

Inside the Fictional Mind: A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of Arya Stark's Mental Models in the Series of "A Song of Ice and Fire"

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the cognitive stylistic perspectives of Arya Stark's mental models construction in the series of A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF). It investigates how the linguistic and stylistic cues externalize Arya's evolving awareness, identity, and morality. Drawing on frameworks from cognitive stylistics, particularly Stockwell's (2020) model of mind-modelling and Johnson-Laird's (1980) theory of mental models, the analysis investigates Arya's chapters across five novels of the series. The paper identifies how the cognitive representations of selfhood are constructed, revised, updated, and disrupted through language, narrative perspectives, and embodied metaphors. This is accomplished through attentive reading and cognitive stylistic analysis. The results demonstrate that Arya's cognitive trajectory progresses from a conflict schema of gender and identity to adaptive survival cognition and moral reconstruction. Each stage of her cognitive development is marked by a particular mental model, such as the mental model of "sword identity, wolf assassin, and no one" identities. The constructed mental models reveal a deep cognitive interplay among past trauma, disguise, and self-awareness. The analysis shows that Martin's linguistic style and narrative framing guide readers to engage in complex mind-reading processes that mirror Arya's internal shift in self-perception. The constructed mental models demonstrate that Arya's cognitive evolution reflects the integration of identity, morality, and survival in narrative cognition, underscoring the role of fiction as a simulation of human mental life. The findings contribute to cognitive stylistic scholarship by demonstrating how readers' construction of mental models parallels a character's evolving consciousness, offering insight into the cognitive realism and emotional depths of Martin's narrative craft.

Keywords: Cognitive Stylistics, Mind-Modelling, Mental Models, Construction, Cognitive Cues.

INTRODUCTION

Reading fictional literature, particularly fantasy, requires cognitive processes related to language comprehension. Extensive world-building and sophisticated narrative techniques are commonplace features, contributing to its high potential for exploration in cognitive stylistic studies. Attempts to research this realm of literature face obstacles related to the cognitive processes mediated by these forms of narration and how readers build mental schemas based on what they read and observe inside the fictional minds of narrators and characters.

One of the most renowned series in modern fantasy literature is the "A Song of Ice and Fire" series, authored by American writer George R. R. Martin (born George Raymond Richard Martin on September 20, 1948), often referred to by his initials G.R.R.M. He has played a pivotal role in elevating fantasy from the realm of geek culture to mainstream Hollywood, transforming it into a genre that appeals to both men and women, and shifting its tone from light and utopian to dark and dystopian. The series' narrative framework includes fictional events, influential

houses, a mysterious world, supernatural powers and creatures, and complex characters. One such complex character is Arya of House Stark. Descended from an ancient King in the North, Arya Stark embarks on a long journey within the fictional world of the series. This journey requires different physical and psychological tactics to be successful. As the journey takes place across various locations—such as Westeros, Essos, the Wall, and others—different psychological states are evoked through the construction of diverse mental models.

The concept of mental models in literary characters is explored by Schneider (2001) as a dynamic process where readers build and continually update a cognitive model for each character based on various textual sources. As they read, these mental models are frequently modified, expanded, or revised in response to new information.

Within cognitive stylistics, mental models are part of mind-modelling, where readers are also able to build up a mental model of another person; this person could be fictional (like the case under investigation). The function of this mental model is to maintain records of both what happens and how each character sees the world. Building relationships with different people can be achieved by projecting them into one's mind. Emphasizing or understanding them, resisting their worldviews, or identifying with them in ways that make their fictional world seem authentic or significant in others' reality (Stockwell, 2020).

With this in mind, reading a series like *A Song of Ice and Fire* (ASOIAF), with its bulky texts and complex characters, is not an ordinary activity but an intellectual journey into the shadowy fictional minds of its characters. This journey challenges readers to navigate intricate plots and moral ambiguities, prompting them to question their own beliefs and values. As they delve deeper into the narrative, readers find themselves grappling with characters' decisions, thoughts, beliefs, and states of mind. One of these fictional minds is that of Arya's character, whose complex character development and resilience make her journey particularly compelling. From a cognitive stylistic perspective, Arya's mental models are constantly challenged by the difficulties she faces, such as the loss of her family, shifting loyalties, and the need for survival in a brutal world. These challenges force readers to adopt her understanding of identity, morality, and trust through the mental models which are constantly constructed.

In the face of cognitively challenging material, the fantastical elements in the series fall short of captivating readers or engaging them when reading the written texts. The narrative events, about Arya's mental models, however, show knotted overlapping when written in a paranormal fictional style. Therefore, the expected amount of information is sometimes not directly stated in the written fragments of the narratives but instead (cognitively) inferred by the reader. To clarify the gap in the literature, the following research questions are raised:

1. What central mental models are constructed for Arya Stark throughout the series?
2. What are the textual information and stylistic cues that help to construct the mental models and determine the type of each model?
3. How does George R.R. Martin's use of stylistic representations externalize Arya's layered mental models of selfhood and identity transformation?
4. How does the shift in Arya's narrative style alter the readers' perception of her changing identity and moral stance?
5. In what way do Arya's mental models encourage readers to engage in fictional events and identities through the theory of mind-modelling to figure out identity, deception, and moral choices?

LITERATURE REVIEW: COGNITIVE STYLISTICS AND MIND-MODELLING

Cognitive stylistics (henceforth CS) is one of the interdisciplinary fields within applied linguistics that examines how readers process and understand literary texts by fusing knowledge from linguistics and cognitive science. It focuses on comprehending the mental operations that go into reading and how they affect the way of interpreting the style of a text. The rapidly developing discipline of CS sits at the intersection of cognitive science, literary studies, and linguistics (Semino & Culpeper, 2002).

As called cognitive poetics, CS is alternatively called 'mind stylistics' since it discusses language as a fundamental reflection of the human mind aspects. In addition, it emphasizes the significance of meaning, conceptual frameworks, and embodied experience in language study. Along with the content work, the author's and reader's inventiveness in creating and interpreting meaning is particularly weighty to CS (Hamawand, 2023). Furthermore, CS comes with the different sub-disciplines of literary criticism, which are closely connected with stylistics. The popular assumption of stylistics is that it is about providing a descriptive, non-evaluative, and rather mechanical account of a text's linguistic qualities. The validity of the results of cognitive poetic and stylistic investigation is more up for debate. One could argue that cognitive poetics has a *non-predictive power* since readers are to reach a primary interpretation depending on a common language before making any analytical sense. An alternative perspective suggests that cognitive poetics has a *productive power* since it offers a fresh or new interpretation, because the act of performing cognitive poetic analysis raises awareness of specific patterns that may have previously gone unnoticed or subconscious. These two sides of argumentation demand a distinction

between reading, as a process of arriving at a personally acceptable sense, and interpretation as being different impressions and senses that might be rejected or refined.

The role of cognitive poetics here “models the process by which intuitive interpretations are formed into expressible meanings, and it presents the same framework as a means of describing and accounting for those readings” (Stockwell, 2002, p.8).

Accordingly, understanding how actual readers react to texts is the goal of CS. Therefore, rather than being rarefied literary-critical readings, CS analyses seek to offer concise accounts of the reading process and the interpretative effects that result from it (Stockwell & Whiteley, 2014). It develops the examination of reading as interaction by acknowledging that narrative comprehension and response inherently need a primary focus on the mental processes involved in engaging with and reflecting on stories. Consequently, it asserts that the study on cognition provides extensive insights that are crucial for comprehending the actions and experiences of actual readers, yet has been mostly neglected. Language is not isolated from other cognitive processes; rather, language production is indicative of that processing (Mason, 2019).

