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**Portrayal of women in present-day Northamerican Literature: female empowerment in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga**

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**Título:** Portrayal of Women in Present-day North American Literature: Female Empowerment in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga.

**Resumo:**

We live in a time in which feminism is acquiring a crucial role in our every day lives. The present-day society is moving within a new feminist wave that, little by little, is destroying old and false patriarchal „values“ that oppress women all around the world. In this context, our society demands a new approach, a *feminist* approach, in every sphere of our lives which will help this feminist wave to reach every single corner of our world, and every corner of our lives. In order to do so, feminism avails itself of different tools, being literature one of the most important.

Reaching millions of people through the books and so many others through the TV show, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is, presumably, the most famous and most popular saga in present-day North American Literature. This novel has become a great source of inspiration and, more importantly, a strong influence for all its followers, thus being its portrayal of women a vital matter. G. R. R. Martin, the author, has created remarkably complex female characters that evolve towards a state of independence and power, advocating for feminism and serving as a model for a society at a standstill in patriarchy. Therefore, both for its feminist value and its literary value, the complex and greatly interesting development of the female characters in this saga will be the main point to analyze in my thesis.

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## 1. ABSTRACT

We live in a time in which feminism is acquiring a crucial role in our every day lives. The present-day society is moving within a new feminist wave that, little by little, is destroying old and false patriarchal „values“ that oppress women all around the world. In this context, our society demands a new approach, a *feminist* approach, in every sphere of our lives which will help this feminist wave to reach every single corner of our world, and every corner of our lives. In order to do so, feminism avails itself of different tools, being literature one of the most important.

Reaching millions of people through the books and so many others through the TV show, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is, presumably, the most famous and most popular saga in present-day Northamerican Literature. This novel has become a great source of inspiration and, more importantly, a strong influence for all its followers, thus being its portrayal of women a vital matter. G. R. R. Martin, the author, has created remarkably complex female characters that evolve towards a state of independence and power, advocating for feminism and serving as a model for a society at a standstill in patriarchy. Therefore, both for its feminist value and its literary value, the complex and greatly interesting development of the female characters in this saga will be the main point to analyze in my thesis.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This essay will present an analysis of the female characters in the series *A Song Of Ice And Fire*, by the American author G. R. R. Martin. The saga, still not finished, is so far formed by a

total of five books—*A Game of Thrones*,<sup>1</sup> *A Clash of Kings*,<sup>2</sup> *A Storm of Swords*,<sup>3</sup> *A Feast for Crows*<sup>4</sup> and *A Dance With Dragons*.<sup>5</sup> In the last few years, it has become a best seller all around the world, having its own TV show. This series deals with the continuous fight for power for the Iron Throne, the so called “game of thrones,” a fight in which almost every character in the saga partakes in, including female characters.

According to several literary critics, such as Patrocínio P. Schweickart, Nina Baym, and Elaine Showalter, the role of women in literature—both as authors and characters—has always been limited and overshadowed by men. For instance, in the book *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*, Katharine M. Rogers defends that misogyny has always played a crucial part in the literary canon. For her part, Nina Baym observes in the article “Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors” that “the theories controlling our reading of American literature have led to the exclusion of women authors from the canon... As late as 1977, that canon did not include any women novelists” (Baym 123). Moreover, the misogynistic character of the canon does not only affect women authors but female characters as well. As Lee Edwards notes in the article “Women, Energy, and Middlemarch”

the first result of my reading was a feeling that male characters were at the very least more interesting than women to the authors who invented them. Thus if,

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter quoted as *GT*.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter quoted as *CK*.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter quoted as *SoS*.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter quoted as *FC*.

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter quoted as *DwD*.

reading their books as it seemed their authors intended them, I naively identified with a character, I repeatedly chose men; I would rather have been Hamlet than Ophelia, Tom Jones instead of Sophia Western, and perhaps, despite Dostoevsky's intention, Raskolnikov not Sonia.

More peculiar perhaps, but sadly unsurprising, were the assessments I accepted about fictional women. For example, I quickly learned that power was unfeminine and powerful women were, quite literally, monstrous... They must be eliminated, reformed, or at the very least, condemned. (Edwards 226)

Indeed, I agree with both Baym and Edwards. As I have witnessed during all my academic years studying literature, the (American) literary canon is clearly androcentric. It is not simply formed by occidental, wealthy, white heterosexual men; it is composed of characters that reflect the same characteristics. Thus, women, ethnic groups, underprivileged social classes and LGBT people have a small presence in literature. However, with the rise of feminist literary criticism, these disadvantaged groups have gained relevance within the literary sphere. It is important to highlight that, thanks to the development of feminist literary criticism, the interest in the study of great female writers and great female characters, which have always been present in North American Literature, has been renewed.

Immersed in the 21st century, our society lives a new feminist wave that pursues the total equality between men and women. In this context, women demand equal treatment in every sphere of their lives, including literature. Therefore, a more active participation of women in the literary world is required. Women want to find female characters with whom they can identify themselves; we long for complex, powerful female characters that are as interesting as male

ones. In my opinion, G. R. R. Martin does a great job in making his characters equally interesting, regardless of their gender. He creates a wide range of multidimensional and fascinating women with whom female readers can easily identify.

Considering everything said above, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the role of the female characters in Martin's saga to exemplify how the American literary canon, obeying the feminist demands of the 21st-century society, is changing from an androcentric approach to a gender-equal one. I will use the five books of the saga *A Song Of Ice And Fire* as an example of how the androcentric canon in twenty-first century US literature is dying. In particular, I will focus on the analysis of the female characters in the saga and on their process of empowerment. It has not been easy to find information and critical studies on the female characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. I have found many useful studies on the characters from the show, but these characters differ slightly from the ones in the books, therefore I could not base my study on this criticism. Nevertheless, the book *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance*, by Valerie E. Frankel, has been alongside the books in the saga, a very helpful source of information for my study. Even though it deals with the characters from the show as well, it offers plentiful insight on the female characters in the books. However, despite the great insight on the female characters offered by Frankel, my thesis is not a mere copy of her work; it also gets considerable inspiration from other bibliographical resources, such as the essays comprised in the book *Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones and Multiple Media Engagements*; and articles from various magazines and blogs.

My personal motivation to carry out this essay stems from three sources: first, my fascination for American Literature born of my experience as a university student enrolled in

courses devoted to the authors, literary works, and characters from the USA; second, my love for the books composing the saga *A Song Of Ice And Fire*; and third, as a feminist, the concern about offering a feminist perspective on the two previous points.

After this introduction, chapter two is devoted to an overview of the writer and his work, focusing on his famous saga. Once given this general information, I will offer an overall overview of the portrayal of women in the saga. The saga offers six major female characters—Daenerys, Arya, Sansa, Catelyn, Cersei, and Brienne. After providing an overview of the figure of women in the saga, their role, and other crucial issues in general, the third chapter of this thesis will principally deal with the last three aforementioned characters, whereas I will devote one entire chapter to analyze Daenerys and another for Arya. Sansa will be included in Arya's part, as I considered that a comparison between the two sisters may give further insight into Arya's character. Besides, since this essay has a limited length, carrying out a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of each one of the six major female characters was an impossible task. Therefore, I was obliged to focus my deepest research on just two of them—Daenerys and Arya. This choice was purely based on my personal preferences, as I personally believe that Arya and Daenerys are the most relevant female characters in the saga—they are, by far, the two female characters with more point-of-view chapters (which reflects their importance in the story); and their development throughout the story is rich and intriguing.

It is pertinent to point out that the analysis of Arya and Daenerys will not follow the same pattern. For Arya, who from the very beginning shows an incredible strength and power, the study will focus on the highlight of her qualities by opposition to her foil character: Sansa. Moreover, I will talk about two problematic points in Arya's personality that show her

complexity and allure: social status and gender. For Daenerys, who starts the story as a dependent girl and ends up being a powerful queen, it is more suitable to offer a chronological analysis of her evolution and empowerment.

### 3. GEORGE R. R. MARTIN AND *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*

#### 3.1. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George R.R. Martin is an American writer born in Bayonne, New Jersey in 1948. He took a deep interest in literature at a very early age. As a child, he started to write short horror stories and comics, which he would later sell around his neighborhood. However, he would not sell any work professionally until 1970, when the magazine *Galaxy Science Fiction* purchased and published “The Hero.” After studying Journalism in Northwestern University in Illinois, he held several different positions until he became a full-time author in 1979. Among his numerous works, we can find novels, comics, short stories and literature for children, all of them partaking of the fantasy, science fiction and horror genres. Martin has won multiple awards for his works, including several Hugo Awards. He has also worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter for popular shows, such as *The Twilight Zone*.

#### 3.2. ABOUT *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*

Martin’s most popular work is by far *A Song of Ice and Fire*, an epic fantasy saga with a worldwide acclaimed TV show adaptation. *A Song of Ice and Fire* belongs to the fantasy genre—more specifically to epic, or high, fantasy—whose main characteristic is the rupture with reality. Rikke Schubart, in the article “Woman With Dragons: Daenerys, Pride, and Postfeminist Possibilities” notes that in high fantasy, “the entire story is set in an alternate world. High fantasy

is epic, with Manichean battles of good and evil narrated in rich detail, and a long-story format” (85-86). Definitely, the saga falls in this category; nevertheless, although *A Song of Ice and Fire* partakes of more genres—romance, fairy tale. Marta Eidsvåg in the article “‘Maiden, Mother, and Crone’: Motherhood in the World of Ice and Fire” notes that the saga is “different from a traditional high fantasy series for a number of reasons, one of them being that it is a heroless story. There is no one hero to root for, indeed there is no Good and Bad (or evil) side in an epic struggle, there is good and evil both in almost every single character” (112-113)

The saga comprises seven novels—*A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *A Feast for Crows* (2005), *A Dance with Dragons* (2011), *The Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*—, out of which only the first five have been published so far. Each of these books is divided in chapters that focus on the perspective of one single character. The number of these “Point of View” characters varies, increasing throughout the saga—*A Game of Thrones* has nine PoV characters, whereas there are eighteen PoV characters in *A Dance with Dragons*. The main plot of the saga, inspired by the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487), revolves around the fight for the Iron Throne among the most powerful Houses in Westeros. However, this war is not the only plot line in the saga—the Others, and Daenerys Targaryen are the other two major plot lines, becoming gradually more central as the story unfolds.

In the first volume, *A Game of Thrones*, the aforementioned conflict between the Houses is introduced, but there is no actual war nor battles. Mainly, this book introduces the causes of the upcoming war, as well as the two other major plot lines, namely the Others and Daenerys. Besides, major characters with PoV chapters in the following volumes are presented here (such as Cersei and Jaime Lannister). *A Clash of Kings*, introduces new characters and major action

occurs—the real conflict among the Houses unfolds, as the “War of the Five Kings” breaks out. In the third novel, *A Storm of Swords*, the war is still the main plot line. However, this volume introduces yet more major characters and the other two main plot lines (the Others/North and Daenerys) gain more importance. *A Feast for Crows* sees the end of the war. However, the conflict between the Houses is far from being terminated. In *A Dance with Dragons*, the last volume published, the Others and Daenerys' plot lines become essential.

#### 4. WOMEN IN WESTEROS

In this chapter I will explore the importance of some of the most salient female characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as well as some crucial concepts and issues concerning them—e.g., gender roles, sexism—always addressing the topic from a feminist perspective.

##### 4.1. PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS: FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY

In the following chapters, as well as in this section, I will constantly allude to the concept of “feminine.” This notion, as any topic regarding gender and sex, is rather complex and controversial. Therefore, it is extremely important to clarify how I make use of the term. Nevertheless, prior to explaining my personal utilization of “feminine,” it is necessary to take a look at what scholars and social experts understand by “femininity” and “masculinity.”

