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AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN CONTEMPORARY FANTASY
BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Abstract – English

The thesis analyzed female characters in contemporary fantasy while aiming to determine if there were any significant changes occurring, which would cause the female characters to be perceived as 'original' or 'revolutionary'. The first chapter focused on the definition of terms, deciding to consider contemporary high fantasy as literature written after 1945 of the "genre of imaginative fiction involving magic"[1] set into a fictional world that has its own system of laws and rules by which it abides. It also outlined ideas of a number of critics on the subject of female roles and stereotypes in literature and agreed that while female characters are continuously evolving they are still largely stereotypical.

In reference to this information, the second chapter analyzed concrete characters in chosen texts (*The Lord of the Rings* from J. R. R. Tolkien, *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula LeGuin, and *A Game of Thrones* by George Martin) to see the extent by which they are subjected to stereotypes. The results showed that female characters are greatly stereotypical; however, they are more likely to become more complex and dynamic in the more modern texts. The Questionnaire in the third chapter showed that readers are prone to notice these qualities and that they perceive them as original, though they are uncertain if they overpower the gender stereotypes.

In the conclusion it was decided that it was not possible to completely prove if female characters in contemporary fantasy have become revolutionary, but there are strong indications which suggest that this is true. However, this claim is only true for the more modern texts, as there was a rapid development of the genre from the post-World War II era until the present.

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[1] *"Fantasy", oxforddictionaries.com,* Web. 28 July, 2014

Abstrakt – Czech

Tato práce analyzovala ženské postavy v moderní fantasy literatuře se zaměřením na změny, které se v ní objevují a jsou-li dostačující na to, abychom mohli označit novodobé ženské postavy jako revoluční či originální. První kapitola se zaměřovala na vymezení pojmů. Jako moderní fantasy literaturu jsme se rozhodli označit texty psané po roce 1945 patřící do žánru imaginativní fikce pracující s magií a dané do fiktivního světa pracujícího s vlastním systémem práv a pravidel. Také jsme uvedli názory několika kritiků komentujících ženské role a stereotypy, a shodli jsme se, že přestože se ženské postavy neustále vyvíjí tak jsou stále do značné míry stereotypní.

Zohledňujíce tyto informace, druhá kapitola analyzovala konkrétní postavy ve vybraných textech (*Pán Prstenů* od J. R. R. Tolkiena, *Čaroděj ze Zeměmoří* a *Atuánské Hrobky* od Uršuly LeGuinové, a *Hru o Trůny* od George Martina) a sledovala rozsah, do jakého byly ovlivněny stereotypy. Výsledky ukázaly, že ženské postavy jsou velmi stereotypní, ale v novějších textech jsou častěji dynamické a komplexní. Dotazník z třetí kapitoly ukázal, že čtenáři si těchto kvalit všímají a označují je za originální, ale že váhají, zda převažují nad stereotypy.

Ve shrnutí bylo rozhodnuto, že nebylo možné definitivně dokázat, jestli jsou moderní ženské postavy revoluční, ale existují silné indicie naznačující, že tomu tak je. Toto tvrzení je ale pravdivé pouze v rámci novější fantasy literatury, jelikož žánr prodělal od roku 1945 do současnosti prudké změny.

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The focus of the thesis being women in contemporary fantasy means that the primary issue which needs to be addressed in this chapter is defining fantasy, specifying the roles of women in fantasy literature and the requirements of a hero as opposed to the requirements of a heroine. Nevertheless, the purpose of this chapter is not only to answer these questions, but also to prepare guidelines according to which the exemplary or revolutionary qualities of female characters will be analyzed in the second chapter of the thesis. This is crucial for us in order to properly address the hypothesis, which is that female characters in contemporary fantasy have not changed significantly enough to be considered revolutionary. Also, it is necessary to set the specific criteria for the time and sub-genre for the analyzed texts so as to avoid overlapping either into older texts where the approach to women was radically different or into texts set too firmly in a definite world that must mirror the rules and stereotypes employed in our society.

1.1   Defining Fantasy

Fantasy is an exceptionally broad term that encompasses a large variety of texts, some of which having relatively little in common. *Fantasy* as a genre definition is generally considered to be a fairly modern term, though it is impossible to assign an exact date to its origin; *Oxford English Dictionary* marks the first reference of fantasy as "genre of literary compositions"[2] as being 1949, but the genre itself is obviously older. In *In Defense of Fantasy,* Ann Swinfen states that the decades following 1945 have witnessed "a considerable expansion in the publishing in this genre and the emergence of a number of notable novels by a new generation of writers in both Britain and America."[3] A great amount of credit for this can be given to J. R. R. Tolkien,

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[2] *oed.com*, Web. 28 July, 2014
[3] Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy*, pg. 1

the 'father' of modern day fantasy, as he made the production of the fantasy genre 'respectable'.

