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## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Strategy Game: The Representation of Women in  
*Game of Thrones*

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## - Resumen

*Juego de Tronos* es una de las series más exitosas del panorama televisivo actual. Desde su estreno en 2011 se ha convertido en todo un fenómeno cuyos niveles de audiencia han ido incrementándose a medida que avanzaban las temporadas. Pero al mismo tiempo que crecía su éxito, también lo hacía la polémica en torno a la serie. La ausencia de censura que tanto caracteriza a otras producciones de HBO está más presente que nunca en *Juego de Tronos*, recayendo esta principalmente sobre los personajes femeninos. Personajes extraordinarios pero cuya representación no les hace justicia. Este trabajo se va a centrar precisamente en mostrar cómo las mujeres están representadas en la serie y en cómo HBO aplica su sello personal sobre dicha representación. Para ello, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis en profundidad de la serie en sí misma, de la cadena responsable y de varias escenas tomando como referencia los trabajos de los autores Richard Barsam, David Bordwell y Kristin Thompson. Inspirado en la teoría de Laura Mulvey sobre el uso de la mujer como objeto erótico para los personajes dentro de la historia y para el espectador, este trabajo pretende explicar, a través de la imagen de sus protagonistas femeninas, porqué la serie es controvertida y exitosa a partes iguales.

- **Abstract**

*Game of Thrones* is one of the most successful TV series in the current small-screen landscape. Since its release in 2011 it has become a phenomenon whose audience has increased as the seasons progressed. But as the success expanded so did the controversy around the show. The absence of censorship that characterizes other HBO productions is more present than ever in *Game of Thrones*, affecting mainly female characters. Characters are extraordinary but their representation does not do justice to them. This work is precisely going to focus on showing how women are represented in the TV series and on how HBO applies its tactics to such representation. In order to show this, the TV series is going to be analyzed, as well as the network responsible for it. In addition to this, several scenes are going to be examined from the point of view of the works of the authors Richard Barsam, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. Inspired by Laura Mulvey's theory about the use of women as erotic object for both characters and viewers, this work aims to explain why the series is equally controversial and successful.

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## 1. Introduction

*Game of Thrones* is one of the most popular TV series nowadays. It is one of my favourite shows and people all around the world watch it. Everyone is looking forward to the release of the next season that will take place in a few days. It shows a fantastic group of female characters who are out of the ordinary but their representation is subject to controversy. This is one of the main reasons why *Game of Thrones* is both polemical and successful at the same time. The aim of this dissertation is to show how women are represented in this well known production and how HBO applies its marketing strategies to these female protagonists. By the time I had to decide the main topic for my dissertation we were studying TV series in the subject *Tendencias y Contextos del Cine II*. In addition to this, in my year abroad with the Erasmus program at the University of Portsmouth I selected a Film Studies module that I really enjoyed and in which I learnt a lot about marketing tactics. These are the reasons why I chose this line and this topic for my dissertation. As an adaptation from a series of novels, the TV series is good, the storyline and the script are brilliant on their own. Characters are charismatic, especially female protagonists, but the way they are depicted is open to debate. In order to explain this, the dissertation is divided in different parts. First of all, the TV series is going to be presented, explaining its main aspects. Then, this dissertation is going to focus on HBO, the premium cable and satellite television network responsible for *Game of Thrones*. After this, the main female characters are going to be introduced and some scenes are going to be analyzed so as to show how women are represented in the TV series. Finally, the dissertation will come to an end with the conclusion of the study.

The methodology applied in the analysis is the same learnt in the subjects *Comentario de Textos Audiovisuales en Lengua Inglesa I* and *Comentario de Textos Audiovisuales en Lengua Inglesa II*. It is a compound of formal and ideological analysis. In the formal analysis, some scenes have been thoroughly examined by focusing on mise-en-scène and framing. Every detail can have a meaning. Mise-en-scène refers to the contents of the frame. Through such elements as set, props, lighting, colour, costume, make up and performance the scene makes sense. Location and colour are significant for the tone and the context in which the action takes place. Props can be relevant to the development of the story. Lighting is crucial in the manipulation of an image because it shows the emotional response of the characters and their internal states. Costume, make up and performance allow the viewer to know more about characters. Framing refers to the relationship between camera and mise-en-scène. It defines the point of view. Through the use of distance, different angles, frame mobility and the combination of shots the most important aspects of the scene are emphasized. For the observation of the scenes, it is necessary to mention two authors that have been fundamental: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson and their book *Film Art: An Introduction*. This work, especially those chapters focused on framing, mise-en-scène, form, style and ideology, have served as guide to the examination of the chosen scenes. In addition to this, another author who has also been relevant for the study of the scenes is Richard Barsam and his book *Looking At Movies*.