Janet Taylor Spence, prominent American psychologist, and fellow Robert L. Helmreich, in their book *Masculinity and Femininity: Their Psychological Dimensions, Correlates, and Antecedents*, explain that these terms stand for “(p)sychological dimensions . . . : clusters of socially desirable attributes stereotypically considered to differentiate males and females and thus to define the psychological core of masculine and feminine personalities” (3). For his part,

the social psychologist Geert Hofstede notes in his book *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures*, that “(m)asculinity stands for a society in which men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life”.(6). Thus, when I refer to a character being “feminine,” I mean that this individual has a particular set of characteristics, both physical and psychological, that are regarded by society as the traits that women are supposed to possess. Traditionally, the world has associated and assigned particular clusters of features to each sex (male and female) that are supposed to identify them. Spence and Helmreich note that these “(t)ypical characterizations of the sexes are that women are dominated by their emotions and a desire to nurture others, while men are independent, self-assertive, and rational” (14). These “typical characterizations” are also called “gender roles.” Hofstede further notes that “the distribution is always such that men take the more assertive and dominant roles and women the more service-oriented and caring roles” (85). However, it is extremely important to highlight the social nature of this division. Geert Hofstede, in his article “The Cultural Relativity of Organizational Practices and Theories,” further explains:

The fundamental issue involved is the division of roles between the sexes in society. All societies have to deal with the basic fact that one half of mankind is female and the other male. The only activities that are strictly determined by the sex of a person are those related to procreation. Men cannot have babies. Human societies, however, through the ages and around the globe, have also associated other roles to men only, or to women only. This is called social, rather than biological, sex role division. (83)

Consequently, the notions of “femininity” and “masculinity,” and their assignation to women and men respectively, are a social construction and not a biological condition. It is society who dictates that women are supposed to be “feminine” and men are supposed to be “masculine.” There are no inherent biological traits that make either women feminine or men masculine; this association is purely social—not natural—so it is liable to change. Indeed, not every woman partakes of femininity, nor every man of masculinity; however, when this happens, the public’s reaction is everything but positive and welcoming. Femininity and masculinity are regarded as positive and desirable qualities as long as they match womanhood and manhood respectively; but they become negative qualities when they do not match.

Having said that, when I talk about Arya not being feminine—f. i.—what I mean is that she does not match the social conception of femininity—she does not like to wear dresses, she prefers to play with her brothers rather than with her sister, and most importantly, she is everything but sweet and compliant. In fact, she possesses traits that are considered by society to be “masculine” such as assertiveness and strength. She simply does not fit in the gender roles that society has established. However, this does not mean (and I definitely do not mean) that she is less of a woman, although several characters in the book, like Sansa, do think that she is not a “real girl” because of the way she behaves.

#### 4.2. FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE*

The “Point of View” chapters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (including prologues and epilogues) are divided into a total of thirty four characters, out of which twenty-three are male and nine female—Arya, Daenerys, Sansa, Catelyn, Cersei, Brienne, Asha, Melisandre and Ariane Martell. This means that only one-third of the PoV characters are female, which indicates that the

story is majorly depicted under a male gaze. However, out of the nine PoV female characters, six of them are major characters; whereas there are only eight male major characters out of the twenty three. Thus, the difference between female and male representation decreases significantly, but only regarding the major characters. If we take a look at the number of chapters, we find that out of these thirty-four PoV characters, only four have more than thirty chapters from their point of view—Tyrion, Jon, Arya, and Daenerys—, two of them are men and two women, thus making representation more balanced. Therefore, although it can't be ignored that male characters have more presence in the books, both as major and minor characters, it can be said that *A Song of Ice and Fire* has a decent share of chapters between male and female characters.

The number of chapters is not the only factor to be considered when comparing the different treatment of female and male characters. Another factor is the difference between female and male characters regarding their characterization, this is, how the female characters are portrayed and the difference between their portrayal and the male one. In his interview with journalist Adrià Guxens, G.R.R. Martin stated that: "I wanted to present my female characters in great diversity, even in a society as sexist and patriarchal as the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. Women would find different roles and different personalities, so women with different talents would find ways to work with it in a society according to who they are".

Indeed, there is a lot of variety regarding the female characters in the book. We can find princess characters, such as Sansa and Margaery; warrior women, such as Arya and Brienne; powerful queens, such as Daenerys and Cersei; and more. The range of female characters is wide, which means that we can encounter women of diverse personalities, although many of

them can be easily sorted into one category or the other. As the British blogger Rhiannon Thomas notes in her article “Game of Thrones: Not the Women They Were Before” the female characters in the saga tend to fit “into one of two boxes: masculine or feminine. Masculine characters are all about overt strength and fighting the system directly . . . Feminine characters, on the other hand, are softer. They are often concerned with marriage and motherhood, and tend to keep their true opinions to themselves.” Here we encounter two main problems. Firstly, the strict categorization of masculine—strong vs. feminine—weak, shades the complexity of the characters. The fact that the concept of a “strong woman” necessarily implies masculinity, causes a loss of complexity because it prevents characters from being “strong” and “feminine.” Secondly, the fact that “strong women” are coded as masculine and “soft women” as feminine, points towards the idea that men are mostly strong and powerful and that women are mostly weak and helpless. This is a very dangerous and false idea, since very feminine female characters can be incredibly strong (Daenerys). In fact, many female characters in the saga break this categorization at least once.

The presence of this complexity when analyzing this saga is not strange considering that it belongs to the genre of epic fantasy in which the role of women is conspicuous by its absence. Taking the greatest example of epic fantasy, *The Lord of The Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, all the major characters are male, and the women present in the story—Arwen, Galadriel, and Eowen—play really small parts, which always revolve around the male heroes. Concerning this, fantasy writer Juliet E. McKenna in the article “The Representation of Women in Fantasy: What’s the Problem?” notes that:

Kings and princes, wizards and heroes – isn't that what fantasy's all about? Look at the great epics of yore and see Gilgamesh, Achilles, Hector, Odysseus, Aeneas, Beowulf, Arthur, Lancelot, Roland, Siegfried. Look at the development of the fantasy genre and see Conan, Aragorn, Elric, Druss, Belgarion. Such lists are endless – and all male.

For his part, the also writer Garret Robinson states in the article “The Fantasy Genre Hates Women” that:

[f]antasy has a problem with women. The grandfatherly books that defined the fantasy genre, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, are, unfortunately, the worst offenders. *The Hobbit* does not have a female character. I don't mean a female character with a speaking role. I mean there are NO females who are so much as seen in the book (other than a few townspeople mentioned in passing). *The Lord of the Rings* does slightly better by having Eowyn and, unforgettably, Galadriel, but no one else of agency. No women in the fellowship. The story's protagonist is either Frodo or Aragorn, depending on your point of view.

And this problem is present in other epic fantasy novels and sagas, such as *The Kingkiller Chronicle* and *The Wheel of Time*, where the role of women is not inexistent, but extremely poor. However, as Frankel observes “there are female authors writing about women's issues, addressing race and other social issues, and crafting high Tolkienesque fantasy,” and for this reason “[c]alling epic fantasy a genre for men is unfair and inaccurate” (16). Indeed, saying that epic fantasy is a genre for men seems quite a vague and unjust statement. However, despite the fact that female authors such as Anne Rice and Ursula LeGuin focus their writing on women,

few male authors have given due relevance to female characters, and the problem is that authors such as this, like for example Tolkien, seem to have had, and to have still, more influence than their female counterparts.

*A Song of Ice and Fire* breaks with this tendency—there are numerous female characters, several of which play an essential role for the plot and enjoy rich characterization. This rare empowerment of the female figure in fantasy fiction will be analyzed in the following pages.

#### 4.3. SEXISM AND MISOGYNY IN WESTEROS

*A Song of Ice and Fire* is based on the European Middle Ages—particularly on the “Wars of the Roses” (1455-1487)—, and the society in Westeros emulates the feudalistic and patriarchal system characteristic of medieval society. Thus, in order to understand the female characters in the saga, we first need to understand the role that women played in the Middle Ages. American historian David Herlihy, in his work *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991*, noted that

men and women in the medieval towns operated within widely separate social spheres. Men held a near monopoly over public affairs, and the formal acts of governments - the promulgating of laws and statutes, the imposing of taxes, the making of peace and war - were almost always the work of males. Women, on the other hand, presided over the activities that were carried within or were centered upon the household. (16-17)

Indeed, this relegation of women to the domestic sphere is reflected in the saga. Major female characters, such as Catelyn and Cersei, first appear in the story as removed from the public life; and even though this situation changes as the story unfolds—after the deaths of both their

husbands, Catelyn and Cersei begin to play a more public role and even achieve certain political power—, when it comes to ruling affairs, they always end up overpowered by men. If there is an exception to this rule, however, that is Daenerys Targaryen. Although in *A Game of Thrones* Daenerys is a child manipulated by her abusive brother—he who was meant to be king, and therefore to hold political power—, by *A Dance with Dragons* she has evolved into an exceptional ruler. Just as in Westeros, there were exceptions, in the European Middle Ages: a few women—mainly religious—achieved great influence in the public life, such as Catherine of Siena (1349-80), Catherine Vigri of Bologna (1413-63) and Catherine of Genoa (1446-1510). However, these were exceptions to the rule. In general terms, women were considered inferior to men, as Israeli historian Shulamith Shahar notes in her book *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, “women were a ‘marginal social group’ in the Middle Ages” (8). This idea is reflected all over the story in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where men are those who truly hold the power.

As suggested above, the society of Westeros is to some extent a reflection of medieval society. In this context, the reader finds that the Westerosi society has a strongly patriarchal and feudal structure, in which women are expected to have little power. However, since *A Song Of Ice And Fire* is not historical fiction but a fantasy saga, the gender roles shown in the books constitute just a free recreation of those in the historical Middle Ages sometimes showing important points of deviation.

Characters such as Catelyn and Sansa, beautiful and dutiful, the perfect highborn ladies par excellence, and (Arya as) Weasel, the typical low-born lass cleaning the Lord’s household, develop traditional female roles in the fashion of medieval Europe. As Frankel notes:

“embroidery and dance for the highborn, cooking and scrubbing for the lowborn. Highborn women are literate. They are kept chaperoned, and virginity is expected” (161). Regardless of their social status, women live under the yoke of men, the power holders. As a matter of fact, women are second-class citizens in the Seven Kingdoms, as they were in the Middle Ages since they depend on men. Of course, women do not depend on men because of some natural condition that makes them helpless and in need of men’s aid: they depend on men because the patriarchal society tells them that they need men in order to survive. Women have to be dependent on men; otherwise, they will be punished.

The way in which the male characters in Westeros depict women—both directly and indirectly—is proof of the sexism pervading this society since, as Frankel remarks “(m)en’s comments are just as gender-biased, of course. Craster asks Jon if he’s a girl, noting that he’s pretty enough. Jaime smirks that King Robb hides behind his mother’s skirts” (167). Thus, most male characters reinforce the strict traditional restrictions on women’s roles—being beautiful, afraid, non-belligerent, etcetera. This sexist and somewhat misogynistic perception of reality is vastly spread, since “(i)n this highly patriarchal world, all men are sexist to some degree. . . . However, misogyny is often correlated with evil” (Frankel 174). Indeed, one of the most misogynistic characters in the saga, Joffrey, is regarded as a brutal tyrant whose death is awaited by everyone except Cersei; and Viserys, the abusive brother of Daenerys, is considered an evil person as well.

In contrast, some characters are more flexible concerning the fulfillment of social rules and gender roles. Lord Eddard allows Arya to use Needle and train her sword skills with one of the best sword fighters. However, he allows Arya to train herself in order to appease her, not because

he either expects or wants her to become a warrior. As a matter of fact, he states in *A Game Of Thrones* that Needle “is no weapon for a child, least of all for a girl” (220), making clear that he sticks to social rules. Balon Greyjoy is another example of flexibility with gender roles, since he favors his daughter, Asha, over Theon. However, as Frankel notes, “(h)e only values manly strength, . . . he’s happy to train his daughter to it, as his last remaining child” (176). Thus, Lord Greyjoy allows his daughter to fight for her right to the throne, but only because she shows male characteristics which, alongside his remark on Theon’s appearance, demonstrates once again the generalized despise for the female nature.

Despite the general sexist and misogynist atmosphere in Westeros society, there are a few male characters that establish a connection with those female characters who do not behave as women are expected to. Jaime and Brienne get to build a sort of friendship when at the beginning there was only despise from both sides, and Jon gives Needle to Arya, thus encouraging her to develop and work on her “not-so-feminine” side and to break gender roles.

However, not only men show sexist and misogynistic attitudes, since according to Frankel “several women put men down by calling them women. . . . [T]hese words also indicate the women’s denigration of their own sex. Calling a weak man a woman means women are weak and undesirable” (172). Indeed, characters such as Cersei, Arya or Brienne, do not feel happy about their female nature. Cersei states several times that she ought to have been born a male because she is the true leader out of the three Lannister children. She believes that her biological condition as a woman is only a handicap for her to reach power, and truth be told, it is because men are the ones holding power in Westeros.