However, this could suggest a misleading idea that works of fantasy are a modern and newly evolving genre, as "most elements of contemporary fantasy can be traced to very ancient examples"[4]. "Indeed, it might be argued that modern fantasy writers are simply the heirs of a long-standing literary tradition, even perhaps that they could scarcely have existed but for the foundation laid earlier in the development of European literature."[5]

Tolkien himself says that he is no great expert in fantasy, when he partly touches on the nature and origin of fantasy in his essay *On Fairy- Stories*, in which he discusses one of fairy-story's meanings, which is "an unreal or incredible story"[6] though he says that this sense would make the topic "hopelessly vast"[7]. He does not give an exact date or definition of fantasy, but his understanding of fantasy encompasses all stories 'seriously' dealing with magic and he argues that this approach reaches far into the Middle Ages.

As fantasy is, by definition, a "genre of imaginative fiction involving magic"[8] and often featuring another alternative world, the time period for the creation of fantasy can be greatly expanded to encompass works of other genres such as myths, fables, romance, legends, folk-tales or fairytales. This definition of fantasy gives fantasy a rich literary tradition that, in Britain, starts somewhere in 700 A.D. with *Beowulf* and continues until the present day.

However, encompassing all these sub-genres in our definition would make it too broad and include "the issue of deciding the dividing line […] between worthwhile literature for children and for adults seems to be a futile exercise"[9], and this would be problematic as we will mainly be dealing with those fantasy texts which "operate on an adult level of meaning."[10]

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[4]Peter Hunt, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction,* p. 30
[5] Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy*, pg. 2
[6] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, p. 110
[7] [7] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, p. 110
[8] *"Fantasy"*. oxforddictionaries.com. Web. 28 July. 2014
[9] Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy*, pg. 2
[10] Ann Swinfen*, In Defence of Fantasy*, pg. 2

This broad definition will be used only when referring to the literary tradition of fantasy, as it will be necessary to mention some historical precedents in order to show how female characters in modern fantasy have evolved. However, when discussing the contemporary texts, we will work mainly with high fantasy, which will narrow the term significantly.

Fantasy is divided into high and low depending on the setting of the work. High fantasy is always set in a fictional world that has its own system of laws and rules by which it abides, while low fantasy is set in a non-fictional world which employs elements of the fantastical. During the course of the thesis, the high fantasy will be far more relevant for us as the texts chosen for analysis all belong to this subgenre of fantasy. Also, as opposed to low fantasy, where characters are forced to conform to the rules and stereotypes employed by the real world, high fantasy gives the author space to devise his own set of rules by which his text's world will be governed. This fact is highly relevant when observing the female roles and functions. While low fantasy should copy a real-world situation, high fantasy can decide whether to give women an equal, higher or lower position to men and thus, in theory, it grants more space for creating exemplary or revolutionary female characters.

As the question of genre used has been answered, the time span observed should also be further specified, to avoid confusion. It was already stated that the focus will be on contemporary fantasy; nevertheless this is still a rather general term. It is difficult to set a definite date on the beginnings of modern fantasy, but in this thesis, the time after 1945 will be used. This is done for two main reasons.

First of all, it is because the end of the World War II changed much of society and its ideas. The terrors of the war challenged the traditional views on morality, which lead to the gradual decrease in amount of Christian believers and brought about a skeptical outlook on life and ethics. Also, the absence of a large number of men caused the women to become viewed as more equally integrated into the society.

The second reason for the choice of date is the fact that J. R. R. Tolkien, who is widely considered to be the 'father of modern fantasy', wrote greatly during this time period, even if his first Middle-earth text, *The Hobbit* was published some ten years

earlier. These reasons are also chosen by other critics dealing with modern fantasy, such as Ann Swinfen, who also chooses the period after 1945 to examine modern fantasy, saying that although the period was arbitrarily chosen, "it witnessed a considerable expansion in the publishing of works in this genre and the emergence of notable novels by a new generation of writers in both Britain and America."[11]

The sample texts which will be analyzed in chapter two cover the whole time span from J. R. R. Tolkien (1892 – 1973) until George R. R. Martin (1948 - present) and so should not portray only the most current trends towards women in fantasy, but show a clear progress of the genre.

1.2   The role of women in fantasy

Considering the fact that the thesis attempts to find exemplary or revolutionary female characters in contemporary fantasy, it would be fitting to first look at the role of women in the history of fantasy literature in general, as some of the roles which they were given, and which should appear outdated in contemporary society, are continuously being used. Also, when deciding on whether a character is exemplary or revolutionary, it is logical to first see if it has a precedent in terms of role, character or purpose. This second reason will be explored more in-depth in chapter two, where concrete characters will be analyzed, though it is more relevant when discussing certain authors, like J. R. R. Tolkien, who draws heavily on Old English literary tradition.