Apart from visual interpretation, ideological analysis has taken into account the story. For this study, the TV series has been compared with some other similar fictions and with the novels written by George R. R. Martin. In addition to this, some other TV series produced and distributed by HBO have been revised in order to know how this

network works. Related to the representation of women in *Game of Thrones*, there is a work that inspired this focalization, the chapter “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” written by Laura Mulvey and included in the book *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, in which she explains:

Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. [...] A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude (838).

This is the main idea the analysis develops in order to show how women are represented in *Game of Thrones* and why their representation is controversial. Since the TV series is equally polemical and successful, the dissertation is going to focus on this duality that is deeply related to female protagonists. But before explaining the main female characters it is required to know more about *Game of Thrones*.

## **2. *Game of Thrones*, the Key to Success**

*Game of Thrones*, three words that today are known by people all around the world. Since HBO’s premiere of the TV series in 2011 it has become a social phenomenon. Throughout its six seasons, the series has had an excellent reception by professional critics, being considered one of the best television series of all times. It has reached a wide audience and its fans were named the most devoted in popular culture by Vulture.com in 2012. *Game of Thrones* has received a large number of awards and

nominations. The TV series has achieved a Golden Globe and 38 Emmy Awards, making it the most awarded series in Emmy history. In addition to this, it is considered as one of the most expensive television series. The cost of the first season was 60 million dollars, of which 10 million went to the pilot episode. The budget even increased as the series progressed, reaching 70 million dollars in the second season and increasing to more than 100 million dollars for the sixth season.

But the TV series was also preceded by the success of George R. R. Martin's novels. *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the series of novels on which the television series is based. The first novel, *A Game of Thrones*, was published in 1996. It won several awards and became a New York Times bestseller in January 2011. In 2014 *Game of Thrones* became the most watched television series in HBO's history when the world premiere of the fourth season surpassed the audience record of the final episode of *The Sopranos*. *Game of Thrones* broke its own audience record in subsequent episodes.

What are the keys of its success? The story is characterized by its medieval aesthetics, the use of numerous well-detailed characters, the contrasting views of the multiple protagonists, its plot with unexpected twists and a subtle and moderate use of the magical aspects so common in other works of fantasy. But why is *Game of Thrones* such a huge phenomenon? Apart from the fantastic storyline, the answer is simple, female roles. In spite of the fact that time and space are fictional, it is not usual to see numerous powerful and prominent female characters in a medieval frame. In other medieval fictions, women are always secondary characters or relegated to the background. Furthermore, they are usually passive characters, depending on men and treated as sexual objects. The empowerment of women is, undoubtedly, something that



characterizes *Game of Thrones*. Female characters are the ones who survive, who resist any type of suffering and who fight for their own convictions.

### **3. HBO**

The extraordinary female characters, in addition to the interesting storyline are the key to success of *Game of Thrones*, but what makes the TV series such a phenomenon and so controversial at the same time? HBO's TV series are usually both very successful and polemical. Home Box Office (HBO) is an American premium cable and satellite television network and the oldest and longest continuously operating pay television service in the United States. It is owned by Time Warner and it primarily releases motion pictures and original television series, documentaries, boxing matches, and concert specials. But HBO is different from almost everything else in the entire TV market. HBO has become a trademark, trying to differentiate itself from standard broadcast television through controversial themes and provocative subject matter. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass explain:

In a country seemingly becoming even more sensitive to moral violations, and broadcast network increasingly subject to nervous censors, subscription channel HBO with its original programming (introduced 1997 with *Oz*) has a licence to produce edgier-drama. Doing things differently, setting itself against what is prohibited on network television, emerges as a crucial institutional strategy for HBO (66).