Something similar happens to Arya, who oppressed by gender roles, enjoys more freedom once she pretends she is a boy. The problem with Arya, being such a strong female character, is that she starts to consider other women—those who are not as “strong” as her—as inferior beings to some degree. Thus, following Cersei’s model, Arya also insults men by attributing feminine characteristics to them. Thus, the problem is that, as Frankel states, the fact that “(w)omen who are so ‘strong’ that they insult men by saying they have female body parts goes in the same category as Arya’s ‘most girls are stupid’ comment. By raising themselves up, these women denigrate all the other women of the world” (174).

#### 4.4. STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS: STRUGGLING AGAINST SEXISM IN WESTEROS

*A Song of Ice and Fire* offers a wide range of strong female characters who struggle with Westeros sexist restrictions. Among the main characters Catelyn, Cersei, Brienne, Asha, Sansa, Arya, and Daenerys are strong female characters, and there are also minor female characters who show strength and power as well, such as Ygritte, Margaery, Melisandre and Arianne Martell. However, one must be careful when gathering all these different female characters under the label of “strong females,” because it can give the mistaken idea of homogeneity and uniformity. In other words, even though all the aforementioned women can be categorized as “strong females,” they must not be taken as mere and identical copies of the same model, namely the “strong woman archetype.” All of them show strength and power, but to different degrees and in different ways. Brienne is definitely a strong woman, just as Daenerys, but they are completely different: their background is different, their identity is different and their goals are different.

#### 4.4.1. THE STRONG WOMAN ARCHETYPE

The “strong woman archetype” is a trope that represents female characters with the sole characteristic of being strong. If by “strong” we understand “compelling,” “complex” and “realistic,” we may find the label “strong woman” rather promising. However, this is not the case. As Carina Chocano, contributing writer to *The New York Times Magazine*, notes in her article “Tough, Cold, Terse, Taciturn and Prone to Not Saying Goodbye When They Hang Up the Phone,” “what most people mean or hear when they say or hear ‘strong female character’ is female characters who are tough, cold, terse, taciturn and prone to scowling” (). Indeed, by taking Arya and Brienne as an example—both characters being marked by a high degree of toughness and (apparent) emotional detachment—, we can see the truth of Chocano’s words. She further points out how absurd the strong-female-character archetype is by gender-reversing it: “Not only does calling for ‘strong male characters’ sound ridiculous and kind of reactionary, but who really wants to watch them? They sound boring.” Partaking of this same idea, writer Sophia McDougall, in the article “I Hate Strong Female Characters” notes that “when one tries to fit other iconic male heroes into an imaginary ‘Strong Male Character’ . . . [a] few fit reasonably well, but many look cramped and bewildered in there. They’re used to being interesting across more than one axis and in more than two dimensions.” Thus, by gender-reversing, it becomes clear that the strong-female-archetype far from depicting women in a realistic, interesting way turns female characters into flat, unidimensional beings.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight that, even though some female characters in the saga (e.g., Arya, Brienne) seem to partially fit in the “strong female character box,” they are by no means archetypes. On the contrary, as I will explain in the sections below, they are round and

multifaceted characters. Therefore, when I use the word “strong” to talk about the women in the saga I am not referring to the “strong female archetype” but to the fact that these women are powerful and resilient.

#### 4.4.2. BRIENNE

Brienne is unquestionably one of the strongest female characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Being the only child of a great lord from the Stormlands, Brienne is the rightful heir to her father’s household. As such, she has been proposed to several times, though none of them had a positive end result. Due to her physical appearance— she is tall, strong, muscular, with a countenance regarded as “ugly” for a lady—, men have courted her only because of her status as the heir to the Sapphire Island and not because of her virtues, thus implying that only beautiful ladies can aspire to be truly loved.

After a traumatic heartbreak, Brienne builds a wall around her, exclusively focusing on her career as a warrior. She excels in fighting, so soon she becomes a knight. This is the cause of mockery and disdain from both men and women, who blinded by social and gender rules, are incapable of seeing her outstanding persona and great value as a “cavalier.” However, Renly Baratheon accepts Brienne the way she is, and he even names her member of his Kingsguard. As expected, her nomination as a Knight of the Kingsguard raises even more disdain from those men who do not accept that a woman can be as strong and capable as them, but Brienne ignores all of them, since she has Renly’s “blessing.” As Loras Tyrell says to Jaime in book three, “[Renly] said that all his other knights wanted things of him, castles or honors or riches, but all that Brienne wanted was to die for him” (Martin, *SoS*, 925), showing that he really acknowledged Brienne as an authentic and outstanding knight, with more principles than most of

his other knights. The quote from Loras also evidences another fact: that Brienne lived exclusively for her King. It is suggested that Brienne's dedication for Renly might stem from romantic love, but as Frankel states, this "fixation on someone she'll never have could be seen as defensive: She need never make her feelings known and never be hurt" (52). Considering her background, her willingness to become a skilled warrior and knight, and her set of values, it seems rather unfair to attribute her dedication to her King merely as a result of idealized romantic love.

Yvonne Tasker and Lindsay Steenberg note in the essay "Women Warriors from Chivalry to Vegeance," that Brienne "is also one of the most, if not the most, honorable characters . . . , remaining committed to her ideals, and loyal to the liege to whom she has sworn service" (135). Thus, when Renly dies, Brienne enters a spiral of bewilderment, remorse, and most of all guilt, since she has failed to fulfill her ultimate purpose: to keep the King safe. Since she was the only one present—alongside Lady Catelyn—when Renly was murdered, the other knights and vassals blame her for the King's death. Since she is a woman, her word is worthless, so she has no other choice than to join Catelyn Stark. Thus, she has passed from being in the service of Lord Renly to being in Catelyn's. This is important because Brienne's story arc focuses on her job as protector of several people—she started with Renly, continued with Catelyn, and then changed to Jaime Lannister—, which, as Frankel notes, points out to the fact that "Brienne is the only true knight of the series, determined to protect the innocent and champion the helpless" (54). Indeed, alongside Beric Dondarrion, Brienne is the only knight concerned about helpless people and values. However, she is no ordinary knight; firstly because she is a woman, and secondly, because she lacks a trait that every male knight shares in the saga: being lethal. In fact, despite

her tough looks, Brienne tries to avoid killing anyone, as Rhiannon Thomas notes in her article “Game of Thrones: Not the Women They Were Before”: “[Brienne] has a strong sense of honor, is fairly naive . . . , is very romantic like Sansa, and has never killed a single person. When she finally does kill somebody, it’s a huge emotional moment for her, and not one that she’s proud of.” Thus, by refusing to fit utterly in one category—namely, knight—, Brienne shows her ambivalence and complexity as a character. In fact, as Tasker and Steenberg note, “Brienne’s ritualistic denials of the titles ‘lady’ and ‘knight’ signal her uneasy and unsettling combination of both categories” (133-134). This means that Brienne does not only refuse to fit in the category of “knight” but in the category of “lady” as well, which adds even more ambiguity to her personality.

Nevertheless, despite Brienne’s categorization as a strong woman, there are some problematic points that hinder her from being considered a feminist role model, as Frankel admits: “[h]er character is very strong and certainly female, but her dislike for her own sex, like Arya’s, makes her a problematic feminist icon” (54). One cannot represent feminism when one despises being a woman. Besides, although she is a protector and spends most of the books protecting Jaime, “[s]he also needs Jaime to rescue her multiple times. . . . Brienne’s never spent much time with women, deliberately placing herself on the men’s battlefield instead” (Frankel 53). This last point is extremely problematic: the fact that Brienne, who started the story as one of the most independent, strong “badass” characters, evolves to some degree into a more dependent woman, somehow suggests the persistence of the traditional expectation that women will always end up dependent on men.

#### 4.4.3. CATELYN

Catelyn Stark is an example of “perfect lady”: she is beautiful, gentle, honorable and dutiful, and follows by heart her birth House’s words of “Family, Duty, Honor.” She was born a Tully, the eldest of Lord Hoster’s three children. Being the eldest, she had to take care of the household, especially after her mother’s death, when she became “the Lady of the castle.” Thus, she has always been used to taking care of her family and household. However, her duty was not limited to house chores and other traditionally “feminine” activities. She also had to deal with great Lords and political matters in order to help her father and make him feel proud. Therefore, Catelyn has always been experienced in both family and political affairs. As a High Lady, she was aware of her duty, including her obligation to marry a high Lord, so when Lord Hoster arranged her marriage to Brandon Stark, Catelyn dutifully accepted the future union and even regarded it as a great honor. However, when Brandon prematurely died, Catelyn was forced to marry his younger brother, Eddard. Again, considering it her duty, Catelyn did not object to marrying a complete stranger and accepted because it was her duty as a daughter and high lady. Her sense of duty and honor is so elemental for her that she does not mind being used by men for political reasons. It is this unquestioned duty towards men that makes her seem rather dependent and “silent,” but what does Catelyn want?

Following what her duty in a patriarchal society dictates, Catelyn abandons Riverrun, her beloved home, to go to Winterfell. At first, she does not like her new and imposed home, because she finds it cold and dim, but after many years living there, Catelyn gets used to the North. Even though she is loved and has her family there, she feels alien. However, how she feels seems, again, unimportant against her duty. She has five children with Eddard, and these kids are the

most important thing for her. In fact, Catelyn's sense of motherhood is the most relevant aspect of her characterization. She would do anything for her children, as she proves when she fights the man trying to murder Bran. Family means everything for Catelyn, her husband and children are her life, as proved by her reaction when Bran falls from the tower: Catelyn is so broken that she even forgets her duty as Lady of Winterfell by spending all her time by Bran's side. Thus, Catelyn shows that even though duty and honor are important for her, the family is always first. As a matter of fact, her family is so important that she starts a war for them. She travels to King's Landing to discover who tried to murder Bran, and she mistakenly finds out that it was Tyrion Lannister (though it was not true). When she is on her way back to Winterfell, she encounters Tyrion and, not thinking about the consequences of her acts, she captures him. Blinded by her grief and thirst for revenge, Catelyn ignores the fact that her offense means war between the Starks and the Lannisters. She will do anything for her family, even start a war.

However, this gentle and loving sense of motherhood is not shared with Jon Snow, Eddard's supposed bastard. Catelyn does not love Jon and what is more, in fact, as Frankel states, she "appears guiltless over her treatment of Jon. It's her husband who's insulted her by raising a bastard beside her children, and she wants Jon to know he'll never be their equal. Here, however, Catelyn is seen failing a test of love for a motherless child" (79). She feels insulted by the fact that Ned wanted to raise Jon as any of their other legitimate children, and she makes Jon pay for it. Marta Eidsvåg, explains in her essay "Maiden, Mother, and Crone: Motherhood in the World of Ice and Fire" that "Catelyn does fail to mother Jon . . . , but the notion of the horror and impossibility of a mother failing to take pity on an innocent child is interesting" (Eidsvåg 117). Indeed, being such a devoted and loving mother, her cruel behavior towards Jon, just an innocent

child, seems rather shocking. However, from Catelyn's point of view, Jon represents a threat to Robb—her first born—, since they both are the same age and Jon could usurp Robb's place as the heir of House Stark. In this sense, Catelyn is protecting her family and lineage—and Jon is none of them.

However, Catelyn proves to be more than just a mother. When Eddard leaves Winterfell to go south, she becomes a sort of “regent” of the North, and in times of war, she can plan strategies and play her role as a politician. When war breaks out, she “becomes an able advisor to her son Robb, traveling with him on campaign rather than returning to Bran and Theon at Winterfell. She's present in his councils, equal to all the lords and councilors” (Frankel 79). She chooses to stay with her first son in order to help him with his army and political matters. After all, Robb is just a boy with no military experience, whereas Catelyn had survived a war and married a Lord deft in battle, and thus she gives good counsel to Robb—most of the times. For instance, she advises Robb not to send Theon back to his family because he might betray them, but Robb ignores Catelyn's counsel, which ends up with the conquest of the North by the Ironmen and the “deaths” of Bran and Rickon. Thus, Robb proves to be rather innocent and proud, the reason why Catelyn needs to remain with him. Nevertheless, Catelyn's skills and power seem to make Robb feel uncomfortable, since they make him feel dependent on her. Thus, Robb tries to put some distance between them the two of them, although as Frankel remarks, she always remains an “important advisor in his campaign, forging alliances and negotiating on Robb's behalf” (81). Indeed, Catelyn proves to be a reliable counselor to Robb, but she presents a feature that turns out to be problematic on most occasions: her emotional behavior.