Within the narratives, a reader's understanding of a character comprises a collection of facts, conjectures, and fundamental and ancillary elements, together with a repository of memories and anticipated scenarios, which might be considered a schema of knowledge. This fundamental lived experience as a person is accompanied cognitively in almost all people with a sense that other humans in the world are also people. Humans possess a Theory of Mind (Henceforth ToM) which is not a theory in the critical sense, but is essentially a presumption that the other person has a mind and consciousness that are basically like others'. This ToM has its origins in cognitive psychology, where it has a particularly specific and narrow definition. In the context of literary reading and an understanding of characterization, cognitive poetics has broadened this notion into an account of *mind-modelling*. This process transcends merely labelling another individual as possessing consciousness, perspective, and views pertinent to a certain context and instead fosters the development of a comprehensive mental model of that person's mind and life in its entirety. This entails attributing to them not just a physical experience of their environment but also a viewpoint, ideological stance, self-perception, mental processes, ambitions, and emotions, while also dramatizing their probable acts, intentions, desires, and dispositions.

Mind-modelling often entails an active engagement in interpreting textual clues and constructing a representation of an individual along the continuum of personhood. Shallow modelling yields a superficial, tokenistic character, while the mental modelling of a well-developed character necessitates significant reader commitment in literary works (Stockwell, 2020).

Mind-Modelling and Mental Models

Within the process of reading, readers perceive characters as they build a schema of knowledge; a character is an assortment of facts, assumptions, superior and inferior details, past experiences and future outcomes. When they read fictional texts, understanding a fictional character is understanding what a person is: a prototype example of a person with conscious awareness and subconscious thoughts, moods, and feelings. The same is true for imaginary people; they are cognitively treated exactly as real, actual people using the same mental faculties. Thus, within the context of literary reading and understanding characters, cognitive stylistics offers mind-modelling as:

[A] process by which we go beyond a simple tagging of another person as having consciousness, view point, and beliefs relevant only to a single setting, and begin to build up a rich mental model of that person's mind and life as a whole. This involves imputing to them not only a physical experience of their surroundings, but also a perspective, ideological outlook, self-regard, stream of thoughts, aspirations and emotions, and dramatising for ourselves their likely actions, intentions, desires, and dispositions (Stockwell, 2020, p. 178).

This builds a mental model by ascribing people's ideologies, sense of self, thoughts, goals, and feelings, and dramatizing their probable behaviour, motivations, and character traits (Stockwell, 2020). In the process of text comprehension, mental models are the dynamic cognitive representations of the contents of a text or an utterance that are held by the recipient or reader who is receiving the information. Through the integration of textual information and personal knowledge, the mental model serves the purpose of facilitating the production of sense. Within the cognitive processing of literary textual information, constructing a mental model needs to take into account the integration of information across texts, codes, and modalities (Bekhta, 2005). This account corresponds to what Johnson-Laird (1980) asserted about mental models in cognitive sciences:

The theory of mental models assumes that they can be constructed on the basis of either verbal or perceptual information, though only in the former case will their construction necessitate the introduction of arbitrary assumptions. It follows that images correspond to those components of models that are directly perceptible in the equivalent real-world objects. Conversely, models may under-ly thought processes without necessarily emerging into consciousness in the form of images (p.100).

This means that constructing a mental model from directly observed information, like words and sentences, or from the information that could actually be seen and experienced. However, not all mental models appear as

conscious mental images; some remain abstract cognitive structures that guide thinking and reasoning without being visualized. Consequently, it could be said that a mental model is an internal, frequently unconscious, cognitive representation of a reality which can be constructed either from words or perception.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Analyzing mental models in a fictional series like ASOIAF requires a thorough focus on character development, textual details, and stylistic cues within the texts. The mental models examined are those of the character Arya Stark. She is selected as the fictional mind and self to explore her mysterious yet insightful worlds. This fictional character experiences significant cognitive growth throughout the series. Her perspectives offer valuable insights into how mental representations, beliefs, intentions, and emotions shape readers' understanding and engagement with the narrative worlds while they read. By focusing on Arya, the cognitive stylistic analysis can effectively illustrate how linguistic and stylistic choices enhance the portrayal of complex cognition within a speculative fictional universe.

The texts of the series are published by Harper Voyager publishers, a UK-based publisher (<https://www.harpercollins.com/collections/harper-voyager>). Arya's chapters are used as samples of the analysis, where the extracts are taken exactly from the written texts. The primary methodological framework followed in the analysis is the Mind-modelling framework. This framework involves constructing mental models throughout the process of reading. A modified model is used in identifying these mental models is based on the theory of Laird (1980), *Mental Models in Cognitive Stylistics*, and that of Stockwell (2020), *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*. The identified constructed models facilitate a deeper engagement with the narrative, enabling readers to establish cognitive connections between the character of Arya Stark and the central themes within the series. By employing this framework, the analysis aims to improve knowledge about the character's cognitive development and plot progression within the series. The following sub-sections contain the cognitive stylistic analysis of these mental models.

A Game of Thrones

Martin provided readers with what amounted to prepackaged mental models. Readers built these models depending on the linguistic cues in the text, where each chapter introduced a new mental model from a specific character's mental perspective. The most cognitively noticeable mental model is found in Arya's chapters. Blending a child's perceptual imminence with intense emotional development makes these chapters cognitively salient and creates rich opportunities for readers to engage in mind-modelling. The first chapter of Arya's started with:

“Arya has the hands of a blacksmith” (Martin, 1996, p. 64).

This phrase constructed a dominant mental model through schema violation, rooted in gendered comparison. The feminine scheme of Stark's house is that northern noblewomen are expected to have beautiful, silky hands, representing classic femininity, opulence, and grace. The cognitive function of this mental model forces readers to construct a conflict schema: Arya's identity as a noble girl versus the embodied reality of having hands resembling those of a male labourer.

In the next chapter of Arya, the schema is changed and updated.

Arya had loved nothing better than to sit at her father's table and listen to them talk. She had loved listening to the men on the benches too... Arya spun around, with Needle in her hand. She slashed at the air savagely... “I don't want to be a lady!” Arya flared. “I ought to snap this toy across my knee here and now, and put an end to this nonsense” “Needle wouldn't break,” Arya said defiantly, but her voice betrayed her words. “It has a name, does it?” Her father sighed. “Ah, Arya. You have a wildness in you, child. ‘The wolf blood,’ my father used to call it (Martin, 1996, pp. 211-14).

Arya, the young noble girl, turned out to be a warrior. She transformed the needle into an integral part of herself, making it more than just a blade. Like her, it is diminutive in physical size but deadly in action. The mental model here is constructed by introducing Arya as an autonomous, strong-willed woman, not a typical lady. Her ultimate goal is to find a place among the typically masculine realms of listening to warriors and using weapons. The role of a fighter, rather than a noblewoman, is shaping her self-perception. Arya's mental model is influenced by her refusal to accept external prescriptions regarding her identity. At this point, she is deeply conceptualizing herself as an individual who is capable of violence, deserving of agency, and unafraid to face danger—even in a symbolic sense. Her declaration and behaviour indicate her internal conflict regarding identity and the development of a warrior mentality.

The linguistic tracing of Arya's character through the five chapters specified for her, the schema has changed again to introduce different mental models for her personality: It was the third time he had called her “boy”.

"I'm a girl," Arya objected: "Boy, girl," Syrio Forel said. "You are a sword, that is all." He clicked his teeth together. "Just so, that is the grip. You are not holding a battle-axe, you are holding a—" "—needle," Arya finished for him, fiercely (Martin, 1996, p.218).