HBO evokes ideas of quality and exclusivity as central to the subscription experience. This uniqueness is achieved through the creative risk-taking and artistic

integrity that justify the explicitness of its productions. As a subscription-based service, it avoids advertisers and is financed by its viewers, which allows HBO to display sex and violence, breaking the rules in terms of language, content and representation.

This autonomy allows screenwriters, producers and directors to be creative with no censorship. But this freedom goes beyond brutal violence and lurid language. HBO is considered a gold standard of television because it also tells stories differently. David Bianculli said that “HBO, more than any other cable network, has aggressively and intelligently pursued and developed original series capitalising on the censorial freedoms that the broadcast networks can’t emulate” (Bianculli, “‘Sopranos’ Has Makings of a Hit”). In its promise of quality television, HBO uses these strategies of innovativeness in its programming and effectiveness in its advertising. HBO shows TV series with no censorship and characterized by realism, graphic sexual content, gory displays of violence and open conversations about controversial topics.

Dealing explicitly with sex, brutal violence and profanity might well strain the limits of television representation for sure, but HBO’s success with its original programmes (as well as miniseries) has had network executives striving to work out how to replicate the groundbreaking formula (McCabe and Akass 74).

HBO’s original programming policy liberated television fiction from previous rules and broadcasting conventions, and established a new way of conceiving television fiction. Since its debut during the 1970s, HBO has released several TV series famous for their polemical aspects. Some well-known examples are *The Sopranos*, considered a

contemporary American masterpiece but also criticized for its extreme violence. Another case in point is *Sex and the City*, in which a group of women in their thirties and forties talk openly about sex and in which explicit sex scenes are frequent. HBO's original programmes have revolutionized the industry of television. These TV series have been subject to controversy because of the explicit realism that characterized them.

In recent times, HBO has found it difficult to replicate the earlier success of the previous productions. The company has started to lose ground to other cable companies like FX that, trying to achieve the same success, has released dramas like *Nip/Tuck*, *The Shield*, *Rescue Me* and *!Huff* in the same line as the HBO creations. But with the premiere of *Game of Thrones*, its unceasing promotion and the aggressive marketing campaigns, HBO returned to the top of small-screen fiction. HBO is always one step ahead of critics and knows how to be transgressive and original, and how the illicit is "essential to compelling story-telling, key to creating complex and morally ambivalent protagonists, vital to dramatic verisimilitude and elevating broadcasting standards." (McCabe and Akass 75) After the release of *Game of Thrones* and other successes such as *The Wire*, the main cable television companies in Spain have offered unlimited access to HBO contents in order to attract subscribers. In spite of the fact that many other channels have tried to imitate HBO's formula, they have not achieved the same success. The use of adult themes, extreme violence and sexual content are strategies that only HBO masters.

In *Game of Thrones*, all these strategies and aspects are clearly visible and even intensified. For this reason, the TV show has become so successful and controversial at the same time. In addition to the fantastic storyline and the prominence of charismatic

female characters, the use of additional violence, naked bodies and sex completes the formula of *Game of Thrones*. From the beginning, the TV series has attracted plenty of attention because of its use of violence. Viewers can see how characters are tortured and killed in every possible manner: death by fire, beheading, slit throat and even exposure to molten gold. Moreover, nudes, rapes and sex scenes are frequent and more graphic than in any other TV show, which makes female characters be represented in ambiguous terms. The analysis that follows is an attempt to explain this ambiguity.

#### **4. Powerful Female Protagonists**

There is a wide variety of complex female characters in *Game of Thrones*. They are all very different from each other. Some of them are ambitious and fight to conquer the throne, some others try to protect their families and others look for revenge but they all have something in common: they are very smart and they learn how to survive in a world ruled by men and in which women are relegated to the role of the beautiful lady and sexual object. They are all brave and independent. Women play ambivalent roles, make decisions and do whatever is needed in order to achieve their own purposes. *Game of Thrones* presents a group of female protagonists out of the ordinary in a medieval context. As an adaptation, the TV series is really good and characters follow the same pattern of development of the novels written by George R. R. Martin since the way in which characters are created in the TV series is very faithful to the descriptions given in the books. The audience sees how protagonists progress through the seasons. In order to prove that female protagonists are relevant for the success of the TV series, the most prominent characters will be discussed in this part of the analysis.