Catelyn is rather impulsive, which always ends in trouble: by kidnapping Tyrion—even when she has no definite evidence against him—she triggers the war between Starks and Lannisters. But her most impulsive act by far is the release of Jaime Lannister. Jaime is their last chance against the Lannisters since neither Cersei nor Tywin would dare to make a move which would endanger Jaime’s life. Once Jaime has been freed, the downfall of House Stark begins, for they have lost their most valuable and only weapon against the Lannisters. However, even though Catelyn’s move is highly irrational, it is also understandable, since it “comes *after* Bran and Rickon’s reported deaths, and as such, it’s an explosion of grief leading to the irrational decision. With two children suddenly dead, Catelyn’s desperate to reclaim her last ones” (Frankel 82). Although her action is somehow justified by her grief, Jaime’s release is undoubtedly irrational and bound to fail—Cersei would never give Sansa back, and Arya’s whereabouts are unknown. But no one can blame her for trying to save her daughters, not even Robb who “is struck with the same grief and acts just as unwisely, suddenly wedding Jeyne Westerling, whose family are bannermen to the Lannisters” (Frankel 82).

Thus, on the one hand, “Catelyn certainly has powerful moments, though many of them prove ultimately ineffectual” (Frankel 79). She does show power and independence—her determination and protectiveness, as well as her political skills—, which makes her a strong female character in the saga. However, on the other hand, “Catelyn is the archetypal mother. . . . Her part in the story is as Bran’s mother and Ned’s wife, fighting to protect them both” (Frankel 77-78). Her actions are always based around her children, so despite Martin’s attempts to create a complex, multifaceted mother, Catelyn still seems rather archetypal.

#### 4.4.4. CERSEI

Cersei is alongside Daenerys, one of the few female characters that seek political power. Undoubtedly, Cersei's motivations are different from Daenerys', but the crucial aspect to bear in mind is that they both strive to be powerful.

There is no doubt that Cersei is one of the strongest female characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. She lives surrounded by men who incessantly attempt to control her, but she never gives in, always trying to break free and to hold power on her own. She is the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, but as Queen consort, she has no real power on political or "state" matters. Certainly, Cersei has power and influence, but these are always limited or even extinguished by the men surrounding her, particularly Robert. In many occasions, Cersei gives a command just to be immediately dismissed by Robert. As a matter of fact, Robert does more than to question Cersei's power and dismiss her ideas and wishes; he belittles and abuses her. Cersei, who had always dreamt of marrying the perfect prince (Rhaegar), finds herself married to a King that has nothing to do with the prince of her dreams, and who ignores and abuses her. Thus, her hatred and fury towards Robert are not surprising. She despises Robert to such an extent that she deprives him of the most important aspect for any king: to produce a legitimate heir. As Frankel states, "[s]he takes her secret revenge by having children with her brother instead of her husband, denying Robert progeny and placing full Lannisters on the throne" (90).

This last idea, "placing full Lannisters on the throne" is rather unsettling. Cersei could have deprived Robert of heirs by having children with any man, or with different men, but she does so by committing incest. Marta Eidsvåg states that Cersei "loves her children, not just because they are hers, but because they are hers and Jaime's, and thus Lannister children" (113-114).

Therefore, as Caroline Spector notes in her article “Power and Feminism in Westeros,” “[t]he only sons who will sit on the Iron Throne after Robert dies are those of the queen’s Lannister bloodline alone” (181-182). In this manner, it is Cersei who is giving the ultimate power—to become the holders of the crown—to House Lannister—not Tywin, not Tyrion and not Jaime—thus proving that she is mightier than they believe. Moreover, Spector remarks that the fact “[t]hat they are children by her twin implies a mirroring of herself in their creation, a startling statement of control and self-defined identity” (181-182). Indeed, Cersei’s children by her twin—who additionally does not take part in the children’s breeding—are a sort of copy of Cersei herself, who on top of that, raises Joffrey, Tommen and even Myrcella in order to reach power through them. Elizabeth Beaton, in her essay “Female Machiavellians in Westeros” notes that “[s]ince the women of Westeros are not equal to men, those who exert control do so through exceptional strength and tenacity” (157) Hence the fact that Cersei tries to reach power by manipulating her children. As a matter of fact, as soon as Joffrey is old enough to be proclaimed king, Cersei murders Robert. With Robert’s murder, Cersei shows how incredibly cunning and dangerous she truly is; she has schemed her husband’s death in such a clever way that no one can relate it to her; and most importantly, once Robert is dead, she becomes the Queen Regent, thus acquiring much more power.

However, Cersei does not know what to do with her newly acquired power. Once the war breaks out—thanks to her because (a) she killed Robert, and (b) Eddard Stark since he knew that (c) her children are illegitimate—, Cersei finds herself powerless once again. Unlike men, she has not been either raised or educated to be a ruler or commander, so she does not know what to

do. Caroline Spector notes that “she lacks the ability to see how her personal and ethical shortcomings hamstring her quest for power and respect” (171).

Thus, Cersei is always overpowered by men: her father becomes the Hand of the King and Cersei loses power; Tyrion is always scheming his own secret plans and counteracting Cersei’s doings; and ultimately, she is imprisoned by the High Sparrow. In the Seven Kingdoms, it is men that truly hold power, and that is something that Cersei cannot bear. She is aware that, in the patriarchal society of Westeros, only men can achieve real power and that even mediocre men like Robert, specially since the rebellion, will always hold more power than outstanding women. She is also cognizant of the fact that she is bolder and more cunning than most High Lords, and she truly believes that she should be the heir to Casterly Rock instead of Jaime. As a matter of fact, she is sure that if she had been born male, she would have inherited Casterly Rock. Considering the situation, it is not strange that Cersei wishes she were a man. Her lust for control is so big that she even plays to be a man, as it can be seen when she has sex with Lady Taena in *A Feast for Crows*. Despite being two women, this sex scene does not show a female-female relationship; Cersei plays the role of the man, becoming the dominant one: “the Myrish woman gave a gasp of pain. ‘You’re hurting me.’ ‘It is just the wine. I had a flagon with my supper, and another with the widow Stokeworth. I had to drink to keep her calm.’ She twisted Taena’s nipple too, pulling until the other woman gasped. ‘I am the queen. I mean to claim my rights’” (*FC* 692). Cersei does not have sex with Lady Taena in order to satisfy her sexual lust but to satisfy her desire for dominance. With Taena, Cersei seeks to act in the same way that Robert did with her; controlling and abusively powerful.

Certainly, Cersei regards the males as robust and powerful, and the female body as weak because women cannot—rather, they are not allowed to—physically fight. Despite this, as Frankel says, “she never seeks training in arms as Arya or Meera Reed does. Instead, she spends her time seething over men’s advantages. . . . Rather than acting to improve her lot, Cersei condemns such women as unfeminine. She longs to be a man, yet she despises women who have chosen that path” (91). Indeed, Cersei spends most of her time complaining about how unfair it is that men are the only ones holding power, but she does nothing in order to prove that women can be as powerful. She is a high Lady that attempts to reach power, but she wants to achieve it without exerting herself. For instance, Cersei states several times that men would yield to her if she were able to handle a sword, but she does not even try to. As Frankel states, “[i]n a male-dominated world, Cersei seizes power, but only to indulge her own selfishness” (88).

Moreover, Cersei’s long for power turns her into a rather paranoid woman, and “by the fourth book . . . , jealousy and paranoia motivate Cersei’s every action. She loathes Margaery for her influence over Joffrey and sees the Tyrells as rivals, not allies” (93). Cersei is most unlucky: she gets rid of Lord Tywin’s and Tyrion’s influence and control, but the Tyrells remain. Margaery and her family represent a threat to Cersei’s dominance over Joffrey and the realm, but Cersei is not willing to let some outsiders snatch away the little power remaining to her. She feels particularly threatened by Margaery since she is younger, more beautiful and people love her. Thus, the reader finds that Cersei hates Margaery. At first, this hatred seems rather excessive, but Cersei has a good reason for her apprehension towards the Tyrell girl: a prophecy foretelling her overthrow by another queen and the death of her three children.

Cersei is scared: the prophecy is coming true, so she knows her downfall is near. Thus, she will do everything in order to prevent this from happening. Seeing that Margaery might be the “other” queen from the prophecy, Cersei does everything in her power in order to control and gain power over her. However, the most disturbing part of the prophecy is not the fact that Cersei will be overthrown by a “younger and more beautiful” queen, but the fact that her children will die. Therefore, Cersei’s fear and hatred towards any outsider is justified because anyone can kill her children. After Joffrey’s death, her hate and dread are more than excused, since the Tyrells were responsible for his death.

As Tyrion states, “Cersei is as gentle as King Maegor, as selfless as Aegon the Unworthy, as wise as Mad Aerys. She never forgets a slight, real or imagined. She takes caution for cowardice and dissent for defiance. And she is greedy. Greedy for power, for honor, for love” (*DD* 281). Certainly, Cersei is flawed and wicked to some extent, but she shows true love and devotion for her children, “her one redeeming feature” (Frankel 91-92). She would do anything for them, even “kill half the lords in Westeros and all the common people, if that was what it took” (*DD* 774). In this sense, Cersei is as fierce and protective a mother as Catelyn.

Cersei is undoubtedly a complex character, and with this complexity comes controversy. As a matter of fact, Cersei is one of the most criticized characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. It is true that Cersei is no saint and that she has committed awful crimes, but most of Cersei’s actions are somehow justified by the society she has to live in, since, as Frankel notes, “Cersei’s falseness and its consequences are a symptom of patriarchal culture. Ned’s bastard son and Robert’s many infidelities are dismissed as typical lordly behavior, but hers is a national

crime” (90). Therefore, it is quite startling that many readers indiscriminately hate Cersei. As noted in the article “In Defense of Cersei Lannister” from the blog *Feminist TV*,

Cersei gets labeled “bitch,” “terrible and whiny,” and “stupid whore” (all quotes taken from various Tumblr conversations). Want to know why? Hint: misogyny! Female characters are traditionally singled out and held to vastly different standards than male characters are, mostly because society at large teaches us that double standards are a-ok (spoiler alert—not true). So while Tywin, Tyrion, and Jaime Lannister get to be cool rebel dudes, Cersei is viewed with an amount of contempt and hatred that’s actually rather shocking.

This treatment of Cersei by the audience demonstrates that our own society, as patriarchal as Westeros, is not happy whenever a woman strives to achieve power, as Frankel notes, “since Cersei is playing the cruel political game alongside Joffrey, Tywin and others, . . . she should not be condemned gender-specifically. Critics who condemn her as whiny may be protesting that she’s speaking too much, in a culture where women are supposed to decorate . . . rather than speak” (95). Indeed, the way in which critics and people all around the world talk about Cersei, and other female characters, is inherently connected to their perception of women in real life. Thus, the fact that they dismiss and insult characters such as Cersei, but not characters such as Jaime, Robert or Theon, points out to the chauvinistic nature of our society.

All in all, G.R.R. Martin offers a wide range of female characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Focusing on the major female characters, he has created multifaceted and powerful women with different virtues and flaws, that excel in various ways. In any case, these female characters

are liable to be categorized in archetypes, which entails their potential simplification. As a matter of fact, the most obvious generalization of the female characters in the saga is the following: the strongest and most “bad-asses” are regarded as manly; whereas those presenting a more flawed, or not so compelling personality, are perceived as feminine. Frankel states:

Brienne and Arya, the masculinized characters, are delightfully strong, mouthy, assertive, and self-reliant. They will battle anyone who talks down to them or threatens their weaker sidekicks. But as such, they also become predictable, more cardboard than multifaceted. . . . Emotional women are weak; stoic women are powerful. . . . The feminized women are too “nice,” while only the masculinized characters can display masculinized anger. (42)

This fact is dangerous for several reasons: firstly, it provides a very simple categorization of the female characters in the saga—strong > masculine; weak > feminine—, pointing out their generalization and thus, their lack of complexity against the male characters; moreover, it conveys the idea that only men, and manly characteristics, can be connected to strength and power, whereas feminine characteristics are linked to the notion of weakness. The second idea is particularly dangerous, since it influences the reader directly, and thus our society as well. In this sense, the figure of Daenerys is crucial, because even though she is powerful and assertive, she keeps her feminine side all the time. Unlike Arya or Brienne, she does not despise being a woman; in fact, she embraces her femininity. She is the evidence that women do not have to reject their femininity or womanhood in order to be powerful. Women can be powerful by being women.