According to the hypothesis, there are not many exemplary or revolutionary female characters employed in contemporary fantasy, the opposite In fact; the function and portrayal of many female characters can be easily predicted. As will be shown late, it is possible, in most cases, to distinguish between a few pre-established female functions in a tale. There are several different lists of these roles and functions based on different criteria.

A reason why there are so few commonly used female functions in literature is suggested by D. Savitt in a curriculum document *Female Stereotypes in Literature*,

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[11] Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy*, p. 1

which is based on the ideas found in a number of critical texts such as Carol Pearson's and Katherine Pope's book *Who am I this time – Female Portraits in British and American Literature*. However, we will be mainly referring to D. Savitt and not to the individual texts she draws from, as her distinction of roles seems more practical for the purpose of the thesis. The one exception will be the role of 'the Warrior', which is employed in *Who am I this time.* While the document does not focus primarily on fantasy or only on English writers, Savitt outlines the basic problems which female characters face in literature and gives one set of female role distinctions. She claims that both men and women view society as 'male' and that it is immensely difficult to change this perception of the world due to the fact that (in western countries) the society stereotypes are enforced very subtlety. Nevertheless, even though humanity is still viewed as masculine, "what male and female have come to mean at the present time is changing our definition of society."[12] Yet while the already wide range of male roles is "ever-changing" the "female literary characters adhere to classical models"[13].

Savitt suggests that this is because the society is still 'male' and literature must reflect that fact, so we should not only be 'suspect' of men writing about females but also re-read women's writings about women, as they include sexual stereotypes which enforce the male-superior/ female-inferior perception. It would seem logical that contemporary female authors would introduce more character roles challenging these stereotypes; however Savitt states that very few actually do so as "women internalize the male idea of feminine and create themselves in the shape of that idea."[14] Due to this, the women have held onto only few role models and the female characters are forced to continuously play and re-play the same themes and are condemned if they "take on male characteristics"[15] such as aggression or ambition.

Leading from these ideas and an analysis done by a group of researches, Savitt introduces her distinction of four female roles which are partly based upon the characters' sexuality. These roles are: the Mother/Wife, the Old Maid, the Virgin and the Whore/Fallen Woman/Seductress. Each of these roles is accompanied by a set of

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[12] Jill Savitt, *Female Stereotypes in Literature*, yale.edu, web. 15. Jan. 2015
[13] Jill Savitt, *Female Stereotypes in Literature*, yale.edu, web. 15. Jan. 2015
[14] Susan Cornillon, *The Fiction of Fiction, Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, p.113*
[15] Jill Savitt, *Female Stereotypes in Literature*, yale.edu, web. 15. Jan. 2015

characteristics, and while a character can partly overlap or fully transfer from one role to another, she will automatically need to adopt some of the characteristics of the given archetype.

This is a perfectly functional distinction of female characters in literature, as all women have traits which mark them as belonging to one of these archetypes; however, while these archetypes cannot be avoided, the widening range of female roles in contemporary literature introduces characters where it is impossible to clearly state which archetype they belong to. This can be seen in cases such as Katniss Everdeen from Suzanne Collins' series *The Hunger Games*. Here, Katniss takes on some qualities from all of the archetypes such as innocence and chastity for the Virgin role; she is attractive, adored by men in an earthy way and able to motivate men to great works as a Seductress; she is supportive, sacrificing and kind for her family as a Mother; and queer and unhappy as an Old Maid. Another subtle problem with this distinction is that these roles are mostly presented as passive, which is less likely to be the case for many contemporary female characters. Also it is a distinction based solely on characteristics and does not take character function into account.

This is amended in another set of distinctions which is motivated by structuralist views, mainly by Vladimir Propp's distinction of "functions among dramatis personae"[16] in his book *The Morphology of the Folktale* where he distinguishes characters based on the their function in a tale. He separates them into heroes, villains, dispatchers, donors, helpers, princesses and false heroes. This work does not focus solely on high fantasy or on English writers, but while it was intended to be applied to fairytales, this distinction applies to many female characters found in high fantasy as well.

In Propp's distinction, the roles are not gender specific and women can fulfill any of them. Nevertheless, the role of a princess is signature for them as (in fairytales) it is their most common role, in which they function as passive objects waiting to be 'obtained' by the hero.

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[16] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale,* p. 12

This distinction is also perfectly pragmatic and offers a division based on the function which a character fulfills in contrast with the previously mentioned division based on a character's characteristics.