The mental model constructed for Arya's personality here encompassed three cognitive forces: her internal statement of gender spoken by her biological self ("I'm a girl"), the social misrecognition of her as a boy, which threatened her sense of self and her gender identity; and the transition of her identity by Syrio as being a hard-hitting warrior ("you are a sword"). The cognitive role of Syrio's speech reconstructed an internal conflict by offering a cognitive reframing strategy. He did not downplay her gender identity, but he replaced the significance of this identity with purpose-driven cognition. The purpose is of a high focus on surviving, where Syrio insisted on the word 'sword' as a means of training to be always ready for fighting to survive. On the other side, Arya insisted on calling the sword a 'needle', which is cognitively became a material metaphor for reinforcing her disciplined and restructured identity.

"Yoren, as it please m'lord. My pardons for the hour." He bowed to Arya. "And this must be your son. He has your look." "I'm a girl," Arya said, exasperated. If the old man was down from the Wall, he must have come by way of Winterfell. "Do you know my brothers?" she asked excitedly (Martin, 1996, p. 338).

In Yoren's perception, Arya is a male character who constructed an out model, and this is how Yoren identified him in the flow of narration. In contrast, Arya is a feminine, noble child of Winterfell as her inner model. Arya actively re-narrated her place in the world to maintain her sense of self-awareness. She mentioned her brother for Yoren as a sign of social schema repair and reframing herself within Stark's kinship. Arya's inner mental model is rooted in her family, gender and nobility.

Arya looked. She knew all of her father's men. The three in the grey cloaks were strangers. "You," the one walking rounds called out. "What do you want here, boy?" The other two looked up from their dice... The old man shook her so hard her teeth rattled. "Shut your mouth and close your eyes, boy." Dimly, as if from far away, she heard a ... a noise ... a soft sighing sound, as if a million people had let out their breath at once. The old man's fingers dug into her arm, stiff as iron. "Look at me. Yes, that's the way of it, at me." Sour wine perfumed his breath. "Remember, boy?" (Martin, 1996, pp. 697-703).

The text is closed with the last mental model of Arya. This model is the survival-through-disguise. After her father's death, Arya disguised herself as a boy to travel safely and avoid recognition as Stark's girl. Her survival depended on recognizing her as a boy, whereas her self-model is still that of Stark's house.

A Clash of Kings

By examining Arya's mental model in the earlier text, it is time to assess the forthcoming mental models for this character to see if any changes have taken place.

Afterward, he told her that from there to Winterfell, she'd be Arry the orphan boy. "Gate shouldn't be hard, but the road's another matter. You got a long way to go in bad company. I got thirty this time, men and boys all bound for the Wall, and don't be thinking they're like that bastard brother o' yours." He shook her. "Lord Eddard gave me pick o' the dungeons, and I didn't find no little lordlings down there. This lot, half o' them would turn you over to the queen quick as spit for a pardon and maybe a few silvers. The other half'd do the same, only they'd rape you first. So you keep to yourself and make your water in the woods, alone. That'll be the hardest part, the pissing, so don't drink no more'n you need" (Martin, 1998a, p. 27).

The first mental model in the text is the model of identity reframing. Arya, the noble girl, turns out to be the orphan boy 'Arry'. This dual-self modelling created a kind of splitting identity conflict; Arya's female identity is a dangerous burden, whereas disguising herself as a boy is a protective strategy in a hostile territory where everyone might be an enemy. As a boy, Arry should follow a cognitive script for survival, which is part of the new identity. This script is encoded as survival behaviour rules (keep yourself...). The cognitive outcome of this mental model is that gender could be used as a mask for survival, not as an essence of real identity.

After travelling north with Yoren, who became the anchor of safety for Arry, the idea of survival is changed. It sometimes means knowing when to speak and when to keep silent, when hiding is safer than fighting face-to-face. However, the safety did not last forever; Yoren was killed at Holdfast, and a new mental model emerged:

By the time they reached the holdfast. They found the gates broken down, the walls partly demolished, and the inside strewn with the unburied dead. One look was enough for Gendry. "They're killed, everyone," he said. "And dogs have been at them too, look..." But Arya would not leave until they found Yoren. They couldn't have killed him, she told herself, he was too hard and tough, and a brother of the Night's Watch besides. She said as much to Gendry as they searched among the corpses. The axe blow that had killed him had split his skull apart, but the great tangled beard could be no one else's, or the garb, patched and unwashed and so faded it was more grey than black... *He was going to take me home*, she thought as they dug the old man's hole. There were too many

dead to bury them all, but Yoren at least must have a grave, Arya had insisted. *He was going to bring me safe to Winterfell, he promised.* Part of her wanted to cry. The other part wanted to kick him (Martin, 1998a, p.264).

The new mental model has emerged from the collapse of the safety, or protective, anchor model represented by Yoren's companion. Firstly, Arya cognitively denied the death of Yoren, this denial triggered a sensory recognition and trauma encoding. She recognized his split skull and his familiar beard. This death is a shattering destruction of Arya's safety plan when she recalled Yoren's promise to take her home. Processing this trauma, a dual emotional conflict emerged: looking for a grave for Yoren and crying over him and kicking her with anger for the betrayal of his promise to take her back to Winterfell. The outcome of the collapse mental model is a signal of cognitive independence; Arya's psychological state initiates a new survival model, one established through self-reliance without a protector.

Moving on with reading Arya's chapters, the mental model continually keeps changing. Each exposure deepens her journey as she discovers more and more about herself. Readers are encouraged to reconsider their perspectives on loyalty, survival strategies, and the vagueness of personality.

The next mental model is connected to Arya's psychological state in the earlier chapters of 'A Game of Thrones' when she was trained by Syrio:

Fear cuts deeper than swords, Arya would tell herself, but that did not make the fear go away. It was as much a part of her days as stale bread and the blisters on her toes after a long day of walking the hard, rutted road... They were being taken to serve Lord Tywin Lannister at Harrenhal, the Mountain told them. "You're traitors and rebels, so thank your gods that Lord Tywin's giving you this chance. It's more than you'd get from the outlaws. Obey, serve, and live."...Every night, Arya would say their names. "Ser Gregor," she'd whisper to her stone pillow. "Dunsen, Polliver, Chiswyck, Raff the Sweetling, The Tickler and the Hound. Ser Amory, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, King Joffrey, Queen Cersei." Back in Winterfell, Arya had prayed with her mother in the sept and with her father in the godswood, but there were no gods on the road to Harrenhal, and her names were the only prayer she cared to remember (Martin, 1998a, pp. 375-79).

After being captured and marched to Harrenhal, Arya remained disguised as Arry and Weasel. The new mental model she developed is essentially one of fear and vagueness. Fear is normalized as part of her daily routine; the trauma of fear, torture, and constant horrors became an initial survival mechanism. The ritual of reciting names at night symbolized the shift of prayer into vagueness. Her prayer list encoded memories of anger and helped her maintain her identity as a Stark while in disguise. This model combined accepting fear with ritualized vagueness: Arya cognitively recognized that survival involves masking obedience, preserving her inner self through prayer, and transforming her spirituality from divine faith to personal vengeance.