In House Stark, Lady Catelyn Tully/Stark (Michelle Fairley) is married to Lord Eddard “Ned” Stark and their children are Robb, Sansa, Arya, Bran and Rickon. Her husband is the Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North. She behaves as a woman of her noble position and as a loyal wife. She fiercely protects her family as a she-wolf (the blazon of the family is a grey direwolf on an ice-white field). Sansa Stark (Sophie Turner) is the eldest daughter of Ned and Catelyn Stark. She is a refined, sweet and naive damsel who dreams of marrying Prince Joffrey Baratheon to become queen. She is very different from her siblings, especially from Arya. She prefers her interests to those of her family. At the beginning, she behaves as a proper lady, as the Lannisters want her to behave. But her innocent infatuation and admiration come to an end when she discovers their real facet. In spite of their cruelties, Sansa remains at their side in order to save her life. She is forced to pretend love and loyalty to Joffrey although she hates him for beheading his father. This character experiences a great evolution throughout the seasons. She is humiliated several times and forced to marry different men but she gradually becomes more powerful and more mature and prepares her war-like revenge. Her sister, Arya Stark (Maisie Williams), is the second daughter of Lord Eddard and Lady Catelyn Stark. She is a rebel young girl who rejects rules and constraints or social expectations like gender roles, courtly virtues, class distinctions, and the expectations of her parents. She does not accept the future her father wants for her. Arya is fascinated by warfare and trains in the use of arms, especially the sword. She refuses to get married for influence and power and to live as a devoted wife for her husband. People usually think that she is a boy because of the way she looks and behaves: she always wears trousers and ragged clothes, is the complete opposite from her sister Sansa, who represents the perfect lady, and is forced to impersonate a boy in order to go unnoticed and save her life when her father dies. Her greater desire is to

avenge her family. None of the characters described above is interested in conquering the Iron Throne, at least it is not their main aim.

The next group of female characters is more focused on the battle for the Iron Throne. From House Lannister, Cersei Lannister (Lena Headey) is the queen. She is the wife of Robert I Baratheon and mother of King Joffrey Baratheon. She is cold, ambitious, manipulative and merciless, and does whatever is needed to get what she wants and protect her own. She hates her husband but stays with him for convenience, while she maintains an incestuous sexual relationship with her twin brother Jaime, who is the father of her three children. She is only interested in power and the Iron Throne. Her words are: "Love is weakness." She does not trust Margaery Tyrell (Natalie Dormer), who is married and becomes queen several times with different men, including Joffrey Baratheon and his brother Tommen. She is beautiful and clever. She is manipulative and knows how to win the minds and loyalties of her subjects. She is skillful in politics and charity works. The other female character that fights to become queen belongs to the House Targaryen. Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke), also known as Dany, Daenerys Stormborn, Khaleesi or mother of dragons, is forced to marry Khal Drogo so that her brother can have an army to retake the Iron Throne. But she realizes that her brother is not worthy of the kingdom, so she decides to fight for the Iron Throne. She becomes more and more powerful through the seasons. She develops from being used as a sexual object to leading an army in order to conquer the Seven Kingdoms. She is smart, cultured, determined and fair. She is immune to fire and damage by heat and possesses three dragons.

The plot makes clear the importance of female characters in the narrative. In order to analyse this, two scenes of the TV series are going to be examined as examples of the singularity of these female protagonists. The first scene belongs to the fourth episode of the third season, titled *And Now His Watch is Ended*. Daenerys Targaryen buys an army called “The Unsullied” to retake the throne. The price for these soldiers is one of her dragons. The man who owns the force undervalues Daenerys and tries to trick her because he thinks she does not speak valyrian, his language. Daenerys makes him believe that she accepts the deal but once she becomes the master of the army, she shows that she speaks valyrian and orders her dragon to kill the man who was trying to deceive her. The mother of dragons frees the army, but “The Unsullied” decide to stay with her.