These two sets of distinctions based on function and characteristics will be continuously referred to in chapter two; however, while they offer one way for us to decide how exemplary or revolutionary a female character is based on the extent to which they fulfill the requirements of a given archetype, they do not allow us to clearly decide on whether a female character truly is exemplary or revolutionary, as all female characters fall into one of the categories. For this reason, we will look at a few examples of female characters in the past and attempt to include some precedents of active heroines in English Literature, where most of the stereotypical female roles and characteristics were created.

Since the beginning of literary history in England, women were given less consideration, place or possibility of self-expression, yet they still were an inherent part of literature. However, unlike male characters, whose range of roles was continuously widening, female characters were usually employed in a limited range of stereotypical roles.

In Old English literature, older women functioned as wives or mothers while the younger women fulfilled the roles of peacekeepers (women given as wives for the sake of peace, such as Wealhtheow in *Beowulf*) or prizes. These roles were highly passive and repetitive and the women usually possessed the same qualities (being beautiful and obedient). As the focus of the period was mostly on men, the women rarely had the opportunity to present their opinions or act upon them.

Nevertheless, there were some exceptions to this. While having a female protagonist defeat the villain of the tale with a sword appears to be a modern image, it actually has its precedents in Old English Literature. An example of this is the tale of *Judith* written sometime in the late 10th or early 11th century. Here, the protagonist of the tale is a female who infiltrates an enemy camp and uses a sword to kill the main antagonist. Yet, while she performs actions that are more commonly found in contemporary fantasy, she is still greatly affected by restrictions imposed by the time's

view on women. She approaches the villain, not as a hero or as a warrior, but as a woman and attempts to gain his compliance by using her feminine charms. The strength that she uses to finally defeat him is not her own either, but it is presented as being lent to her by God, to whom she feverishly prays. Moreover, after the deed is done she receives no praise for fighting and is completely forgotten due to the presence of the male bravery shown by the warriors; instead, the poem praises her for her beauty, virtuousness and belief.

English literature of Middle Ages also uses the same repertoire of functions as are found in Old English literature, and in a sense it even narrows down the female characteristics, but it also gives the female characters their own voices and gives them sufficient place for expression (though still less than what is currently common), which gave them distinct individuality. What is meant by narrowing down the female characteristics; is the influence of the cult of Mary, which idealized the femininity of the female characters. This was greatly employed by the high literature, such as the romance. Here, the female characters where not only beautiful and obedient but also ideal in all other ways which made them seem almost divine. Still, some tales give women a more active role, such as in the *Wife of Bath's Tale,* where they have a change to speak for themselves and influence the men around them.

To summarize, the most repeated portrayal of a positive female character in early English literature is that of a woman which is primarily beautiful (or gifted with attributes which make her seem desirable in an earthly way to male characters), endowed with Christian virtues, such as obedience, kindness or chastity and requiring assistance and support from other characters in order to perform an action. Likewise, a more negative female character (the seductress…) is primarily beautiful but does not always require support. Also rather than possessing virtues like kindness and chastity, they make full use of their sexuality and are driven by male associated qualities, such as ambition. These characteristics continue to be used in contemporary literature as well, and there is not much evidence of decline in these character traits.

1.3   Hero as opposed to a heroine

It was already noted that female characters function in a completely different way from their male counterparts. For the same reason, it would be illogical to expect a heroine to function in a same way a hero does, but there are different views on this as well. Referring back to Vladimir Propp's image of hero, as a central character which sets on a quest (and fulfills certain tasks and actions during the process), it is of no importance whether a character is female or not. Jill Savitt's separation of women based on their characteristics is of negligible significance when deciding whether a female character can even be considered a heroine. Though her archetypes tend to be passive which is not a quality commonly associated with heroes.

Another possibility of defining a hero or a heroine is elaborated by Joseph Campbell, who says that, "The hero is a man of self-achieved submission. But submission to what? That precisely is the riddle that today we have to ask ourselves and that is everywhere the primary virtue and historic deed of the hero to have solved"[17]. Campbell avoids a direct answer as to what this virtue is, but one line of his reasoning connects with the willingness of sacrifice, only not of life but of power. Both heroes and villains in fantasy possess extraordinary power, but the hero willingly limits his own to avoid being 'corrupted' by it (for example, Galadriel in *The Lord of the Rings* refuses to accept the ring as its power could make her evil).

There are several dictionary definitions of a modern hero and of a modern heroine. It is usually stated that a heroine is only a female equivalent of a hero; however, even though they are similar in many aspects, they are not completely synonymous terms. One definition of a hero calls him "a persona which is the subject of the tale,"[18] though this definition excludes all other supporting characters, many of which also perform heroic acts and share similar qualities. A heroine is also defined as a "central female character […] one whom the reader or audience is intended to support or admire"[19]. In the sense of them both being central characters, these

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[17] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pg. 6
[18] *oed.com*. Web. 28 July. 2014
[19] *oed.com*. Web. 25 Jan. 2015

definitions correspond to Vladimir Propp's definition of a hero, which does not distinguish based on gender.