## 5. ARYA

Alongside Daenerys, Arya is the most important female character in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga. She is the only female character playing a role in every single volume of the saga, thus even surpassing Daenerys, whose point-of-view chapters appear in four of the five books. In total, there are thirty-three chapters from Arya's point of view, in contrast to Daenerys's thirty-one. However, Arya's power is not as political as Daenerys's, since she is no queen but just a lonely girl trying to survive and thrive in a world that has always outcast her.

### 5.1. ARYA'S PERSONALITY: ARYA VS SANSA

In my opinion, Arya's most compelling aspects are her rebelliousness and strength. She stands out because of these features, which are better appreciated when we compare her with Sansa. Thus, I will explore the relationship between Arya and Sansa in *A Game of Thrones* in order to analyze Arya's identity from a comparative approach. From a narrative-analytical point of view, Sansa can be considered a foil for Arya. Thus, Sansa's characteristics enhance Arya's own traits by opposition. Therefore, the fact that Sansa is depicted as the perfect lady, sweet and submissive, only intensifies Arya's rebellious character.

Arya is the daughter of Eddard Stark, Lord of Winterfell, and therefore she is regarded as a highborn lady. As a lady, Arya is expected to behave sweetly, mildly and even submissively—as it corresponds to a proper high-class woman according to Westerosi society—as well as to fulfill certain tasks and duties typical of her social status, such as needlework, dancing, and singing. However, Arya despises all of this. She is certainly neither interested in nor good at these kind of ladylike activities and behaviors, which causes people to regard her as an outrageous girl. Thus, the medieval and patriarchal society of the Seven Kingdoms rejects Arya for not fitting in the

“lady model,” making the girl terribly unhappy. Moreover, she has to endure being constantly compared to Sansa, who according to Tasker and Steenberg “provides the point of contrast—beautiful, naïve, and for whom the marriage contract between herself and Joffrey is the highest honor and ambition” (139). Thus Sansa is depicted as Arya’s opposite: a beautiful girl and a proper lady. She loves dancing, singing, needlework, and in short, everything that Arya hates. Since Sansa is and behaves like a lady, people admire her and set her as a model for lady values, causing Arya to feel displaced: “Sansa had everything. Sansa was two years older; maybe by the time Arya had been born, there had been nothing left. Often it felt that way. Sansa could sew and dance and sing. She wrote poetry. She knew how to dress. She played the high harp and the bells. Worse, she was beautiful” (*GT* 70)

The quote above shows that, whereas Sansa excels in ladylike activities, Arya excels in activities considered to be masculine. Actually, Arya feels more connected to her brothers than to her sister, since she shares interests and passions with them but not with Sansa. Arya loves to ride, to explore, to fight. Generally, she loves all the things that boys typically do, but since she is a highborn girl, she is not allowed to practice the said manly hobbies. Moreover, as Frankel notes, “[s]he can outshoot Bran, but she’s chided for her untidiness . . . . When she practices swordplay with Mycah the butcher’s boy, trying out the sword Jon gave her out of love, she is punished” (48). Thus, it is not simply that she is not permitted to practice “masculine” activities; she is severely chastised when she does not behave like a proper lady.

#### 5.1.1. SOCIAL STATUS

Despite the fact that Arya and Sansa have been raised under the same circumstances and rules, both sisters could not be any more different:

Sansa knew all about the sorts of people Arya liked to talk to: squires and grooms and serving girls, old men and naked children, rough-spoken freeriders of uncertain birth. Arya would make friends with anybody. This Mycah was the worst; a butcher's boy, thirteen and wild, he slept in the meat wagon and smelled of the slaughtering block. Just the sight of him was enough to make Sansa feel sick, but Arya seemed to prefer his company to hers. (*GT* 142)

The previous passage proves two points: firstly, how important social status and rules are for Sansa; and secondly, how irrelevant the very same aspects are for Arya. In fact, in spite of having been raised together, Sansa and Arya have two different sets of values. On the one hand, Sansa only connects and deals with highborn people, feeling superior to those of humbler birth. She even “rejects” her half-brother Jon Snow because he is a bastard, therefore being socially marked as an inferior individual: “Sansa sighed as she stitched. ‘Poor Jon,’ she said. ‘He gets jealous because he’s a bastard.’ ‘He’s our brother,’ Arya said, much too loudly” (*GT* 69). On the other hand, Arya, neglecting the established social rules by treating everyone equally despite their social status, enjoys the company of lowborn people and loves Jon Snow. Thus, Sansa always follows what is established, doing what is expected of her, always obedient and mild; but Arya is wild. She breaks with the social scheme by befriending everyone, and she breaks gender roles by refusing to do lady-like activities and doing more “boyish” ones.

Sansa, in opposition to Arya's wildness, pretends to live in an epic song by idealizing everything in her life. She idealizes and idolizes Prince Joffrey to such an extent that she is not able to see how mean and cruel he really is; or perhaps she does see it, but she pretends not to, so she can live her perfect song. On the contrary, Arya is very down-to-earth, and she is aware that

life is no epic song, being in a sense much more mature than Sansa, who blinded by the regal position of Joffrey and his handsome appearance—showing again how shallow she is—proclaims her love for him. But Arya, who is not easily persuaded or deceived and pays no heed to class status, sees Joffrey’s true nature. Arya simply does whatever she wants, which is of course, rather outrageous for everyone else, especially for Sansa, who is always obeying orders.

Arya, as Frankel states, further shows how little she cares about social status when, “transgressing against her gender and class rules, [she] stands up to Prince Joffrey, the spoiled heir to the patriarchy” (48). In fact, she does not only “stand up to Prince Joffrey” but she fights and beats him at the riverbanks of the Trident. Here, when he attacks Mycah just to humiliate and unjustly punish him, Joffrey begins to show his true and cruel self. Arya, far from keeping away, fights Joffrey in order to help her friend. Thus, Arya prioritizes her friend’s wellness, not minding that she is beating the Prince because Joffrey’s status is not relevant for her, whereas his abusive behavior is. At this point of the story, Arya’s values—humbleness, fairness, justice—are dramatically contrasted with Sansa’s actions. The fight causes a big commotion, and the King demands explanations. Joffrey lies and says that the butcher’s boy attacked him, and Sansa, wanting to please her prince at all costs, supports his lie. Here, Sansa’s absurdity reaches the highest point. Because of her lie, Mycah is slaughtered by the Hound, and her wolf Lady is killed by the King’s “Justice.” Sansa’s eagerness for the love of Joffrey ends up in fatality. Moreover, although Joffrey proved to be mean and cruel, Sansa keeps defending him. In the meantime, Arya, completely devastated by Mycah’s death, realizes that life is terribly unfair. She begins to hate Joffrey and the Queen because she finds them guilty of her friend’s murder, but Arya also blames and hates herself for the fatality: “(s)he thought of Mycah again and her eyes filled with

tears. Her fault, her fault, her fault. If she had never asked him to play at swords with her . . .” (*GT* 219) Once again, this shows how Sansa cares only about haughty matters and important people, whereas Arya cares about everyone.

After this terrible event, Arya truly comes to understand how corrupt society is. Joffrey has cowardly lied in order to get his way. Even though most in his court know—or guess—that he has indeed lied, no consequence or responsibility came back on him, since he is the Prince and nobody has neither the courage nor the wish of confronting him. Arya finds this repulsive, as she used to believe in Justice and its equity over every individual. She realizes that not even her father and other knights—who are supposed to protect the weakest—will lift a finger in order to save Mycah and Lady:

They’d let the queen kill Lady, that was horrible enough, but then the Hound found Mycah. Jeyne Poole had told Arya that he’d cut him up in so many pieces that they’d given him back to the butcher in a bag, and at first the poor man had thought it was a pig they’d slaughtered. And no one had raised a voice or drawn a blade or anything, not Harwin who always talked so bold, or Alyn who was going to be a knight, or Jory who was captain of the guard. Not even her father. (*GT* 218)

### 5.1.2. LIFE AT COURT

When they arrive in King’s Landing, the situation gets even worse for Arya. Since the Red Keep is the dwelling of the royalty, it is full of flatterers and dishonest people who are always striving in order to please the heir of the Iron Throne, and Arya cannot bear such falseness. She

becomes terribly unhappy in the capital, spending most of her time isolated in her room or wandering around alone: “No one talked to Arya. She didn’t care. She liked it that way. She would have eaten her meals alone in her bedchamber if they let her” (*GT* 217). Arya is alone because she is different, because she will not turn a blind eye to injustice and because she breaks with what is socially established. This loneliness is partly her choice, since she does not feel identified with the people surrounding her, and partly a punishment from a society that will not accept the infringement of its own precepts. In fact, Arya’s misery is so great that she even considers the idea of running away, “she would go out the window and down the tower, run away from this horrible place . . . She could find Nymeria in the wild woods below the Trident, and together they’d return to Winterfell, or run to Jon on the Wall” (*GT* 220). She longs for everything that the royal family has taken away from her; this is, her home Winterfell, her family, and Nymeria.

However, whereas Arya is obviously miserable in King’s Landing, Sansa could not be any happier. King’s Landing, and notably the Red Keep, represent what she has always dreamed of—exotic and majestic buildings, the Court, Ladies and Knights, endless banquets and feasts, tournaments, etc. In short, a life colored in pink where everything is beautiful and perfect—, and for a while, the city fulfills Sansa’s expectations. Sansa believes that she is finally living her own epic song, or even better: “‘It is better than the songs,’ she whispered when they found the places that her father had promised her, among the high lords and ladies. Sansa was dressed beautifully that day, in a green gown that brought out the auburn of her hair, and she knew they were looking at her and smiling” (*GT* 293).

Back at Winterfell, Sansa was already used to being treated in a special manner, since she was the most distinguished Lady in the North after her mother. However, this situation changes at court, where there are many other ladies that are as noteworthy and as beautiful as Sansa. Thus, she gets exceptional delight when others praise her looks and beauty since it makes her feel distinct and superior, like a lady from a song whose beauty is praised by every knight in the realm. This feeling of superiority is enhanced by the fact that she is betrothed to Joffrey: she will be the future Queen, which is the final rise in the social ladder. For Sansa, to become the Queen is a dream come true, but unlike Daenerys, who wants to be Queen of Westeros in order to rule them, Sansa wants to be queen just because it entails richness, beauty and the highest position in the social scale. Furthermore, Sansa does not feel only socially superior but also morally, though these two aspects are interrelated in her case: “Jeyne covered her eyes whenever a man fell, like a frightened little girl, but Sansa was made of sterner stuff. A great lady knew how to behave at tournaments” (*GT* 295). Since she is “a great lady” (socially superior), she is “made of sterner stuff”; and since she is “made of sterner stuff” (morally superior), she is “a great lady.” She believes herself to be incredibly mature, but she is definitely not. She lives a fantasy in which everything and everyone is beautiful and fair, and whenever something or someone gets out of that bubble, she gets frightened, because she is not able to accept that awful things may exist:

“You are shaking, girl,” he said, his voice rasping. “Do I frighten you so much?” He did, and had since she had first laid eyes on the ruin that fire had made of his face, though it seemed to her now that he was not half so terrifying as the other. . . . The king could command Father to let her stay in King’s Landing and

marry Prince Joffrey, Sansa knew he could, but the king had always frightened her. He was loud and rough-voiced and drunk as often as not. (*GT* 145)

She is scared when she sees that some knights (the Hound and Ser Ilyn) and the very King are not as they are depicted in the epic songs she so much loves. However, she is frightened because they are not beautiful and fair, not because they don't fulfill the duties of the knighthood. Thus, Sansa's "flawed judgment," as Frankel calls it, "becomes clear: Ser Ilyn and the Hound are monstrous to her because of their scarred faces" (106). Sansa is again, proving her immaturity, which is even more accentuated by the fact that she believes she is mature. In fact, Arya is the more mature of the two. Although she also undergoes a process of disillusionment about the knights, it has nothing to do with their physical appearance but rather with their values. In fact, one of the reasons why Arya cannot stand being in King's Landing is because of this disillusion with the high nobility, since she is now aware of its corruption. She only finds solace in her sword lessons with Syrio Forell. With her sword lessons, Arya finally comes to love "needlework," although this kind is certainly not the feminine activity she was forced to endure back in Winterfell. She proves how capable she is of doing things when she is interested in them. As a matter of fact, Arya gets immersed in her training to such an extent that it is all she does. The training with Syrio is crucial for Arya, since it will help her survive, and not just by using a sword. Moreover, Syrio becomes a kind of a friend for Arya. However, it might seem a bit odd that after all the punishments for not behaving like a lady, she is all of a sudden allowed to learn how to use a sword—and by extension to fight—, a rather masculine activity. This is because, as Tasker and Steenberg note "[h]er tomboy persona is a function of youth, tolerated by an indulgent father who, nonetheless, envisages a future for her of more conventional high-born

femininity” (139). In other words, Lord Stark permits Arya to take sword lessons in order to make her a bit happier in King’s Landing, not because he is encouraging her masculine side.