The dragon and the whip that controls the army as a prop are relevant in this scene. Both are symbols of Daenerys’s cleverness of and the camera focuses on them. Framing is also very important. The combination of long shots, medium long shots and medium close-up shots allows the viewer to understand the context and notice the reaction of the

characters. Medium close-up shots show the emotional response of the characters: in this case, surprise and fear in the face of Daenerys's enemies and satisfaction in the face of her allies. This type of shot also reflects Daenerys's determination and courage. In addition to this, angles also have a singular meaning in this scene. Enemies are presented as defeated through the use of high angles. The rise of her power is represented through low angles. The performance is also significant because the spectator does not know that everything is part of the plan until Daenerys speaks valyrian.



The other example takes place in the second episode of the third season, titled *Dark Wings, Dark Words*. Margaery Tyrell visits King Joffrey Baratheon in his chamber. He asks her about her previous marriage (she is a widow) and she tells how it was never consummated because her husband was not interested in women. Margaery acts as a victim when Joffrey rebukes her because her former husband was a traitor. She explains that she was trying to do her duty as a wife. Margaery knows Joffrey because previously in the same episode Sansa Stark has told her about the king's real face. Sansa explains



to Margaery the monster Joffrey is and the cruelties that he committed in the past, so that she is completely prepared to deal with him. Joffrey loves hunting and is a sadist obsessed with death and suffering, so Margaery pretends to be attracted by these inclinations. Margaery makes Joffrey think that she is excited by his dark impulses and shows him her loyalty and admiration. Margaery's strategies really convince Joffrey and she gets her purpose: to seduce the king and avoid the mistreatment that Sansa Stark suffered or death.



The scene begins with long shots that show Margaery going into Joffrey's bedroom while he is holding a weapon, a crossbow. Joffrey simulates interest in his fiancée's happiness of but this is an excuse to question her. As the conversation progresses, long shots combine with medium and medium close-up shots to show the reaction of the characters. Long shots are repeated when the tension of the moment disappears and Margaery asks Joffrey to teach her to use the crossbow. At the end of the scene, medium and medium close-up shots predominate and reinforce Margaery's achievement when both characters are flirting.



In a few words, female protagonists in *Game of Thrones* are different and extraordinary, and this is one of the reasons for the success of the series; but another key element to its success is the polemical display of sex and violence introduced by HBO, which principally involves female characters that are not represented as they deserve.

## **5. Representation of Women by HBO**

As has been discussed in the preceding analysis, female characters are intelligent, interesting, charismatic, brave and independent, something that the audience would not expect in a fiction based on a past time, but the truth is that the representation of women in the series is in line with the time in which the story is supposed to take place. In spite of being exceptionally different from other female protagonists found in this type of fiction, women are still undervalued. From the first season, the spectator witnesses how female characters suffer more than any other male protagonist to get what they want. While women have to undergo terrible experiences and fight to assert their rights, men

are born with everything done. Women never get all the opportunities and privileges male characters have for simply being men. This aspect is also quite visible in the novels written by George R. R. Martin because female protagonists go through a process of suffering and development which is harder than that of any male protagonist. But the TV series intensifies this distress and goes beyond the limits by introducing changes in the plot. Like the other TV series produced by HBO, *Game of Thrones* has been polemical because of its display of violence and explicit sexual content. This methodology that characterizes HBO mainly affects female characters.

The image of women represented by HBO in *Game of Thrones* is exploitative because female protagonists are sexualized and views of their naked bodies are recurrent in the series. By contrast, men rarely expose their body and male characters are the perpetrators of violence. Some specific scenes have been debated because they show the sexual abuse or rape of female characters when this does not appear in the original story. These scenes have been very controversial not only for being extremely violent but also because they are an invention of HBO, they do not appear in the novels. These fragments are part of the HBO's strategies to catch the audience through the use of cruelty. In order to prove what has been stated before, some other scenes from *Game of Thrones* are going to be analyzed. These scenes are going to be compared with their real descriptions in the original novels written by George R. R. Martin. In addition to this, some reviews about the most polemical scenes are going to be contrasted.