The rest of the employed Oxford English Dictionary definitions, however, are concerned with qualities of the characters and seem more limited for heroines. They claim that hero is someone possessing "superhuman strength, courage, ability", "a man distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements,[...] who does brave or noble deeds" and who exhibits "extraordinary bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul, in any course of action, or in connection with any pursuit, work, or enterprise; a man admired and venerated for his achievements and noble qualities."[20] While a heroine is described as "A woman distinguished by the performance of courageous or noble actions; a woman generally admired or acclaimed for her great qualities or achievements" or as "a woman lauded or admired by a specified individual or group."[21]

Here we can see a certain change in tone, a woman is also greatly admired, but the order of qualities and achievements is reversed. As we saw above: heroines are not often connected with male associated qualities such as ambition, firmness, fortitude or strength. Rather they reach their achievements by making full use of their femininity and qualities such as kindness. This may seem as having no significance, but such subtle details continue to reinforce the female stereotypes and continue to enforce the idea of women being a "natural group"[22]. It is precisely the kind of subtle re-establishing of stereotypes which were hinted at by the aforementioned Jill Savitt, and there are many other critics, who also believe that females "have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us."[23]

That women are still approached, in literature, in relation to their stereotypes is an undeniable fact. Due to our male dominated society (where being male is the norm), male characters are characterized by their actions, as opposed to female characters that become characterized primarily by being female. This in itself makes it

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[20] *oed.com*. Web. 28 July. 2014
[21] *oed.com*. Web. 25 Jan. 2015
[22] Monique Wittig, *One Is Not Born A Woman, p. 1*, Zinelibrary.info, Web. 28 Jan. 2015
[23] Monique Wittig, *One Is Not Born A Woman*, p. 1, Zinelibrary.info, Web. 208 Jan. 2015

incredibly difficult for female characters to try and assert themselves and oppose these approaches.

It is one of the reasons why contemporary female characters often adopt male characteristics. The problem is that some contemporary writers take this to the extreme, creating characters which are female only by virtue of their biological gender, though those are, of course, a minority.

Yet it is not always necessary to go to such extremes; currently it is quite common to make more realistic characters by combining both male and female characteristics, so it is possible to find female role-models who still keep certain aspects of their femininity. One example of this trend was mentioned in an article by Suzanne Moore, where she focused on Katniss Everdeen from the series *The Hunger Games* as well as on women role models in general.

According to Moore, Katniss can be considered a role model for our times as she is "a young woman who is not defined by her relationship to men"[24] but by being 'resilient', 'strong', 'vulnerable' and 'smart' which Moore considers a significant innovation to the "roll-call of politically correct heroines"[25] which we had until now. Of course, Moore admits that there have been 'though' and 'independent' female role models to be found, but those are few and currently there was even a rising trend of emphasizing the feminine side of heroines, such as "Twilight's mopey and passive Bella Swan."[26]

That female characters are continuously observed and debated on, in terms of their femininity or their lack of it, is reflected by many aspects of feminine description employed by contemporary authors, as they always have to react to these problems when creating female characters, even when they try to avoid conforming to them. Overall, in contemporary society, it is immensely difficult to craft a believable female character without needing to conform to feminist or stereotypical notions of what a woman should be.

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[24] Suzanne Moore, "*Why The Hunger Games' Katniss Everdeen is a role model for our times*", The Guardian. com, 29. Jan.2015
[25] Suzanne Moore, "*Why The Hunger Games' Katniss Everdeen is a role model for our times*", The Guardian.com, 29. Jan.2015
[26] Suzanne Moore, "*Why The Hunger Games' Katniss Everdeen is a role model for our times*", The Guardian.com, 29. Jan.2015

Looking at it this way, there arise several highly important questions which require consideration. We need to state what is meant to be considered as an exemplary or revolutionary female character: are we to acknowledge anyone who diverges, even slightly, from one or any of the female archetypes mentioned above as revolutionary, or do we search for female characters that deliberately chose to adopt masculine features? And is it even possible for a contemporary female character to be exemplary or revolutionary or does the dictation of the feminist and post feminist era force the women to become entirely masculine in order to become innovative?