After serving under Roose Bolton at Harrenhal, Arya learned how to gather knowledge and power through social masking and deception. She planned to escape from Harrenhal with Gendry and Hot Pie with a totally new personality:

"I'm not an owl," said Arya. "I'm a wolf. I'll howl." Alone, she slid through the shadow of the Tower of Ghosts. She walked fast, to keep ahead of her fear, and it felt as though Syrio Forel walked beside her, and Yoren, and Jaqen H'ghar, and Jon Snow. She had not taken the sword Gendry had brought her, not yet. For this the dagger would be better. It was good and sharp. This postern was the least of Harrenhal's gates, a narrow door of stout oak studded with iron nails, set in an angle of the wall beneath a defensive tower. Only one man was set to guard it, but she knew there would be sentries up in that tower as well, and others nearby walking the walls. Whatever happened, she must be quiet as a shadow. He must not call out. A few scattered raindrops had begun to fall. She felt one land on her brow and run slowly down her nose...Cursing her softly, the man went to a knee to grope for the coin in the dirt, and there was his neck right in front of her. Arya slid her dagger out and drew it across his throat, as smooth as summer silk. His blood covered her hands in a hot gush and he tried to shout but there was blood in his mouth as well... "*Valar morghulis,*" she whispered as he died. When he stopped moving, she picked up the coin. Outside the walls of Harrenhal, a wolf howled long and loud. She lifted the bar, set it aside, and pulled open the heavy oak door (Martin, 1998a, pp. 815-16).

This is one of Arya's most pivotal moments in *A Clash of Kings* — her first deliberate, calculated kill. Her mental model here is the "Wolf-Assassin Identity Model": a cognitive fusion of Stark heritage (wolf) with the assassin logic she has learned from Syrio, Yoren, and Jaqen. By rejecting "owl" (a mere watcher) and claiming "wolf" (hunter, predator), Arya reframes herself not as prey or passive observer but as an active agent of death and escape. She imagines her mentors walking beside her, constructing a composite mental scaffolding of courage and skill. This inner "council" allows her to mask fear and replace it with purposeful action. Her choice of a dagger over a sword shows a shift toward stealth and pragmatism: she is no longer imagining herself as a knightly warrior, but as a killer who embraces shadow and silence. The kill itself marks her entry into a new cognitive territory: violence as agency. The act is described with sensory precision — the smooth cut, the hot gush, the silenced cry — signalling that Arya encodes the moment deeply. Her whisper of "*Valar morghulis*" shows she is internalizing Jaqen's philosophy: the inevitability of death, but also the power of controlling its timing. The wolf's howl outside

mirrors her own transformation, linking her Stark identity to this new role as predator. By lifting the bar and opening the gate, Arya not only enables her companions' escape but also symbolically opens the gate to her own new identity: no longer a child, no longer just a survivor, but someone who wields death consciously as a tool of freedom.

A Storm of Swords

Tracing Arya's mental models in this text is still cognitively significant to see if any changes have taken place.

The first chapters in the "*A Storm of Swords*" text documented her escape from Harrenhal toward the north with Hot Pie and Gendry:

They rode north, away from the lake, following a rutted farm road across the torn fields and into the woods and streams. Arya took the lead, kicking her stolen horse to a brisk heedless trot until the trees closed in around her... They could not stay on the road. *There is death on the road*, she told herself, *death on all the roads*... and Arya Stark was unafraid. *Fear cuts deeper than swords*, she whispered under her breath, the words that Syrio Forel had taught her, and Jaqen's words too, *valar morghulis* (Martin, 2000, part 1, pp. 43-4).

Arya's mental model revolves around survival despite fear. She manages her fear by understanding her emotions and acting as her own leader and protector. Her mental model shifts between immediate survival and her desire for revenge. The primary mental models in these chapters are the self-model, where controlling fear is crucial for survival, and the moral model, where justice is achieved through revenge.

On her way north, she was recognized by one of her father's former guards, Harwin. This recognition led to a new way of thinking, and a new mental model arose: Arya is no longer a child. She is Arya Stark, without disguise.

For a moment she did not know how to answer. She'd had so many names. Had she only dreamed Arya Stark? "I'm a girl," she sniffed. "I was Lord Bolton's cupbearer, but he was going to leave me for the goat, so I ran off with Gendry and Hot Pie. You have to know me! You used to lead my pony, when I was little." His eyes went wide, "Gods be good," he said in a choked voice. "Arya Underfoot? Lem, let go of her." "She broke my nose." Lem dumped her unceremoniously to the floor. "Who in seven hells is she supposed to be?" "The Hand's daughter." Harwin went to one knee before her. "Arya Stark, of Winterfell." (Martin, 2000, part 1, p.187).

Lord Beric Dondarrion. Arya remembered all she'd heard at Harrenhal, from the Lannisters and the Bloody Mummerys alike. Lord Beric the wisp o' the wood. Lord Beric who'd been killed by Vargo Hoat and before that by Ser Amory Lorch, and twice by the Mountain That Rides. *If he won't send me home maybe I'll kill him too.* "Why do I have to see Lord Beric?" she asked quietly. (Martin, 2000, part 1, p. 233).

The mental model that emerged from Arya's experience in that moment is survival-driven realism. Her moral models start to collapse when she realizes that morality is situational; she could act unjustly or crudely if others fail to keep their word, and things do not go well for her.

"I'm not a squirrel," she said. "I'll almost be a woman soon. I'll be one and-ten."... The next day they rode to a place called High Heart, a hill so lofty that from atop it Arya felt as though she could see half the world... *I'm not a lady*, Arya wanted to tell her, *I'm a wolf*... "I wish I had a flaming sword." Arya could think of lots of people she'd like to set on fire... "I'm sorry, my lady." Arya suddenly felt bad for her, and ashamed. "I'm sorry I tore the acorn dress too. It was pretty." "Yes, child. And so are you. Be brave." (Martin, 2000, part 1, pp. 298-310).

Arya at High Heart with Lady Ravella Smallwood after being captured by the Brotherhood without Banners, the place where a new mental model emerged. Her self-model alternates between childhood identity, as others see her, and her emerging self-concept. Her insistence, "I'm not a squirrel...", demonstrates an effort to construct an adult cognitive identity against others' perception. Yet, her inner correction, "I'm not a lady... I'm a wolf", signals a mindful rejection of femininity as a social role. The wolf serves as a mental imagery for selfhood, where wildness, freedom, uncontrollability, and living outside civilized roles are dominant principles of daily practices. Therefore, Arya's personal identity schema is rooted in animalistic survival, rather than gendered or noble roles.

At the same time, her dialogue with the ghosts of High Heart reveals a violence-based mental model. Her wish for a flaming sword shows that her revenge remains emotionally active and governed by fantasy and anger. Unlike this, when she apologized for tearing the dress, she reactivated guilt and compassion and realized emotional consequences beyond her self-interests. This closing scene captures a dual-cognitive state: feminine empathy and compassion, and the wolf's nature of wildness.

She looked at their filthy hair and scraggly beards and reddened eyes, at their dry, cracked, bleeding lips. Wolves, she thought again. Like me. Was this her pack? How could they be Robb's men? She wanted to hit them. She wanted to hurt them. She wanted to cry... Arya took off the linen and lace, pulled her tunic over her head,

climbed up into the bed, and burrowed under the blankets. “Queen Cersei,” she whispered into the pillow. “King Joffrey, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn. Dunsen, Raff, and Polliver. The Tickler, the Hound, and Ser Gregor the Mountain.” She liked to mix up the order of the names sometimes. It helped her remember who they were and what they’d done. *Maybe some of them are dead*, she thought. *Maybe they’re in iron cages someplace, and the crows are picking out their eyes...* Sleep came as quick as she closed her eyes. She dreamed of wolves that night, stalking through a wet wood with the smell of rain and rot and blood thick in the air. Only they were good smells in the dream, and Arya knew she had nothing to fear. She was strong and swift and fierce, and her pack was all around her, her brothers and her sisters. They ran down a frightened horse together, tore its throat out, and feasted. And when the moon broke through the clouds, she threw back her head and howled (Martin, 2000, part 1, pp. 395-403).