The first scene is the wedding night of Khal Drogo and Daenerys Targaryen. This scene takes place in the first episode of the first season of the TV series, titled *Winter Is Coming*, and in *A Game of Thrones*, the first book of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the series

of novels on which the story is based. Daenerys is forced to marry Khal Drogo to get an army for her brother, who wants to become the king of the Seven Kingdoms. In the book, this moment is sensual and romantic, he delicately caresses and undresses her and she agrees to have sex with him:

He began to undress her. His fingers were deft and strangely tender. He removed her silks one by one, carefully, while Dany sat unmoving, silent, looking at his eyes. [...] She could sense the fierce strength in his hands, but he never hurt her. He held her hand in his own and brushed her fingers, one by one. He ran a hand gently down her leg. He stroked her face, tracing the curve of her ears, running a finger gently around her mouth. He put both hands in her hair and combed it with his fingers. He turned her around, massaged her shoulders, slid a knuckle down the path of her spine. [...] Dany was flushed and breathless, her heart fluttering in her chest. He cupped her face in his huge hands and 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 (*A Game of Thrones* 60-61).

The narrator describes each movement the characters make and how Khal Drogo is undressing Daenerys and stroking her with tact. The description is very detailed and full of adjectives and adverbs like “carefully” or “breathless” so that the reader can know how Daenerys is feeling at every moment. The fragment is very descriptive and sensual, bordering on eroticism. This piece shows Drogo as someone tender and even loving that cares if Daenerys wants to have sex with him or if she does not want to. This is

reflected through the question that he poses to her. Finally, Daenerys accepts and incites him to make love.



By contrast, in the TV series the scene is more violent. Daenerys is crying and she refuses to stay nude in front of her husband. While in the book Drogo asks her if she wants to have sex, in the series he does not care. The sequence begins with an extreme long shot in which Daenerys is looking at the sea at sunset. There is an eye line match of two shots that allow the viewers to see her face and what she is looking at. The scene is composed of a sequence of long shots, medium and medium close-up shots. Long shots make visible the difference of height between the two characters: while Drogo is tall and robust, Daenerys is small and thin, which emphasizes his authority and her delicacy. Medium shots let the audience appreciate some aspects of the mise-en-scène that are very significant. In these shots, the contrast between Drogo and Daenerys is evident through their physical appearance. On the one hand, Daenerys has pale skin, blue eyes and her hair is light blonde, almost white. She wears a long grey dress. This combination of soft colours emphasizes the purity and innocence of the character. On

the other hand, Drogo has brown complexion, his hair is long and black and he wears a few dark leather clothes. His physical appearance, in addition to the make-up in his eyes and his body, affirms his rudeness and his violent attitude. Through the medium close-up, the spectator perceives the emotional response of the characters. While in the face of Drogo there is no sign of any expression or feeling, Daenerys is crying. Both characters are seen through a straight-on angle and from different perspectives (from their right side and from their left side). There is no camera movement in this scene, apart from the end when the camera follows Daenerys to show how she leans down to have sex with Drogo. The soft colours of the sunset by the sea (blue and pink), in addition to the external music of the TV series, bring a melancholic tone to the scene.



Their relationship changes as the season progresses and they fall in love with each other, but the brutality of their first sexual encounters is something missing in the novels and very recurrent in the first episodes of *Game of Thrones*. These violent scenes show the development of Daenerys and how she will gradually take control of the

situation and put an end to these abuses. But exhibiting the protagonist's naked body is frequent in the TV series.

Another relevant sequence is Cersei's rape, during Joffrey's burial, by his twin brother and lover, Jaime. This scene takes place in the third episode of the fourth season in the TV series, titled *Breaker of Chains*. After the death of King Joffrey, Jaime and Cersei find themselves guarding the body of their son when Jaime cannot control himself. The cruel and ruthless Cersei, less committed, tries to calm her brother's spirits, but he forces her to have sex just next to Joffrey's coffin. This scandalized the followers of the characters and of the original novels because, although the scene is placed in the same context in the books, the sex between Jaime and Cersei is at all times consented, which is evident in this fragment of *A Storm of Swords*, the third novel of the saga:

She kissed him. A light kiss, the merest brush of her lips on his, but he could feel her tremble as he slid his arms around her. 'I am not whole without you.'

There was no tenderness in the kiss he returned to her, only hunger. Her mouth opened for his tongue. 'No,' she said weakly when his lips moved down her neck, 'not here. The septons...'