These questions are immensely difficult to answer, so for the course of the thesis we will settle for the following guidelines: an original or revolutionary female character is such that she does not fall directly into any of the female archetypes and in terms of character, purpose and values has no direct precedent. As it is debatable whether such a character exists, when we will be analyzing the texts in chapter two we will mostly discuss the extent to which a character diverges from the female stereotype and to set a line beyond which a female character is exemplary; the character must retain her femininity and present herself in such way that would be objectively perceived as diverging from the stereotypical form.

Moreover, in the course of the thesis we have a limited set of analyzed works, which only allow us to get a general idea of the extent of stereotyping which is employed in the portrayal of contemporary female characters. However, from the theories and works mentioned in this chapter, it is possible to conclude that while there are exceptions, overall, contemporary female characters are strongly subjected to blunt sexual stereotypes which cannot be completely avoided.

Chapter 2 – Character Analysis

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on analyzing concrete female characters in selected works of contemporary high fantasy. The selected texts are; *The Lord of the Rings* from J. R. R. Tolkien, *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula LeGuin, and *A Game of Thrones* by George Martin. Of course, it must seem overly ambitious to form a generalization about the traits of female characters in contemporary fantasy based only upon an analysis of few characters from three authors, but that is not our aim. As was stated in the previous chapter, it is possible to find exemplary and revolutionary female characters in contemporary fantasy as their range of roles and functions broadened to some extent, but those characters are marginal in number. A number of critics (several mentioned in the first chapter) also agree on this point and so, rather than as proof, this chapter functions to illustrate their findings in practice on these acknowledged classics of high fantasy.

The aforementioned texts and authors were chosen for several reasons. The first reason is that the texts cover the whole time span from WW II until the present and are spaced continually through it. *The Lord of the Rings* covers the years from 1937 until 1955 (1937 is the year when *The Hobbit* was published, but it was already then that Tolkien started writing *The Fellowship of the Ring,* though the actual publishing dates are 1954 to 1955). Ursula LeGuin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* series is longer, consisting of six books, and she started writing it in 1968 and continued until 2001. The same applies for George Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, which is still not finished but presently consists of five books published from 1996 until the present with two more books pending.

As the series are extensive, only the first books from each will be analyzed, this is to avoid an overly large time gap between the books from the same author, as we are not trying to analyze changes in the style of individual authors. This is more

relevant in the case of LeGuin's as, even she herself, states that towards her later years (while writing the continuation of the *Earthsea* trilogy) her style changed drastically and she began to "write as a woman."[27]

It is interesting that she said that she started to "write as a woman"[28] seventeen years after writing *The Farthest Shore*, especially considering the fact that *The Tombs of Atuan* is written from a female point of view. Le Guin states that in order to write from a woman's point of view she had to write from "the point of view of the powerless, the disempowered."[29] As will be shown in the *Earthsea* section of the chapter, this statement is rather confusing, as precisely this point of view is employed when Le Guin deals with her female characters in the first two books of the *Earthsea* series. She gives them the illusion of power, but as the story progresses she makes it evident that they are powerless on their own. Moreover, this statement is also confusing in that she claims that what made her start writing as a woman was in part her experience and in part the "rebirth of feminism"[30], which should have motivated her to make her female characters stronger and more independent, rather than the opposite.

All texts chosen are classic works of high fantasy and come from well-known and respected authors. What's more, each author approaches female characters in a different manner: Tolkien basing them on historical precedents, LeGuin on stereotyping of seemingly powerful women and Martin on the avoidance of any distinctions (save for the biological) between genders. This allows for a clearer portrayal of the changes occurring in the analyzed time span.

2.2 *The Lord of the Rings*

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[27] Ursula Le Guin, "Chronicles of Earthsea", *TheGuardian.com*, March 12, 2015
[28] Ursula Le Guin, "Chronicles of Earthsea", *TheGuardian.com*, March 12, 2015
[29] Ursula Le Guin, "Chronicles of Earthsea", *TheGuardian.com*, March 12, 2015
[30] Ursula Le Guin, "Chronicles of Earthsea", *TheGuardian.com*, March 12, 2015

The first series to be analyzed is J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings.* When observing *The Lord of the Rings,* we do not find any lead female characters, though there is "the occasional heroine"[31], which is an improvement from *The Hobbit,* where there were "no women in the story at all."[32] There are only three women of any importance: Arwen, Galadriel and Eowyn. Yet while all of them are, in a certain sense, in a position of power (for example, Galadriel being the Lady of Lorien and a powerful sorceress), they all, to a great extent, fulfill their stereotypical female roles.

Before focusing solely on the characters themselves, it is necessary to first examine the author and the time, in which the texts were written, as such context needs to be taken into account when making the final analysis of the female characters. Tolkien first started writing about Middle-earth during the time of the WWII, which was a time when feminism was on the rise but did not have a long history; this was mirrored by the literature which did not exhibit strong or unique female role models. Moreover, Tolkien was not even trying to take inspiration from his contemporary culture, but from Old English literature and culture, as he wanted to write a "serious work of mythology"[33]. This is evident in his portrayal of female characters, which are neither original nor independent in that they are influenced by historical precedents and were never intended to have any major part in the texts.