The wolf-centred self-model is in progress; she maps herself as a wolf by collapsing the human social categories of lord, queen, etc., into a single surviving ontology: pack membership and predation. The repeated names of her enemies before her sleep completed the circle of the wolf model to be a mnemonic revenge model: a ritualized list that organized the memory, fixed future targets, and transformed past trauma into perceptual plans. Her wolf dream integrated both aggression and fantasy.

Arya, according to the wolf-centred model, acted with two two-layered schemas: a protective, action-oriented model that externalized enemies, and a private, childish affect model that needed attention, comfort, and safety.

I’m going to learn to shoot a bow, Arya thought. She loved swordfighting, but she could see how arrows were good too... *Kill them all*, she thought fiercely. She bit her lip so hard she tasted blood. *Kill every single one... It’s not fair, he’s only a little older than me, they should have let me fight...* “Could you bring back a man without a head?” Arya asked. “Just the once, not six times. Could you?” (Martin, 2000, part 1, pp. 531-36).

Again, revenge and the desire to kill are embodied within her training goals. Cognitively, a learning-oriented model is developed to replace her fantasy thinking of power. Arya mentally readdressed justice via violence when she asked, “Could you bring back a man without a head?”

The dwarf woman studied her with dim red eyes. “I see you,” she whispered. “I see you, wolf child. Blood child. I thought it was the lord who smelled of death...” She began to sob, her little body shaking. “You are cruel to come to my hill, cruel. I gorged on grief at Summerhall, I need none of yours. Begone from here, dark heart. Begone!”... Outside the stables the rain was still falling, and distant lightning flashed in the west. Arya ran as fast as she could. She did not know where she was going, only that she wanted to be alone, away from all the voices, away from their hollow words and broken promises. *All I wanted was to go to Riverrun*. It was her own fault, for taking Gendry and Hot Pie with her when she left Harrenhal. She would have been better alone. If she had been alone, the outlaws would never have caught her, and she’d be with Robb and her mother by now. *They were never my pack. If they had been, they wouldn’t have left me*. She splashed through a puddle of muddy water. Someone was shouting her name, Harwin probably, or Gendry, but the thunder drowned them out as it rolled across the hills, half a heartbeat behind the lightning. The lightning lord, she thought angrily. Maybe he couldn’t die, but he could lie (Martin, 2000, part 2, pp. 25-32).

An emotional overload forms a new mental model of trust and belonging within Arya’s character. The dwarf woman’s accusation, “wolf child... blood child,” prompts Arya to reconnect with the violent self-image she had been developing earlier. Cognitively, the breaking of the ‘pack’ exposes a mental breach: she withdraws from the collective identity; “they were never my pack”; and replaces it with a self-reliant survival model. She shifts from relational trust to radical isolation, building a self-sufficient mental framework where deception and abandonment are anticipated, and survival depends on rejecting empathy.

Arya spun away from him and darted for the gate. The portcullis was coming down, but slowly. *I have to run faster*. The mud slowed her, though, and then the water. *Run fast as a wolf*. .. And Arya ran. Not for her brother now, not even for her mother, but for herself. She ran faster than she had ever run before, her head down and her feet churning up the river, she ran from him as Mycah must have run (Martin, 2000, part 2, p. 139).

In a dangerous situation, Arya activated her wolf identity as a psychological mechanism that supported the cognitive self-centred motivation. She no longer acts out of loyalty or family duty, but she acts from an internalized drive for self-survival. Her literal escape from the Hound shows that her identity is now operating through learned fear and the solitude of the wolf-self.

She could feel the hole inside her every morning when she woke. It wasn’t hunger, though sometimes there was that too. It was a hollow place, an emptiness where her heart had been, where her brothers had lived, and her parents. Her head hurt too. Not as bad as it was at first, but still pretty bad. Arya was used to that, though, and at least the lump was going down. But the hole inside her stayed the same. The hole will never feel any better, she told herself when she went to sleep... And dreamed. That was the best part, the dreaming. She dreamed of wolves almost every night. A great pack of wolves, with her at the head. She was bigger than any of them, stronger, swifter, faster. She could outrun horses and outfight lions. When she bared her teeth even men would run from her, her belly was never empty long, and her fur kept her warm even when the wind was blowing cold. And her brothers

and sisters were with her, many and more of them, fierce and terrible and hers. They would never leave her (Martin, 2011, part 2, p.309).

This text from Arya's chapter, before the last one, reveals the most profound trauma-based mental model. The hole inside her represents the cognitive imprint of loss: an awareness of the emotional absences that she recognized by naming and accepting. At the same time, her wolf dreams function as compensatory cognition, where her imagination reactivates what has been erased by reality. In her dreams, she leads the "pack" of strong, fast, swift wolves as a symbolic identification with her direwolf self. Cognitively, this dream serves as a restorative self-model, unifying the survival instinct with the power of belonging.

They had two now, Stranger and a sorrel palfrey mare Arya had named Craven, because Sandor said she'd likely run off from the Twins the same as them. They'd found her wandering riderless through a field the morning after the slaughter. She was a good enough horse, but Arya could not love a coward. *Stranger would have fought*. Still, she tended to the mare as best she knew. It was better than riding double with the Hound. And Craven might have been a coward, but she was young and strong as well. Arya thought that she might be able to outrun Stranger, if it came to it...But that was just stupid, like something Sansa might dream. Hot Pie and Gendry had left her just as soon as they could, and Lord Beric and the outlaws only wanted to ransom her, just like the Hound. None of them wanted her around. *They were never my pack, not even Hot Pie and Gendry. I was stupid to think so, just a stupid little girl, and no wolf at all.* (Martin, 2000, part 2, p. 310).

Here, the mental models of loyalty, trust, and friendship are collapsed due to the loneliness Arya experienced. Her refusal to name the horses 'Craven' mirrors an inner conflict in rejection of weakness. She redefined herself as non-belonging when she realized that everyone abandoned her, "they were never my pack...". This redefinition is part of the self-defence model.

He's one of them, Arya thought when she saw that. She bit her lip so hard she tasted blood. He's just like they are. *I should kill him when he sleeps...* Arya could taste the beginnings of panic in the back of her throat. *Fear cuts deeper than swords. Fears cuts deeper...* The Tickler backed away. Arya could smell his fear. The shortsword in his hand suddenly seemed almost a toy against the long blade the Hound was holding, and he wasn't armored either. He moved swiftly, light on his feet, never taking his eyes off Sandor Clegane. It was the easiest thing in the world for Arya to step up behind him and stab him...The Hound gave him a crack across the face that made him scream again. "Don't call me ser." He turned back to Arya. "This one is yours, she-wolf. You do it..." I wish I could change into a wolf and grow wings and fly away...*Maybe some real wolves will find you*, Arya thought. *Maybe they'll smell you when the sun goes down.* Then he would learn what wolves did to dogs. "You shouldn't have hit me with an axe," she said. "You should have saved my mother." She turned her horse and rode away from him, and never looked back once... *I have no home*, Arya thought. *I have no pack. And now I don't even have a horse...* Jaqen said to say the words too. Arya crossed her arms against her chest. "*Valar morghulis*," she said, as loud as if she'd known what it meant. "*Valar dohaeris*," he replied, touching his brow with two fingers. "Of course you shall have a cabin." (Martin, 2000, part 2, pp. 455-67).