'The Others can take the septons.' He kissed her again, kissed her silent, kissed her until she moaned. Then he knocked the candles aside and lifted her up onto the Mother's altar, pushing up her skirts and the silken shift beneath. She pounded on his chest with feeble fists, murmuring about the risk, the danger, about their father, about the septons, about the wrath of gods. He never heard her. He undid his breeches and climbed up and pushed

her bare white legs apart. One hand slid up her thigh and underneath her smallclothes. When he tore them away, he saw that her moon's blood was on her, but it made no difference.

'Hurry,' she was whispering now, 'quickly, quickly, now, do it now, do me now. Jaime Jaime Jaime.' Her hands helped guide him. 'Yes,' Cersei said as he thrust, 'my brother, sweet brother, yes, like that, yes, I have you, you're home now, you're home now, you're home.' She kissed his ear and stroked his short bristly hair. Jaime lost himself in her flesh. He could feel Cersei's heart beating in time with his own, and the wetness of blood and seed where they were joined (*A Storm of Swords* 578).

This section of the novel is also very descriptive, bordering on eroticism. While the previous one is more romantic, this one is more passionate. The narrator describes their sexual encounter in great detail. Although at the beginning Cersei refuses to have sex with Jaime, in the last paragraph she clearly accepts, asks for it and enjoys. In the TV series, Cersei is forced to have sex with Jaime.





In the TV series, this scene takes place in the same context but differently. Through the use of medium close-ups and close-ups the pain and the rage for the death of their son is emphasized. Jaime gets angry when Cersei asks him to kill the alleged murderer but he refuses because the accused is also their brother, Tyrion Lannister. He starts to kiss her and Cersei begs him to cease but he does not stop and forces her to have sex. The camera focuses on Joffrey's body several times. These shots, in addition to the external music and the dim lighting from the candles, represent a lugubrious moment that is sordidly desecrated by Jaime's passion. The mise-en-scène plays an important role when Jaime starts to tear Cersei's clothes because this fact makes it clear that sex is not consented. The audience sees the scene through a straight-on angle and the camera follows the characters' movements when they lie on the floor. This use of the camera is significant because shots cease to focus on Joffrey to focus on the rape and on Cersei's attempts to stop Jaime. In the last shot, we can see Cersei's hand grabbing a cloth, which indicates that Jaime has not contained himself.

The violence of this scene really shocked the audience because it was completely different from the novels. It does not produce any change in the relationship of the characters, so it is another strategy to attract people through gruesome modifications.



Related to the previous scene, there is another sequence that has also been very polemical because it does not appear in the novels. In *Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken*, episode six of the fifth season in the TV series, Sansa Stark marries Ramsay Bolton, who is a psychopath, in order to win back her home, Winterfell, and to avenge her murdered mother and brother. Sansa is raped by her husband, who forces his servant Reek/Theon (who had grown up with Sansa when he was a ward of Winterfell) to witness the entire process. This degrading and violent scene shocked and displeased the audience of the TV series. Missouri Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill tweeted that she was done with *Game of Thrones* because this gratuitous rape scene was disgusting and unacceptable. Melissa Leon explains in *The Daily Beast*:

No story-bound justification for depicting the rape of an underage girl, then making it all about a male supporting character's feelings, exists here. [...] She was once attacked by a group of men in King's Landing, and Joffrey had always threatened to rape her despite her marriage to Tyrion. But this latest violation has touched a nerve among even the show's higher-profile fans. [...] Rape is not a necessary plot device; it is not a prop or a parlor trick to include for an end-of-episode shocker. On the rare occasion that sexual violence is depicted with a justifiable purpose, it's the consequences and emotional aftermath—not all the gory details of the act itself—that matter most (Leon, "The Rape of Sansa Stark")



The scene begins with medium long shots in which the audience can see the three characters, Sansa, Ramsay and Theon going through the bedroom. When Ramsay asks Sansa to undress, Theon tries to leave the room but Ramsay forces him to stay on their wedding night. At this point, the camera begins to approach the characters through

medium and medium close-up shots. At the moment of the rape, the spectator does not see it completely because the camera focuses on Theon, who is crying while he witnesses such atrocity. The camera moves forward and gets closer to the faces of Theon and Sansa through a medium close-up in order to emphasize their anguish. In spite of the fact that the rape is not explicitly shown, the audience experiences the horror through the emotional response of the characters, seeing the tears on Theon's face of and hearing Sansa's screams of agony. The mise-en-scène reinforces the dread in this deplorable situation through the low lighting of the candles and the way in which Ramsay rips the dress Sansa is wearing. The performance is also very significant in this scene, especially in the case of Iwan Rheon (the actor who plays Ramsay Bolton) because he perfectly performs as if he really were a psychopath, which is made visible by means of his facial expression and the way he looks and behaves.