Opposed to Arya’s realization and capability to see reality, stand Sansa’s innocence and naivety. She believes that Joffrey and the Queen are the kindest and most moral beings in the Seven Kingdoms just because they are beautiful and graceful. Since she bases her judgment on appearance—beautiful > good; ugly > bad—, she becomes extremely manipulable. This manipulation reaches its highest point when Sansa obliviously “betrays” her father. When Lord Eddard finds out that Cersei’s children are not the King’s but Jaime’s, he plans to send his daughters back to Winterfell in order to ensure their safety. However, Sansa refuses to go back, claiming that she loves Joffrey: “I love him, Father, I truly truly do, I love him as much as Queen Naerys loved Prince Aemon the Dragonknight, as much as Jonquil loved Ser Florian. I want to be his queen and have his babies” (*GT* 478). Nevertheless, this love is nothing but an illusion, born of her desire to live a song like “Jonquil and Florian.” She idealizes Joffrey, turning him into a stereotyped prince from an epic song, which is why she “loves” him. However, Lord Eddard dismisses the matter and concludes that both girls are to sail home as soon as possible. Sansa, seeing that her song is coming to an end, turns to Cersei in a desperate attempt to stay in King’s Landing. She tells the Queen about her father’s plans, not realizing that she is putting her father and her household in danger. Sansa’s innocence ultimately leads to the arrest and death of her father and consequently, the downfall of House Stark.

Furthermore, the contrast between both sisters finds expression in the formal differences that can be appreciated in the way that their PoV chapters are narrated. For instance, there is a remarkable difference in the vocabulary used to represent their actions and words. In Arya’s PoV

chapters, verbs such as “protested,” “objected,” “flared” and adverbs such as “fiercely” are plentiful, reflecting Arya’s rebellious character. On the contrary, in Sansa’s PoV chapters, there are many verbs such as “hesitated,” “pleaded” and adverbs such as “uncertainly,” “meekly,” showing Sansa’s mild character.

## 5.2. PROBLEMATIC POINT OF ARYA’S INDIVIDUALITY: GENDER

Arya, as a highborn lady is socially expected to be sweet, mild, and subordinate to men. Furthermore, she is supposed to perform feminine activities, such as needlework, and dancing; but Arya despises every aspect of this “perfect lady” standard. Instead, she loves riding and sword fighting. However, she is not allowed to perform these hobbies because they are seen as “manly” activities. This prohibition causes Arya to feel angry and unhappy about being a girl since due to her sex she cannot live as she desires. Nevertheless, Arya breaks the social rules and practice these “manly” activities anyway, thus showing her strength and independence. However, breaking the social rules brings negative consequences: people treat her as an odd person, and eventually, they cast her out. Surely, all this makes Arya feel terribly unhappy because she must either fit in, but betray her true self; or stay loyal to herself and be an outcast. The decision is difficult, but Arya chooses to be faithful to herself at all cost, showing once again how independent and strong she is.

In fact, in the patriarchal society of Westeros, life is much easier for men than for women—men have the power and control over everything and everyone. Arya, aware of this, becomes more miserable in her role as a girl because as such, she is not free to do whatever she desires. However, Arya has a chance of breaking free from gender roles when she joins Yoren and his recruits from the Night’s Watch, because with them she must pretend to be a boy. Certainly, she

is to some extent forced to acquire a male identity—otherwise, it would be easier for her enemies to catch her. Nevertheless, as Caroline Spector notes, “her willingness to throw off her gender demonstrates her understanding of the workings of power in her world. She can do things as a boy that would be denied her as a girl” (Spector 177). Indeed, Arya feels quite comfortable pretending to be a boy since finally, she can behave as she wants without anyone reproaching that her behavior is not proper of a lady. However, being a boy is also hard for Arya, because she does not feel like a boy, in the sense that she is not transgender. Thus, there is a conflict between her persona—a girl that cannot be free and safe in the world she lives—, and the boy—the alter ego who provides her power and strength.

### 5.3. ARYA’S RELEVANCE

Arya is by all means one of the most powerful characters in the saga. From her rebelliousness against social precepts in *A Game Of Thrones* to her determination and implacability in *A Dance With Dragons*, Arya never ceases to show her strength. Being such a strong and independent character, she has become one of the most beloved characters in the saga, although her relevance is more intense regarding female readers.

This is due to Arya being able to survive and thrive in a patriarchal society that has always outcast her for being different, thus conveying to the female readers that they can survive and thrive in 21st-century patriarchal society too. However, due to her hatred towards the feminine and her own femininity, Arya cannot be considered a feminist icon.

Searching the internet for information on Arya and her relationship with feminism, I came across several articles—such as “11 Ways 'Game Of Thrones' Arya Stark Is A Feminist Hero,” and “Arya Stark Is Definitely A Feminist”—claiming that Arya is a feminist role model. Even

though the belief that Arya embodies the feminist principles seems to be rather popular among the followers of the books and the TV show, I sharply disagree with this opinion. By reading the articles, I got the feeling that people consider her a feminist icon simply because she is “strong” and “rebellious.” While this is indeed true, I do not think that her strength and rebelliousness justify her categorization as a feminist role model. In my opinion, her ability to be considered a feminist hero is annulled by her hatred towards femininity, which is, in fact, a rather misogynistic attitude. Blogger Jordan Lauf, in the article “‘Game Of Thrones' Season 7 Is Feminist, But Only For One Kind Of Woman” reflects about this issue:

So when we cheer every time Khaleesi burns some more guys with her dragons or Arya checks a name off her list, we're really celebrating a woman just as masculine as her enemies . . . But the reason these women are cool is because they are like men, because they aren't “like most girls.” But, having feminine traits should be celebrated, too. . . To succeed in Westeros, it appears that these women have to adapt to a society that values strength and necessary brutality in their leaders. But this adaptation forces them to shed much of their femininity in the process. I'm happy to see a show insist that “masculine” traits aren't for men only, but Game of Thrones has left no room to celebrate femininity. So when we call the GoT women “badass,” we should pause to think about what it is exactly that we're celebrating.

Feminism is an inclusive, hate-free movement that seeks utter gender equality. Then why should Arya be considered a feminist role model when she despises women and her own

condition as one? Yes, she is strong, indomitable, and she gives a feeling of empowerment since she can do whatever she wants and thrives despite her sex; but still, feminism is more than that.

Nevertheless, what is important to bear in mind about Arya is that she is a character that encourages readers to be brave and fight for what they long for, even if they must break the rules. Because rules, particularly the patriarchal ones, should be broken.

Lastly, considering that strong female characters are scarce in epic fantasy, the work that G.R.R. Martin has done with Arya is quite remarkable. He has created an incredibly round and complex character that connects very well with the readers because, like any human, she has many virtues and many flaws, and she still thrives.

## 6. DAENERYS

Daenerys is by all means one of the major characters in the saga. From a formal point of view, Dany is one of the characters with more chapters all throughout the five books—out of the more than three hundred chapters and forty one PoV characters conforming the whole saga, Daenerys leads the role in thirty one—, which implies that her role in the story is crucial. However, her relevance can be inferred not only from the number of chapters she plays the lead in but also because of the treatment G.R.R. Martin gives to her and because of the story itself.

### 6.1. DAENERYS'S EMPOWERMENT

Daenerys's evolution from an innocent and abused child in *A Game of Thrones*, to a strong and powerful Queen in *A Dance with Dragons* shows the great complexity and empowerment of her character. Since female characters in fantasy fiction have been usually depicted as archetypal and flat individuals, Daenerys's radical development is extremely important.

### 6.1.1. DEPENDENCE AND FEAR

At the beginning of the story, Daenerys Targaryen is a thirteen-year-old child. As a child, she is extremely liable to the influence of other people. She is remarkably vulnerable to men's power since she has never had a female figure to guide her, support her or take care of her. Moreover, since she has spent her whole life surrounded by men, living under their commands and manipulations, she is dependent on them. In fact, this dependence is so extreme that despite being mentally and physically abused by her brother, she does not confront him and even defends his abusive behavior towards her. This submissive attitude is a result of the fear she feels for Viserys. She has no control over her life. All she has ever done is follow the lead of men, and in particular, her brother's.

Thus, the lack of power and control over her own existence is so extreme that she ends up being sold by her brother to a horse lord. Rikke Schubart, in the essay "Women With Dragons: Daenerys, Pride, and Postfeminist Possibilities," notes that "she is material for marriage and, . . . Prince Viserys, trades her to thirty-year old warrior Khal Drogo in return for an army. . . . From the outset Daenerys is a humiliated victim" (86-87). Indeed, at this point of the story Daenerys has no agency whatsoever; she is a passive character, a "material" to be used and traded with by men for their own benefit. Daenerys does not desire to marry a stranger, but whatever she feels or wants is of no interest to those surrounding her. Therefore, even though Daenerys begs her brother to stop the wedding, he ignores her wishes and gets extremely brutal and cruel with her, stating that:

"We go home with an army, sweet sister. With Khal Drogo's army, that is how we go home. And if you must wed him and bed him for that, you will." He smiled at

her. “I’d let his whole khalasar fuck you if need be, sweet sister, all forty thousand men, and their horses too if that was what it took to get my army.” (*GT* 38)

At this point of the story, she is not afraid of just her brother but also of her husband to be. She is afraid because she does not know this man, who is from a completely different culture and many years older than her. She is also terrified of his size and his cruel and barbaric looks. During their wedding day, in view of the first night together, “the terror grew in Dany, until it was all she could do not to scream” (*GT* 103). She is terrified and with good reason: she will be forced to have intercourse with a barbaric stranger much older than her. However, some critics, as Mariah Larsson in “Adapting Sex: Cultural Conceptions of Sexuality in Words and Images”, have argued that Daenerys is in fact not forced to have sexual intercourse with Khal Drogo on their wedding night. She states that “[t]he description of Khal Drogo’s tender seduction of Daenerys covers more than two pages, and although she is frightened and reluctant in the beginning, it is quite clear towards the end that she is more than willing to have intercourse with him” (22). While it is true that, eventually, Daenerys does lead Khal Drogo into having intercourse, I believe that this statement is considerably problematic. The book reads: “He cupped her face in his huge hands and she looked into his eyes. ‘No?’ he said, and she knew it was a question. She took his hand and moved it down to the wetness between her thighs. ‘Yes,’ she whispered as she put his finger inside her”. (*GT* 108). The fact that she guides her new and imposed husband does not mean she was “more than willing” to have sex with him. It strikes me as odd that an innocent thirteen-year-old girl, frightened and helpless, would want to have sex with a strange man who is nearly twice her age. On the contrary, considering her situation of (patriarchal) oppression, it seems as if she had resigned herself to a fate she could not fight—their marriage and all its consequences—, and

that she wanted to be done with it as soon as possible. In fact, she did not have much of a choice. Ironically, Larsson, by pointing out the fact that “the marriage starts out as an unequal relationship, with Daenerys as the possession of Khal Drogo” (23-24) suggests the reality of non-consensual intercourse, since if it had been indeed consented, it would have been an equal relationship.

#### 6.1.2. LIFE WITH THE DOTHRAKI

However, despite its more than questionable beginning, her marriage with Drogo is a turning point in Daenerys’ life. With the Dothraki, Daenerys achieves a position of power that she had never had before. She is the Khaleesi—“queen”—of these people, who serve and respect her. Furthermore, the power emanating from her union to Khal Drogo enables her to loosen the bonds with which Viserys was choking her. This is extremely important because, as Frankel suggests “Viserys represents the patriarchy” (150). Therefore, by accepting her power and its consequent sense of pride, Daenerys is not simply freeing herself from her brother, she is starting to liberate herself from patriarchy.