Arya's perception of the world is dominated by distrust and threat recognition; this is a cognitive defence built from betrayal and loss. The repeated phrase "fear cuts deeper than swords" functions as a psychological tool for self-control and fear-control, helping her to overcome emotions in moments of panic. Her Stark's identity is reclaimed through the Hound's word "she-wolf," and her emotions of grief for her mother express a deep layer of moral conflicts among justice, revenge, family, and loyalty. Her wish to be a wolf with wings to fly is a cognitive reflection of trauma from isolation; she seeks liberation through fantasy and imagination.

By the end, Arya tested the sense of existential isolation, "I have no home..." where she shifted her focus from family belonging to individual survival. Her final words, "*Valar morghulis*", show an inner acceptance of a broader, fatalistic worldview where death and service define the existence of individuals.

A Feast for Crows

The star of home. Arya stood at the prow, one hand resting on the gilded figurehead, a maiden with a bowl of fruit. For half a heartbeat she let herself pretend that it was her home ahead...But that was stupid. Her home was gone, her parents dead, and all her brothers slain but Jon Snow on the Wall. That was where she had wanted to go. She told the captain as much, but even the iron coin did not sway him. Arya never seemed to find the places she set out to reach. Yoren had sworn to deliver her to Winterfell, only she had ended up in Harrenhal and Yoren in his grave. When she escaped Harrenhal for Riverrun, Lem and Anguy and Tom o' Sevens took her captive and dragged her to the hollow hill instead. Then the Hound had stolen her and dragged her to the Twins. Arya had left him dying by the river and gone ahead to Saltpans, hoping to take passage for Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, only...The captain had given her passage but he had no time to speak with her. Some of the crew shunned her, but others gave her gifts—a silver fork, fingerless gloves, a floppy woolen hat patched with leather. One man showed her how to tie sailor's knots. Another poured her thimble cups of fire wine. The friendly ones would tap their chests, repeating their names over and over until Arya said them back, though none ever thought to ask her name. They

called her Salty, since she'd come aboard at Saltpan, near the mouth of the Trident. It was as good a name as any (Martin, 1998b, pp. 98-99).

The core cognitive state of Arya's mental models is instability: her mental models are flexible, adjusting according to her perception of immediate contexts and responding to instant changes. The first model in the text, *A Feast for Crows*, is based on the idea of surface cognition and immediate context. The name of the ship, "Star of home," is the symbolic stimulus that evokes her longing for home belonging. Whereas her inner cognition oscillates between imagining homecoming and negating this fantasy imagination by realizing that home is gone (as she says in the previous mental model, 'I have no home').

The failure in reaching her destination, Winterfell, Harrenhal, Riverrun, the wall, and the Twins, constructs an amoral, chaotic mental model colored with distortion. As a result, her self-model is always kept under active dissolution and reconstruction. Thus, her name is changed to **Salty** by disguise and adaptation. Aboard the ship, Arya's mental attitude toward others is open, yet guarded; no one is interested in knowing her name, while teaching her some skills and giving her gifts. This distancing from her Stark identity confirms her mental model of being unseen and unrecognized.

Winterfell is burned and fallen, Arya reminded herself... *All men must die...* Arya, the lone wolf, still lived, but the wolves of the pack had been taken and slain and skinned... *I wouldn't have killed him if he hadn't grabbed me.* The Hound had been dying when she left him on the banks of the Trident, burning up with fever from his wound. *I should have given him the gift of mercy and put a knife into his heart...* Yorke backed the oars, and the boat bumped gently against stone pilings. He grasped an iron ring set to hold them for a moment. "Here I leave you..." *Salty is a stupid child, she told herself. I am a wolf, and will not be afraid.* She patted Needle's hilt for luck and plunged into the shadows, taking the steps two at a time so no one could ever say she'd been afraid... (Martin, 1998b, pp.100-7).

Internal monologue within Arya's mental models takes the form of the metacognitive self-talk; a mental act of remembering, reframing, and strengthening. She still has feelings for revenge and sees death as an act of balance and justice. Self-models are in continuous change. Arya rejected the imposed social identity 'Salty' and kept her symbolic one 'wolf'. Cognitively, this self-concept, wolf, reinforces her internal continuity to her Stark's roots and scripts herself as a brave to manage fear. The narrative framing in Arya's mental model changes opens new cognitive domains where identity, morality, survival, and revenge are continually redefined.

"A place of peace." His voice was gentle. "You are safe here. This is the House of Black and White, my child. Though you are young to seek the favor of the Many-Faced God..." Finally, the cowed man said, "Tell me your name, child."

"Salty. I come from Saltpan, by the Trident." "No," he said. "Tell me your name." "Squab," she answered this time. "Your true name, child." "My mother named me Nan, but they call me Weasel—" "Your name." She swallowed. "Arry. I'm Arry." "Closer. And now the truth?" *Fear cuts deeper than swords*, she told herself. "Arya." She whispered the word the first time. The second time she threw it at him. "I am Arya, of House Stark." "You are," he said, "but the House of Black and White is no place for Arya, of House Stark." "Please," she said. "I have no place to go." "Do you fear death?" She bit her lip. "No." (Martin, 1998b, pp. 109-10).

In Braavos temple, the house of Black and White, the setting is a place of peace, Arya's mental models move from loss and survival to spiritual and cognitive reconfiguration. She is the child Arya with fear and a real identity. However, this reality did not last long; the scene is confusing for Arya. "Squab, Arry, Nan, Weasel" represent the false self for Arya, which they collapse step by step until the core self, Arya of House Stark, remains real. This cognitive play-acting of identity stripping is the survival code, where each name corresponds to a temporary, invented survival identity in Arya's narrative life.

The other self-awareness model is illustrated by the collapse of the previous maps she had built to survive: home, friends like the pack, kinship, and revenge are cognitively broken down when she admits that she has nowhere to go.

Each night before sleep, she murmured her prayer into her pillow. "Ser Gregor," it went. "Dunsen, Raff the Sweetling, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, Queen Cersei." She would have whispered the names of the Freys of the Crossing too, if she had known them. *One day I'll know*, she told herself, *and then I'll kill them all...* "They're people I hate. I want them to die." (Martin, 1998b, p. 350).

The prayer list remains part of Arya's cognitive domain; it is a ritual, a prayer, and a vow that transforms personal hatred into a ritualized activity. The childish determination reveals violent intent and gives Arya a kind of control, even if she cannot act on these intentions yet. This list of hated names is an extension of her past trauma and revenge desire.

Only the kindly man knew the Common Tongue. "Who are you?" he would ask her every day. "No one," she would answer, she who had been Arya of House Stark, Arya Underfoot, Arya Horseface. She had been Arry and Weasel too, and Squab and Salty, Nan the cupbearer, a grey mouse, a sheep, the ghost of Harrenhal . . . but not for true, not in her heart of hearts. In there she was Arya of Winterfell, the daughter of Lord Eddard Stark and Lady Catlyn, who had once had brothers named Robb and Bran and Rickon, a sister named Sansa, a direwolf

called Nymeria, a half brother named Jon Snow. In there she was someone... but that was not the answer that he wanted (Martin, 1998b, p. 351).

Linguistically, Arya's dialogue with the faceless man serves as a performative speech act; her reply, "No one," attempts to establish a new identity in response to the question "Who are you?". By the faceless man. Cognitively, the reply is a cognitive adaptation for a self-erasure model where Arya is learning to think like no one. Internally, her core mental self-representation is still structured around the identity scheme of House Stark. This identity conflict produces a dual-layered mental model: the outer layer is performative and adaptive, while the inner one is emotional, authentic, and mnemonic.

"Salty is known to Ternesio Terys and the men of the Titan's Daughter. You are marked by the way you speak, so you must be some girl of Westeros . . . but a different girl, I think." She bit her lip. "Could I be Cat?" "Cat." He considered. "Yes. Braavos is full of cats. One more will not be noticed. You are Cat, an orphan of . . ." (Martin, 1998b, p. 367).