There were so many reactions against this scene at the moment when it was first shown on TV that there are still many negative reviews every time critics or fans watch

this unexpected sequence. They all seem to agree that this end of the episode was an unnecessary depravity. It is true that Sansa Stark is no longer a child. We have spent four seasons watching her lamenting and going from being a little girl, educated, correct, to a woman formed in the darkest way by the events of the last years that passed between the death of her whole family (or so she believes) and the terrible experience of being subdued by Joffrey Baratheon. But this terrible scene, in which she is ruthlessly raped by Ramsay, exceeds the limits. These depraved events seem to happen only to shock the viewer, not for the sake of the story. In spite of this, Sophie Turner (the actress who plays Sansa Stark) defended the scene in an interview, assuring that she really liked how the story turned. Many people agreed that this atrocious scene was not necessary and that it completely was an invention to attract the audience through extreme violence. As Sansa has suffered a lot from the first season, her long-awaited revenge is a catching argument to assure that the audience remain true to the series. But such a disgusting scene was not required to get that. This additional sequence was a wrong decision made by the screenwriters because it really produced a barrage of criticism.

To conclude this part of the analysis, female roles are depicted through the duality of being empowered and sexualized at the same time. In *Game of Thrones* the audience finds a group of female protagonists that are brilliant, interesting, powerful and charismatic, something completely different from any other similar fiction. Women are not relegated to the role of the perfect wife who looks after the house and whose only duty is to provide her husband with children and food. Female protagonists in this story are numerous and fight for their own convictions. But in spite of being extraordinary, as is evident in the plot, HBO damages the image of these female characters through the introduction of violence and graphic sexual content. Rape, abuse and all kinds of

suffering are experienced by female protagonists more than by men. So the representation of women by HBO is exploitative and degrading.

## **6. Conclusion**

To conclude this dissertation, *Game of Thrones* has become a social phenomenon because it is different from anything in small-screen fiction. Since its premiere in 2011, the TV series has surpassed record ratings. The key for this success is an interesting storyline based on the novels written by George R.R. Martin. A plot full of intrigue, strategic alliances and treachery in the battle for the Iron Throne keeps the audience hooked on the TV series. But in addition to the fantastic story, characters make the difference, especially female roles. There is a group of female protagonists that are completely out of the ordinary. In spite of the fact that time and space are fictional, the TV series is supposed to be based on a past time. Female protagonists do not behave as it would be expected in a medieval context. They are intelligent and charismatic, know how to manage to survive. Female characters are also brave and independent and learn to assert their rights on their own in a world ruled by men. They are not the stereotype of the submissive lady or the devoted wife. They are not passive, they act to get what they want and fight for it. But the conception of this wonderful group of characters is damaged by the strategies used by HBO. In its search for uniqueness and aiming to increase the audience, HBO introduces gruesome changes that include violence and graphic sex scenes. These modifications and additions primarily affect female characters that suffer more than any other male character to achieve the same purpose. The representation of women is exploitative and sexualized because rapes, as well as unjustified nudity, are recurrent in the TV series. Female protagonists are depicted as erotic objects for the characters within the story, and as erotic objects for the audience.

This makes the *Game of Thrones* controversial but at the same time captures the attention of the spectator and the TV series increases its audience every season. HBO has mastered how to be successful by creating controversy. This methodology may not please everyone but the truth is that it works because HBO is considered a gold standard in small-screen fiction. *Game of Thrones* is brilliant as an adaptation and as its own script with the contrasting views of the multiple protagonists, unexpected plot twists and a fantastic group of well-detailed characters that is blurred by the sordid details introduced by HBO. There has been a debate on whether the TV series is sexist or not but it is clear that the strategies used by HBO to represent female characters are not beneficial for the image of women. Maybe HBO is the reason why *Game of Thrones* is such a huge phenomenon but the representation of women in the TV series is not the fairest.

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