With the help and support of Ser Jorah, her handmaids, her blood riders and her husband she grows apart from Viserys. She enjoys this rift between them because this way she gets to be more independent and gains control over herself. Now that she is the Khaleesi, she gains power over her brother and herself. This is how she starts to gain confidence and to stand up for herself. In actuality, as Larsson notes, the fact that Daenerys achieves power and independence thanks to Viserys—since he was the one who forced her to marry Khal Drogo—is rather paradoxical,

Viserys uses his sister as a way to extract support for his plan to gain the Iron Throne from the Dothraki. The irony of this action is that although the prospect of

marrying the massive, fierce Khal Drogo frightens the thirteen-year-old Daenerys, the marriage itself leads to a reversal of the power relations between brother and sister. By becoming Khaleesi, Daenerys frees herself from her brother's coercive influence.(24)

Furthermore, before moving in with the Dothraki and becoming their Khaleesi, Dany experienced a sort of existential crisis. Even though she has known for her whole life that she is a Targaryen princess, she has never had the feeling of being regal. After all, she has always been on the run, and she has never known her family, nor the land she was born in because of Robert Baratheon and his rebellion. However, now she is a Khaleesi, recognized by the Dothraki people and by all those new people she encounters from that moment onwards. It is important to highlight that with this title comes power and realization, and once Daenerys is aware of who she is, she gets strength from it: when Ser Jorah states “You are learning to talk like a queen, Daenerys” her answer is clear enough: ““Not a queen,”” said Dany. ‘A khaleesi’” (*GT* 227). Khaleesi, in fact, is just a consort function. Khaleesis don't rule nor take part in political life. Only when the Khal dies and they become Dosh Khaleen—spiritual leaders— do they get to play an active role. However, Dany does have certain influence over the political and social affairs within the community. One clear example is when after a battle between the Dothraki and the Lhazareen people, she opposes to the rape of several Lhazareen women and girls. For the Dothraki men, to rape women from tribes or villages they have conquered is a kind of tradition, and even a “right”; but Daenerys gets away with her resolution by taking these women under her care—although as slaves. This proves that, besides having a good heart, she has never utterly adopted the Dothraki customs; or rather, that she never abandoned hers. However, she states that

she is a khaleesi and not a queen. Indeed, she is not a queen (yet)—term connected to the Seven Kingdoms—, and not even a suitor to the Iron Throne, since Viserys—the rightful heir—is still alive. With no claim to the throne, and no expectations, Daenerys is happy with her new Dothraki identity.

Of course, adopting this new culture is not easy for Daenerys, especially at the beginning, as the Dothraki lifestyle is extremely different to that of the societies from Westeros and the Free Cities. In fact, the former consider the nomadic and warlike Dothraki to be little more than “savages” because of their customs. The Dothraki life, organized on a strict patriarchal hierarchy, revolves around the figure of the horse— sacred animal to them—, trade, raiding, and slavery. In order to be accepted, Daenerys must espouse the Dothraki traditions, and she does, although not utterly. The more time she spends learning with the Dothraki, the more she stands against her brother’s abuses. Now that she is the Khaleesi, she is not going to allow him to run over her: “His hand went under her vest, his fingers digging painfully into her breast. ‘Do you hear me?’ Dany shoved him away, hard. Viserys stared at her, his lilac eyes incredulous. She had never defied him. Never fought back” (*GT* 230-231).

As a matter of fact, Daenerys is not becoming more confident just in relation to Viserys, but in her whole life in general. If at the beginning she was just a little girl, now she is a young woman, and a Khaleesi, so she will not allow anyone to treat her as a child. Now she has a home, or something that resembles on. She embraces the Dothrakis traditions, gets to wear their clothes, to speak their language and to follow their customs:

“They are my people now,” Dany said. “You should not call them savages, brother.” The heart of a stallion would make her son strong and swift and fearless,

or so the Dothraki believed. I am the blood of the dragon, she told herself as she took the stallion's heart in both hands, lifted it to her mouth, and plunged her teeth into the tough, stringy flesh. (*GT 487*)

As seen in the previous fragment, Daenerys feels very much at home with the Dothraki: they are her family now, so she adopts their traditions, their language and their lifestyle. Thus, Daenerys leaves her status as the princess of Westeros in a second place. Nevertheless, this does not mean that she has forgotten or rejected her origins as "blood of the dragon"; it simply means that, at the moment, she is focused on being the female leader of the Dothraki.

The confidence Daenerys acquires from her identity as a Dothraki enhances and turns into courage when she gets pregnant. Since her baby becomes Daenerys' priority, she is resolute to keep her baby safe at all costs. Thus, even though Viserys keeps abusing her, Daenerys, not allowing anything nor anyone to hurt her and her baby, fights him back:

His fingers dug into her arm painfully and for an instant Dany felt like a child again, quailing in the face of his rage. She reached out with her other hand and grabbed the first thing she touched, the belt she'd hoped to give him, a heavy chain of ornate bronze medallions. She swung it with all her strength. (*GT 494*).

It is important to highlight the fact that this is the first time that Daenerys defends herself from Viserys since it is a statement of strength and power. With this, Daenerys is conveying to her brother that he cannot hurt her anymore and that if he does, he will pay for it. She is finally putting an end to a whole life of abuse, which eventually comes to an end when Viserys dies.

Viserys's death means that Daenerys is the rightful queen of the Seven Kingdoms. However, despite this new position of power, she keeps depending on men to a certain extent.

Even though she is the rightful heir to Westeros, she needs the help of her husband, since he is the only one who can provide an army for her. But Drogo refuses to conquer Westeros, so Daenerys turns to Ser Jorah so that he can help her convince her husband: “‘But he must ride west,’ Dany said, despairing. ‘Please, help me make him understand.’ If I were not the blood of the dragon, she thought wistfully, this could be my home. She was Khaleesi, . . . That should be enough for any woman . . . But not for the dragon” (*GT* 585). Indeed, she is no ordinary woman; she is a Targaryen, the blood of the dragon, so she simply cannot forsake what belongs to her by right. After living her whole life under the shadow of Viserys, after all the dangers she has had to endure, after living their entire lives with one sole purpose—to regain the kingdom—, she was not bound to turn away from her heritage. This is what she was made for, not Viserys. She is the dragon: “‘Princess . . .’ he began. ‘Why do you call me that?’ Dany challenged him. ‘My brother Viserys was your king, was he not?’ ‘He was, my lady.’ ‘Viserys is dead. I am his heir, the last blood of House Targaryen. Whatever was his is mine now’” (*GT* 799). These lines are considerably revealing. She actually challenges Ser Jorah—a man, and thus by extension the patriarchy—for underestimating her power and position. She is not a princess anymore, she is a Queen, and she demands Ser Jorah—and the patriarchy—to acknowledge her status. Thus, she shows her incredible resolution to pursue what is hers by right, not letting anyone step between her purposes and goals.

Just as Rikke Schubart points out “Daenerys desires the Iron Throne. First, Drogo refuses, but when an assassin sent by King Robert attempts to poison his wife, Drogo declares war . . . Daenerys is happy that he will do this for her” (89-90). However, war means death, slavery and rape. The price seems too high for Daenerys, who hesitates when she sees the real horror with

her own eyes. Schubart further writes: “then, she actually sees Drogo’s warriors raping women. . . ., she can’t help but respond to the girl’s ‘heartrending sound’, and claims the raped women as her slaves” (89-90). Thus, she stands against rape, but not against slavery, which might seem a bit odd—if she does fight rape why not slavery as well? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to point out to the connection between rape and gender, and slavery and social status/race. Daenerys, as a woman, is capable of identifying herself with the raped women—especially considering she went through something similar—, and therefore, she saves them. On the other hand, Daenerys, as a highborn lady—a queen and khaleesi—born in the Seven Kingdoms and raised in the Free Cities, has nothing in common with the lowborn people from the East. Thus, incapable of identifying herself in social/ethnic terms with the defeated, she accepts slavery. So she takes slaves, even though she does it reluctantly: “Slaves, Dany thought. Khal Drogo would drive them downriver to one of the towns on Slaver’s Bay. She wanted to cry, but she told herself that she must be strong. This is war, this is what it looks like, this is the price of the Iron Throne” (*GT* 667). Dany is in conflict: on the one hand, her good nature goes against slavery; on the other hand, she acknowledges the monetary benefits slavery will bring to her. In this case, her thirst for wealth and ambition for getting an army surpasses her goodwill.

Among the women she saves, and enslaves, it is important to highlight the “maegi” Mirri Maz Duur, as she plays a crucial role in Daenerys’ life: she murders Drogo and the baby Daenerys was expecting. This might shock the reader just as deeply as it shocked Daenerys. Quoting Schubart, “Daenerys doesn’t understand. Why would Mirri Maz murder Drogo and her unborn son when she had saved the woman?” (90). At first sight, the horrendous actions carried out by Mirri Maz seem illogical and unfounded; however, when we analyze the scene from the

“maegi’s” point of view, we get a hint of her reasons. To her, Drogo—and by extension Daenerys, his khaleesi—are responsible for the slaughter and enslavement of her people, the rape of her fellow women, and her own rape. Thus, as Schubart notes, “[f]rom a micro-perspective, Daenerys saved Mirri Maz, but from a macro-perspective, the former was the cause of her downfall” (90). This is a turning point in Daenerys’s life: “Daenerys learns to harden her ‘gentle heart’, and takes Mirri Maz into the fire” (Schubart, 90), which according to Machiavellian precepts, is an essential trait for a ruler.

When Daenerys loses Drogo and their son, she is left alone again. She loses her position as Khaleesi, and therefore she loses part of her power as well. Only a tiny part of her former Khalasar remains with her, among whom she counts Ser Jorah, her handmaids, and her three blood riders. As a Khal’s widow and according to the Dothraki tradition, she should have joined the crones of the Dosh Khaleen, but she refuses to live that life just because it is customary. Besides, she is not just a Khaleesi, she is the heir to the Iron Throne, and thus her true fate is to conquer Westeros, so she will do what it takes in order to achieve this. She is the blood of the dragon, and for the first time, she is fully aware of her identity. This self-awareness makes her feel unafraid and self-confident: “The fire is mine. I am Daenerys Stormborn, daughter of dragons, bride of dragons, mother of dragons, don’t you see? Don’t you SEE?” (*GT* 806).

### 6.1.3. MOTHER OF DRAGONS

As a matter of fact, Daenerys is far more than just the blood of the dragon. She is the dragon herself, one of three heads of the dragon that had been prophesied: “Ser Jorah Mormont found her amidst the ashes, surrounded by blackened logs and bits of glowing ember and the burnt bones of man and woman and stallion. She was naked, covered with soot, her clothes

turned to ash, her beautiful hair all crisped away . . . yet she was unhurt” (*GT* 806). The fact that Daenerys does not only not die burnt in the pyre but she is reborn with three dragons, endows her with an incredible power, since her subjects regard her and her dragon babies as a magical and even divine phenomena. Frankel notes:

She has become a worker of miracles, mother to the first dragons in centuries. When Dany sees her subjects kneel, she knows they’re hers as they were never Drogo’s—on by the power of life and fire, not that of conquering and rule. On the threshold of death, she calls herself Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen for the first time. She’s claiming her own birthright of dragons and the Targaryen legacy, not just her role as Drogo’s counterpart. (153)

However, her strength does not emanate just from magic and mystique. Now that she understands who she really is, she feels more powerful than she had ever felt. But Daenerys gains even further power through motherhood. This new state turns her into a fierce woman, capable of anything in order to protect her babies. Thus, Daenerys has evolved from a helpless girl to a protective mother. However, she is not just the mother of the dragons, but symbolically she is also the mother of her small Khalasar. She is still the Khaleesi of these people, who have supported and stuck with her, and therefore she must guide and protect them. And in order to do this, she needs to take control of the whole situation and act as a real queen and as Khaleesi. Without Drogo, she is the figure of maximum authority, so she becomes more powerful than ever. Moreover, it is interesting to highlight the fact that as the highest authority, she becomes independent on a whole new level. She is now a leader, and as one, she grows more cautious and strategic every time, since she does not want to risk the lives of her Khalasar: “When I leave this

place, I do not mean to strike out blind again. I will know where I am bound, and how best to get there” (CK 182). In fact, thanks to this strategy she is able to save her Khalasar from dying in the desert.