The cognitive dynamics of Arya's mental models keep changing with the narrative continuity. An updated mental model has emerged, faced with external labelling 'Cat'. Since Braavos is full of the same entity, the cat is a pragmatic choice that demonstrates a flexible self-representation for social interaction and survival. An absolute fictional mark and a keen narrative choice are noticeably perceived when reading this exchange at the end of the last chapter entitled 'Arya'. This new label functions as a mask rather than an ontological replacement because the sociolinguistic as well as the linguistic cues are central to this mask, "you are marked by the way you speak".

Cat of the Canals

Cat was always the first to awaken. It was warm and snug under the blankets with Talea and Brea...*I dreamed I was a wolf again...I should not be dreaming wolf dreams*, the girl told herself. *I am a cat now, not a wolf. I am Cat of the Canals*. The wolf dreams belonged to Arya of House Stark. Try as she might, though, she could not rid herself of Arya (Martin, 1998b, p. 570).

The Wolf-Assassin Identity Model has collapsed, and a completely new mental model has emerged from this collapse. The new model is the dual-identity conflict mental model; a cognitive split is formed between Arya Stark's authentic self and the assumed identity of the cat. The stylistic hallmark of this model is its linguistic deviation: Arya is consciously aware of her true identity, telling herself she is not a wolf but a cat, even though in both cases she is Arya with an animalistic identity. This metacognitive awareness limits recognition of her genuine self, imparting a childish attitude to the character and giving the narrative a naïve, cartoonish tone.

"My throat is dry. Do me a kindness and bring a cup of wine for me and warm milk for our friend Arya, who has returned to us so unexpectedly." On her way across the city Arya had wondered what the kindly man would say when she told him about Dareon. Maybe he would be angry with her, or maybe he would be pleased that she had given the singer the gift of the Many Faced God. She had played this talk out in her head half a hundred times, like a mummer in a show. But she had never thought *warm milk*. When the milk came, Arya drank it down. It smelled a little burnt and had a bitter aftertaste. "Go to bed now, child," the kindly man said. "On the morrow you must serve." That night she dreamed she was a wolf again, but it was different from the other dreams. In this dream she had no pack. She prowled alone, bounding over rooftops and padding silently beside the banks of a canal, stalking shadows through the fog. When she woke the next morning, she was blind. (Martin, 1998b, p. 585).

A rush progress, Arya, the cat, tested a new identity within the same chapter. This identity is part of her stay at Braavos, the model is considered a subtype of the dual-identity conflict model. It has two sensory dimensions. The burnt bitter milk is a sensory punishment that foreshadows hospitality betrayal, moral corruption, and sensory deprivation. The second dimension is metaphoric; blindness symbolically forces Arya to perceive not only through external forms of perception, but through internal patterns of recognition, preparing her for the next phase of inner reconstruction and self-reconfiguration.

A Dance with Dragons

Arya remains blind at the House of Black and White in Braavos, her dreams through the eyes of her direwolf, Nymeria, continue visiting her every night, but she did not speak of it to anyone. Her prayer list is still in her night rituals, "*Ser Gregor, she thought. Dunsen, Raff the Sweetling, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, Queen Cersei. Her morning prayer. Or was it? No, she thought, not mine. I am no one. That is the night wolf's prayer. Someday she will find them, hunt them, smell their fear, taste their blood. Someday*" (Martin, 2011, part 2, p. 66).

She was glad of that. A water dancer needs good legs. Blind Beth was no water dancer, but she would not be Beth forever...*Hear, smell, taste, feel*, she reminded herself. *There are many ways to know the world for those who cannot see*...Someone had entered the room behind her, moving on soft padded slippers quiet as a mouse. Her nostrils flared. *The kindly man*. Men had a different smell than women, and there was a hint of orange in the air as well...*"And who are you this morning?" "No one," she replied. "A lie. I know you. You are that blind beggar girl."... "Poor child," said the kindly man. "Would you like to have your eyes back? Ask, and you shall see."* (Martin, 2011, part 2, p. 67-8).

A new identity has emerged during Arya's self-reconfiguration phase, in which she, a blind girl in Braavos, constructs a mental model of embodied identity through sensory reconstruction. The identity in this model is the blind 'Beth' who would not last forever. This identity's cognitive feature is reconstructed using sensory channels other than vision, such as hearing, smelling, and tasting. Adaptive perception is also a core cognitive feature of the blind Beth; she learns to map the physical world through nonvisual cues, recognizing the presence of the kindly man through his scent. Blindness with self-denial made Arya the blind, poor, beggar child, struggling between ego erasure and core self. This struggle serves the narrative purpose of transforming punishment into empowerment and sensory rebirth.

"Yes. I know that you're the one who has been hitting me." Her stick flashed out, and cracked against his fingers, sending his own stick clattering to the floor. The priest winced and snatched his hand back. "And how could a blind girl know that?" ...*I saw you.* "I gave you three. I don't need to give you four." Maybe on the morrow she would tell him about the cat that had followed her home last night from Pynto's, the cat that was hiding in the rafters, looking down on them. Or maybe not. If he could have secrets, so could she... And come the morning, when the night wolf left her and she opened her eyes, she saw a tallow candle burning where no candle had been the night before, its uncertain flame swaying back and forth like a whore at the Happy Port. She had never seen anything so beautiful (Martin, 2011, part 2, p. 79).

The return of the sight and the tallow candle flame function as symbolic and literal clarification: Arya perceives the beauty in an epistemic way, she earned her perception through blindness.

The final chapter of the series ended with a new identity entitled 'The Ugly Little Girl' where Arya still has the cat identity, speaking both Braavosi and High Valyrian, and repeating her words "all men must die". She attends a meeting of eleven priests and takes her first assassination assignment by Plague Face, where she is recognized by her cat identity and Arya Stark.

"Who are you?" plague face asked when they were alone. "No one." "Not so. You are Arya of House Stark, who bites her lip and cannot tell a lie." "I was. I'm not now." "Why are you here, liar?" "To serve. To learn. To change my face." ... "You lie. I can see the truth in your eyes. You have the eyes of a wolf and a taste for blood." ... She almost bit her lip again, but this time she caught herself and stopped. *My face is a dark pool, hiding everything, showing nothing.* She thought of all the names that she had worn: Arry, Weasel, Squab, Cat of the Canals. She thought of that stupid girl from Winterfell called Arya Horseface. Names did not matter. "I can pay the price. Give me a face." (Martin, 2011, part 2, p. 349-50).

The ugly girl and the stupid Arya Horseface are cognitive elements of memory activation; they are retrieved from prior identities that construct the new mental model of identity indexing. The conflict in the self-schema between past-self (Arya Stark) and her aspired self (no one) is performative rather than internalized, since she aims to learn how to show internal control over personal identity. The metaphor of the 'dark pool' conceptualized Arya's opacity and emotional suppression. The contradiction between Arya's linguistic performances of detachment and her embodied truth (dark pool face showing nothing vs. horseface and wolf's eyes) constructs a conflict node that confirms the persistence of her core self-schema.