2.1.1 Galadriel

In *The Lord of the Rings* Galadriel is portrayed as a beautiful object of admiration perceived almost as a goddess, much like women in chivalric romances, as she is both "grave and beautiful"[34] and perceived as one of the "mighty kings"[35]. Her charm is such that even Gimli who, as a dwarf has little love for the elven-folk, claims

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[31]Christopher Wrigley, *Return of the hero,* p. 36
[32]Christopher Wrigley, *Return of the hero,* p. 37
[33] Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien Biography*, p. 168
[34] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 373
[35] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 373

that she is "above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!"[36] and to Frodo she appears as so "wise and fearless and fair"[37] that he offers her the one ring. She also functions as an "ideal mother"[38] both for her people and to Frodo.

Yet Galadriel is more than just a stereotypical beauty. The first time she is mentioned is in reference to her power and knowledge. Once the company meets the wood elves, they must be taken "before the Lord and the Lady. They shall judge you, to hold you or give you leave, as they will."[39] When the company is allowed to wander 'free' it is only because "the Lady knows who and what is each member of your Company."[40] Upon the arrival to Cerin Amroth, everyone is overtaken by its beauty and the 'feel' of the place where there can be no 'stain', 'sickness' or 'deformity' and which makes them feel to be in a 'dream'. When Sam voices these feelings, Haldir informs him that he feels "the power of the Lady of Galadhirm"[41].

Galadriel is even placed above Celeborn, in a specific sense. Even though they both greet the guests together, Celeborn being the one who holds the conversation, and she continuously praising him, calling him the "wisest of the Elves of Middle-earth, and the giver of gifts beyond the power of kings"[42] and in this way acknowledges him as being above her. Furthermore, she acts as a wife of a king according to the Old English literary tradition, following her lord and bringing a cup to him and all the company. Yet she is far more informed about the Company and about the things taking place in Lothlorien. Not only that, she is the one who knows what "was and is, and in part also what shall be"[43] and with her knowledge she was the first to summon the White Council and, had her original plans been followed, the entire War of the Ring might have been avoided.

She is also shown (in *The Lord of the Rings*) to be both a purely good and incredibly powerful sorceress, bearing one of the three rings, Nenya. Not only does her

[36] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 375

[37] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 384

[38] Christopher Wrigley, *Return of the hero,* p. 42

[39] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 366

[40] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 368

[41] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 369

[42] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 376

[43] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 381

power cover the whole territory of Lothloriel but she has strong power of telepathy and her own 'mirror' magic, "the magic of Galadriel"[44], which is powerful and pure unlike that of Sauron, to whom she compares it. When she states that she is able to "perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind […] and he gropes ever to see me and my thought. But still the door is closed!"[45], she shows that she is actually powerful enough to compete with him, which is far more than is suggested by any of the other characters.

Yet while she possess such power, she chooses not to use it except to protect her people, she even refuses to give any council and try to sway the will of anyone. It is another way in which she keeps herself 'good', though she must fight temptation to remain such. This temptation is offered by Frodo, when he tries to give her the ring, and for a moment she appears "beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful"[46], yet she passes her test and remains herself by refusing it.

Using Savitt's criteria, Galdriel repeatedly reinforces her Mother position. Though a biological mother role is not overly stressed in *The Lord of the Rings,* she acts as a mother to her people. She is 'kind', 'comforting', 'nurturing' and 'supportive', as such role suggests.

Using Propp's criteria, Galadriel clearly functions as a donor, for she gifts the Company with elven garments, lembas, ropes, boats and a guide. More than that, she gives special gifts to all members of the Company, the most notable of which are Aragorn's Elessar and Frodo's phial with the light of Earendil's star. Even long after the meeting with Galadriel, the Company often praises her and her gifts.

In historical terms Galadriel is greatly influenced by both Old and Middle English literature. Her portrayal, as that of a perfect beauty, is an obvious influence of the Cult of Mary employed mostly in romances but she is also given a greater deal of freedom and power and she acts as the equal to her partner, though she openly acknowledges his power and gives him the dominant position. This is more akin to the women in Old English epic: Galadriel even performs the same actions as were

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[44] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 381
[45] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 384
[46] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 385

expected of them, such as offering a drink herself to all the members of the company, letting her partner speak or act first and referring to him as her 'better'.

