in the 21st century makes its portrayal of women's agency significant. Jon Snow's perspective, whilst initially seeming biased, importantly reminds the reader of the restrictive customs of the Seven Kingdoms to highlight the freedom of the wildlings. As he battles with his own beliefs, the reader is equally invited to challenge the attitudes of the 'civilised' Seven Kingdoms. It is interesting that the characters with seemingly the most sexual freedom are those considered savages, who are cast

out from ‘civilised’ society. In an unfortunate parallel to feminist struggles in our own world, it appears that societies allowing women autonomy might be viewed with fear. The wildlings, whilst not benefitting from the privileges associated with being part of ‘civilised’ society, are free of obligations and restrictions as outsider figures, and frequently undermine oppressive patriarchal structures.

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