The kindly man was waiting for her at the House of Black and White, seated on the edge of the temple pool. The ugly girl sat next to him and put a coin on the lip of the pool between them. It was gold, with a dragon on one face and a king on the other. "The golden dragon of Westeros," said the kindly man. "And how did you come by this? We are no thieves." "It wasn't stealing. I took one of his, but I left him one of ours." The kindly man understood. "And with that coin and the others in his purse, he paid a certain man. Soon after that man's heart gave out. Is that the way of it? Very sad." The priest picked up the coin and tossed it into the pool. "You have much and more to learn, but it may be you are not hopeless." That night they gave her back the face of Arya Stark. They brought a robe for her as well, the soft thick robe of an acolyte, black upon one side and white upon the other. "Wear this when you are here," the priest said, "but know that you shall have little need of it for the present. On the morrow you will go to Izembaro to begin your first apprenticeship. Take what clothes you will from the vaults below. The city watch is looking for a certain ugly girl, known to frequent the Purple Harbor, so best you have a new face as well." He cupped her chin, turned her head this way and that, nodded. "A pretty one this time, I think. As pretty as your own. Who are you, child?" "No one," she replied (Martin, 2011, part 2, p. 362).

At the final stage of her journey in the series, Arya's mental models are sealed with a performative mystery model: she appears as 'no one' while she is meant to re-develop the cognitive flexibility required for shifting strategically among identities. Her repeated linguistic performance of 'no one' is no longer an internal truth but a discursive tool that forms the mask Arya wears throughout her journey. Her last speech patterns, which are short, declarative, and emotionless, indicate a stylistic coding of cognitive control and affect regulation. The exchange of coins between her and the kindly man functions as a cognitive metaphor for a moral transaction and a death economy, where Arya navigated the symbolic system of values and consequences.

'No one' is the surface identity that underlies the core Arya Stark, the observer and the learner, but not that free Arya, since she has the acolyte that represents the institutional control over her. Despite this constraint, Arya

has the desire to master transformation in her new journey of apprenticeship in Izembaro. This progress is the cognitive goal that will shift her mental models from self-erasure to practical skill-acquisition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Arya's chapters across ASOIAF reveals a series of distinct but interrelated mental models. These models have emerged and been constructed through the interaction among the textual information, cognitive schemas, narrative perspectives, and stylistic cues. Each model represents a specific stage in Arya's self-image and identity transformation.

The central mental models constructed for Arya Stark's character are the following:

The Gender-Conflict Model

The early characterization of Arya's personality constructs a schema violation rooted in gender identity. The textual information of "Arya has the hands of a Blacksmith" signifies a stylistic deviation from the expectations of femininity. This deviation sets up Arya's cognitive struggle between her emerging self and the socially imposed femininity. From a cognitive stylistic perspective, this struggle leads to the construction of a dual mental model that readers could easily reconcile: Arya as a noble girl and Arya as a warrior-in-formation.

The Survive-through Disguise Model

The adaptation of a male disguise, "Arry," represents Arya's adaptation to a logic of survival. The disguise itself cognitively functions as a mental reconfiguration of identity and a gender transformation from ontological fact into a tactical cognitive construct. Readers are prompted to process Arya's linguistic self-representation through inferential reasoning and cognitively accept this disguise as a means of surviving and part of her narrative identity.

The Trauma and Fear-Normalization Model

After the deaths of her family and protector figures, Arya's cognition changes to be trauma-oriented. Her recurring phrase, "*Fear cuts deeper than swords*," functions as a cognitive mantra for emotion regulation. In this model, Arya turns fear from being a problem into an internalized training concept. This turning point signals the emergence of an adaptive cognitive style rooted in emotional discipline and embodied awareness.

The Wolf-Assassin Model

The linguistic and stylistic cues of constructing this mental model are: "I'm a wolf and Valar morghulis", which merge the Stark identity with assassin philosophy. The wolf imagery is a stylistic cue that externalizes her predatory cognition, while her ritual naming of her enemies cognitively demonstrates the way memory and emotions construct her renewed mental architecture. From a cognitive stylistic perspective, this model demonstrates the conceptual-blending cognitive framework: the merging of predator and human schemas to generate a new mental model of ontology.

The Fragmented Self and Adaptive Identity Models

In *A Feast for Crows* and *A Dance with Dragons*, Arya's mental models become more unstable and performative. Identities like "Salty, Cat, and Beth" demonstrate a cognitive multiplicity: the constructed mental models are transient self-models for context-specific adaptation. The recurring question "Who are you?" stylistically foregrounds a recursive identity-testing process that invites readers to engage in meta-cognition awareness of Arya's efforts to erase her real identity. Her blindness in Braavos functions as a metaphor for introspective cognition, emphasizing perception through non-visual modalities and representing the cognitive rebirth of the real self.

The No-One Self-Model

The no-one mental model is constructed where Arya reaches her *Zenith*, the point where internal resilience exists within superficial erasure. Despite Arya's denial of her Stark identity, her internal cognitive monologue forces her not to completely erase the memory of her past heritage. The clear grammatical and stylistic brevity of her last speech, "no one," indicates emotional suppression and cognitive control. Having mastered the cognitive skill of changing identities without losing her primary identity schema, Arya reaches a performative balance at her final stage in *A Dance with Dragons*.

Observing the progression of Arya's mental models across the series illustrates a cognitive simulation of moral and psychological growth through the use of cognitive stylistic devices. Marin's stylistic techniques of schema violation, repetition and vocalization serve as textual cues that cognitively guide readers to construct and update

Arya's mental models dynamically. Each transformation in her narrative voice corresponds to a shift in readers' cognitive alignments, producing an immersive experience of evolving consciousness.

From a cognitive stylistic standpoint, Arya's mental models developments exemplify Stockwell's (2020) concept of mind-modelling as an active process of empathic construction. Readers oscillate between identification and critical distance, constantly updating their mental representations of Arya as she negotiates among identity, morality, and survival. Moreover, the recurrent animal metaphors, wolf, cat, and embodied cognition, underlie her self-perception. Through these metaphors, readers experience how identity is both socially performed and physically sensed.

One might ask how fictional narrative addresses gender disguise as a mask of survival. If Martin embraced the modern way of disguise known as gender transformation, would narrative consequences arise from readers in constructing transgender mental models? Since the series belongs to the fictional narrative genre, imaginary things, activities, daily life routines, and abnormal practices are allowed to be included in the flow of the narrative and believed by readers. However, Martin has not gone that way; he adapted gender-based survival mental models indirectly. Arya's refusal to call her a girl is his indirect linguistic choice that he imposed in the narrative, forcing the reader to cognitively accept the idea of 'gender is a mask' that could be changed if the situation demanded such. This narrative approach challenges the traditional perceptions of identity and the moral principles, emphasizing the fluidity of gender roles within the contexts of survival. By presenting characters like Arya, who defy conventional labels, Martin invites readers to explore the complicated relationship between societal expectations and personal identity.

CONCLUSION

Arya Stark's mental models in ASOIAF are made up of a complex web of cognitive strategies such as identity negotiation, emotional regulation, and adaptive transformation articulated through Martin's writing style. As she changes from Arya to "no one", Arya's fictional mind does not dissolve; instead, it integrates cognitive plurality when letting her assume different selves while still being morally consistent. What helps to make the mental models in this analysis cognitively detectable is Martin's linguistic and stylistic choices. He uses simple sensory descriptions that go with children's worldview, fragmented syntax during fear and confusion, and internally vocalized narration that directly draws readers into Arya's embodied experience.

This cognitive stylistic analysis shows how the fictional characters can change to reflect human thoughts, feelings, and selfhood. It shows how narrative cognition works in modern fantasy fiction in producing great examples of self-identity change models like those of Arya Stark. These elements not only enhance the readers' connection to the character but also deepen the exploration of identity and transformation within the narrative. Through his intricate storytelling, Martin encourages readers to reflect on their journeys of self-discovery and the choices that shape who they are. They are prompted to consider the universal struggles of finding one's place in a tumultuous world.

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