Nevertheless, this new position of absolute power is not easy for Daenerys. Even though she acts more like a queen every passing day, she still has doubts about her power and capacities. She still thinks that if she had Drogo, everything would be easier and that he would have conquered Westeros for her, so in this sense, she still depends on men: “The thought of home disquieted her. If her sun-and-stars had lived, he would have led his khalasar across the poison water and swept away her enemies, but his strength had left the world” (CK 388). As a matter of fact, Daenerys is surrounded by men, except for her handmaids Irri and Jhiqui, who play no role when it comes to “authority” or political matters. It is men that Daenerys relies on in order to conquer Westeros.

#### 6.1.4. LEADER

Nevertheless, Daenerys is more intelligent and capable than people—particularly men—think she is. Indeed, as Frankel points out, “She has learned trickery as she trades her dragon to the slavers of Astapor, and she’s also learned queenship, staring down her counselors and outwitting them as well. Her dragons are gaining size and strength, emphasizing her growing power in the world” (155). Thus, she proves her skills and capabilities when she trades with the Astapori slaver master. She pretends to not understand the language he speaks while acting the part of a naive little girl with little knowledge on trading, in order to get a benefit from it. Thanks to her strategy of playing the fool, she gets the eight thousand Unsullied, this is the army, she wanted all along. Even though she still depends on men to a certain extent—she has Ser Jorah

and other men to advise and protect her—, Daenerys makes it clear she is completely capable of ruling. Moreover, she will not allow anyone to question her authority: “Dany turned on the old man. ‘Whitebeard,’ she said, ‘I want your counsel, and you should never fear to speak your mind with me . . . . When we are alone. But never question me in front of strangers. Is that understood?’” (*SoS* 372). She is tired of people treating her as if she were a small girl who knows nothing about the world, but once again she shows her prowess on political matters. Moreover, she is not putting up with men who question her just because she is a woman: “‘Woman?’ She chuckled. ‘Is that meant to insult me? I would return the slap, if I took you for a man.’ Dany met his stare. ‘I am Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, the Unburnt, Mother of Dragons, khaleesi to Drogo’s riders, and queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros’” (*SoS* 576). In a world ruled by men, Daenerys struggles for power. Aware of how incredibly hard it is for a woman to rule on her own, Daenerys is not letting men underestimate her, and much less threaten her power—definitely not after all the sacrifices she has had to make in order to stand where she stands. This strong and resolute attitude against the patriarchal society make her a feminist icon for the readers of the novel—the message is clear: women can be equal to men.

All throughout the third book, Daenerys develops and improves her political-strategic skills. This is so much so that several critics have connected her figure to that of Machiavelli's “The Prince”. For instance, Elizabeth Beaton notes in “Female Machiavellians in Westeros” that

The term “prince”, as it is used in Machiavelli’s treatise, also applies to Daenerys, a formidable female Machiavellian who gains considerable power in *A Song of Ice and Fire* . Machiavelli wrote of rulers with absolute authority in *The Prince* , and Daenerys’s status changes from chattel to head of a nomadic group to

a queen with her own army. As she becomes a conqueror of cities, her situation comes to reflect that of Machiavelli's "new prince", who takes charge of a foreign principality and becomes its leader. (153-155)

She gains political agency mainly by playing the role of an innocent girl, as she repeats many times that "It is true that I am only a young girl, and do not know the ways of war" (*SoS* 577). However, behind that facade of innocence and ignorance, Daenerys hides an incredibly able and cunning self. She becomes quite deft in war, and even though she is not a warrior queen since she does not take part in battles personally, she wishes she could: "The waiting is the hardest part. To sit in her tent with idle hands while her battle was being fought without her made Dany feel half a child again." (*SoS* 585)

#### 6.1.5. POWER STRUGGLES

Another important point in the third, and especially the fifth books, is how Daenerys becomes a Queen with capital letters. After conquering the cities in the Slavers' Bay, she has ended up ruling over thousands of people, and once she establishes herself in Meereen, her object is to rule this city. However, the more people she has to rule, the more complicated it gets, especially when she is not the rightful ruler of those people. Thus, she realizes that she has a lot of work to do and that ruling is a hard responsibility:

Irri fetched her crown, wrought in the shape of the three-headed dragon of her House. Its coils were gold, its wings silver, its three heads ivory, onyx, and jade. Dany's neck and shoulders would be stiff and sore from the weight of it before the day was done. A crown should not sit easy on the head. (*DwD* 36).

In *A Dance With Dragons*, the political situation gets far more turbulent. After conquering Astapor and freeing the slaves in Yunkai, Daenerys heads to Meereen in order to end what she had started: the abolition of slavery in Slaver's Bay. Out of the three cities, Meereen is the one representing the biggest threat and challenge to Daenerys. Since the city has been warned already about Daenerys' plans, seeing what had happened in Astapor and Yunkai, they are prepared for her. They welcome Daenerys by signaling her way with the corpses of slave children, as a kind of warning to make her weaken and turn around. However, Dany is not put off by this threat. On the contrary, she becomes even angrier and outraged due to the extreme cruelty of the Meereenese masters. Once she has conquered the city, she decides to stay there in order to terminate slavery once and for all, and to appease the political situation in Slaver's Bay.

Despite Dany's success in capturing Meereen, she will face countless issues when it comes to ruling the city. Since she has overthrown and killed hundreds of the Masters, the remaining powerful families hate her for that and will try to take her down. Nevertheless, the Meereenese do not reject and oppose Daenerys just because she has murdered their leaders but also because she is an intruder, an alien, who came to the city to wreak havoc. For the Meereenese, Daenerys is little more than a savage from a distant land who thinks she has some sort of right to meddle in their way of life. They despise her because by ending slavery, the primary source of income in Slaver's Bay, she makes the political and socio economic system collapse. The situation is so extreme and hostile, that it results in war. Being aware that she is not welcomed there, Dany tries to handle the situation as peacefully as possible by attempting to force the slaver families to accept her rule without shedding too much blood.

In order to do this, Daenerys follows the advice of some Meereenese people, who suggest that she should adopt some of their traditions, such as clothing:

“The Mother of Dragons must don the tokar or be forever hated,” warned the Green Grace, Galazza Galare. “In the wools of Westeros or a gown of Myrish lace, Your Radiance shall forever remain a stranger amongst us, a grotesque outlander, a barbarian conqueror. Meereen’s queen must be a lady of Old Ghis.” (*DwD* 35).

However, Dany fails in her attempt to please the powerful families of Meereen who, seeking revenge, will form the criminal gang called Sons of the Harpy. At first, Daenerys does not feel particularly threatened by the actions of this group—a few murders and some turmoil—, but when they start to become more and more radical, slaughtering people every night, Daenerys feels the urge to strike back. Initially, she considers killing every remaining powerful man, and every person presumably involved with the Sons of the Harpy. However, she acknowledges that this consideration will not save the city, since the leading cause of the turmoil is the economic situation, and exterminating this criminal gang will not help whatsoever: “she was the blood of the dragon. She could kill the Sons of the Harpy, and the sons of the sons, and the sons of the sons of the sons. But a dragon could not feed a hungry child nor help a dying woman’s pain” (*DwD* 151). Meereen, once a wealthy city thanks to slavery, is now living in the most abject poverty. The newly freed people starve and die every day in the streets, while the most powerful families enjoy their wealth inside their dwellings. This situation causes in Daenerys a great sorrow since she realizes that having liberated the slaves has caused more damage and death than happiness and welfare: “What have I unleashed upon the world? A queen I am, but my

throne is made of burned bones, and it rests on quicksand” (*DwD* 160). In this context, Daenerys finds it more and more difficult to rule Meereen. In desperation, given the rebellions, death, and war within the walls of Meereen, Daenerys endeavors to find a way to end this situation. Firstly, she attempts several military-offensive strategies, but they all fail. Since the situation is so critical, Daenerys sees no other way out than to marry a Meereenese: “My people are bleeding. Dying. A queen belongs not to herself, but to the realm. Marriage or carnage, those are my choices. A wedding or a war” (*DwD* 299).

Marrying a Meereenese belonging to a wealthy slaver family is a great sacrifice for Dany, but she is willing to do it, provided the violence ends. The fact that she needs to turn to a man in order to help her rule the city shows the patriarchal nature of society. In this sense, Daenerys keeps depending on men, since she needs a king in order to achieve peace. However, this dependence does not spring from a personal necessity but from the statements of a male chauvinist society: if she does not marry, she will pay for it. However, it is important to highlight that, even though Dany accepts to marry a Meereenese, she is not renouncing her power and authority: “If my husband wishes me to wash his feet, he must first wash mine. I will tell him so this evening. She wondered how her betrothed would take that” (*DwD* 479). On the contrary, she makes clear that she still has control and that she will not yield to a man. By this I mean that in marital relations - and in any kind of relations, in fact - men were those in control. Daenerys is highly aware of this fact, and she does not want to lose the power she fought so hard to gain. Of course, she needs to marry a Meereenese to bring peace to the city; but if she were a man, her power would not be on the tightrope. If she were a man, she would look for alliances with Meereen as well, but her authority in and outside the marriage would never be questioned.

## 6.2. DAENERYS'S RELEVANCE

Valery Frankel notes on the figure of Daenerys that

[she] cycles through many archetypes. She is the child bride and helpless princess, then warrior woman and conqueror queen. Sometimes she dresses in sky blue silk with gold filigree armor, sometimes she wears Dothraki leathers. She is a sensual lover in the first and fifth books (and tries a lesbian relationship on rare occasions). She's a loving wife as she struggles for a night to return Drogo to life. She is a mother to her dragons and to the people under her protection. And she's a medium when she has visions of future and past in the House of the Undying and in her dreams. As such, she's a fully rounded character, rather than a stereotype on curvaceous legs. (157-158)

On her part, Caroline Spector states that “Daenerys’s journey from child bride to first female ruler of a khalasar is one of the more dramatic examples in the Ice and Fire series of a woman taking power. However, hers is not a journey without problems—both for the character and for readers” (183). These excerpts, alongside the brief explanation on Daenerys’ evolution that I provided before, clearly show the reasons why Daenerys Targaryen is such an important character in the saga. Firstly, her empowerment from submissive child to powerful woman is exciting, stimulating, and encouraging for female readers, since we are not used to seeing a female character undergoing such a process of empowerment, especially not in fantasy fiction. She is an example of what women have been requesting for so long from literature—a non-archetypal, non-stereotypical female character. In other words, women want to be represented in literature with the same intensity, variety, and fidelity as men are. We women are complex

individuals, just like men, but this complexity has rarely been depicted in fantasy fiction. However, Daenerys, with her outstanding complexity, elevates the figure of the fantasy female character to make it equal with the fantasy male character. Moreover, her multifaceted nature makes her incredibly realistic, which enables women to identify with her. Besides, her fight against patriarchal precepts and inequality, and her victory against them, make her a rather feminist icon.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The role of women and the portrayal of female characters in North American Literature have undergone an incredible evolution ever since its beginning back in the 17th century. From a limited and domestic role, women have fought for their right to have a more prominent representation in American Literature. Unfortunately, in the 21st century women are still not equal to men, so this fight continues nowadays, with women striving to be as prominent authors, editors and characters as the male ones. In the middle of a new feminist wave, people demand equality in every sphere of their lives, including literature. Within the more specific context of epic fantasy, it is relatively easy to find feminist female authors, but not so easy to find male authors that make serious efforts to present their female characters in a complex and realistic way. In this context, it is important to highlight the work of G. R. R. Martin in the saga *A Song Of Ice And Fire*.

Although male characters in this saga are still predominant over female characters, and the representation of many female characters is still quite flawed and archetypical, Martin's work also depicts a series of complex, round female characters that stand out for both their qualities -

such as strength, resilience, ambition, and loyalty - and their flaws. In fact, his most celebrated female characters, Arya and Daenerys, do not stand out simply because of their assertiveness and power but due to their conflictive personalities and mistakes. They represent the complex nature of any human being, man or woman, quite faithfully. Thus, Martin escapes from the traditional gender-biased roles so frequent in epic fantasy, in order to provide the reader with a better representation of women: thus by endowing female characters such as Arya and Daenerys with the control of the story, G.R.R. Martin breaks the traditional schemes of fantastic stories, in which the male hero has always prevailed over the female characters, so as to give more power to women. And by giving more power to his female characters, Martin is adapting the fantasy genre to a society demanding equal treatment to women and men. With such strong and assertive female characters that fight the patriarchy and the social precepts, the women in *A Song Of Ice And Fire* may encourage women in our society to fight for their rights and dreams.

Lastly, I would like to highlight the fact that it has been rather difficult to find information about the female characters from the books. Most analyses I have found focused on the TV show characters, but these differ significantly from those presented in the books.

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