2.1.2   Arwen

Arwen is also portrayed as a beautiful, noble object of desire in much the same way following the script of a romance, as can be seen in the first scene with her appearance where she is described as "the likeness of Luthien had come on earth again, and she was called […] the Evenstar of her people"[47], and it was said that "such loveliness in living thing Frodo had never seen before nor imagined in his mind"[48]. But while her beauty is elaborated upon, otherwise she is not given nearly as much space as are the other women of the story, nor does she have any lines for speech. There is little more said of her, except a mention that she married king Aragorn and that Gimly and Eomer argued whether she or Galadriel is the most beautiful of women. This is partly because Arwen was not intended to play any role in *Lord of the Rings*. She was added latter and the *Tale of Aragorn and Arwen* was written to explain their attraction later.

Yet, while Arwen is not given much space for self-expression, she can be easily classified into any of the categories mentioned in chapter one. In terms of Savitt's distinction she falls into the category of the Virgin, being as she is a highly 'passive', 'angelic' form waiting throughout the tale to become a bride for Aragorn. The same reason qualifies her in Propp's distinction as Princess - a passive character existing only as a prize for Aragorn once the quest succeeds and he becomes the king. Arwen is also easily classified in terms of a historical precedent, being a perfect example of the influence of the Cult of Mary, as she is described as an impossibly perfect, almost divine ideal of a female beauty.

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[47] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 343
[48] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 243

2.1.3   Eowyn

The only woman who strays from the romance portrayal is Eowyn, who is, on one hand, a heroine in the sense that she actively joins the fight and at the end of her 'quest' defeats the Witch-king of Angmar, Lord of the Nazgul. On the other hand, however, she for the most part fulfills her role as a daughter and shield-maiden of Rohan and acts actively only once so she functions much the same as the cross-dressed women in Renaissance drama, where they cross-dress in order to achieve a single feat yet otherwise are typical representatives of their sex.

The first time Eowyn is seen; she is but a figure behind Theoden's throne and is barely mentioned in the following three pages. When she is at last addressed by name, she is referred to as 'sister-daughter' and is told to leave. But this is followed by a detailed paragraph of Aragorn's perception of her as "fair, fair and cold"[49] and "strong she seemed and stern as steel, a daughter of kings"[50], the last three characteristics of which hint at her not truly feminine nature. She is a still extremely young but she has seen much and so is overly mature. He experiences caused her to fear being 'caged' and inspired extreme loyalty to her family, which is what prompts her to join the battle.

Eowyn is not easily characterized by Savitt's categories, as she is one of the few women characters who "are given the strength and courage to resist"[51] the limits of their role. However, when she defeats the Lord of Nazgul, Eowyn, according to Pearson's and Pope's categories, would qualify as a Warrior as she "initiates action that affect the world"[52]

In terms of Propp's distinction she migrates between the role of the helper and that of a hero. This is because, while she is mainly a supporting character, she embarks on a quest of her own to fight alongside her father and confronts the witch king of Angmar. As Propp built his distinction upon fairytales he did not contemplate the idea

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[49] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 537
[50] J.R.R, Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* pg. 537
[51] Jill Savitt,.*Female Stereotypes in Literature*, yale.edu, web. 15. Jan. 2015
[52] Carl Pearson, Katherine Pope, *Who am I This time*, Pg. 243

of a character switching between roles, but considering the length and relative complexity of the text in comparison to identically structured fairytales, it is logical to assume that it is possible. This can also be supported by the fact that when *The Lord of Rings* is printed in three texts, the trilogy can be treated as three different stories, in which case Eowyn acts as helper in the second book but as hero in the third.

In terms of historical precedent, she is also more complicated than the others, though less than it appears at first glance. Concentrating on her in *The Return of the King* she does not seem to act like a stereotypical woman. She disobeys orders, dresses as a man, joins the battle and defeats a formidable opponent, which none of the surrounding men can do. Yet while this seems to stray completely from our perception of women in early English literature, it is not the case. Cross-dressing is commonly employed in Renaissance drama (such as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*). As for her physical fighting, that is not without a precedent either, though it was not a common female role in England, and we can find mention of a female warriors as early as the 10th century in the poem *Judith.*

2.3 *A Wizard of Earthsea*

The two books analyzed in this section are the first of the *Earthsea* series from Ursula LeGuin. Originally she wrote it as an *Earthsea* trilogy but after a nearly twenty year period she continued with several other novels. She herself admits that there was a great change to her writing during this period, stating that during those seventeen years "feminism was reborn […] and I learned to write as a woman, not as an honorary, or imitation, man."[53] (though it seems a bit contradicting to her following statement that in order to achieve a woman's point of view she had to describe the world from "the point of view of the powerless, the disempowered"[54]). Having this direct admission of the author, we are alerted to the notion that the presentation of all female characters in the first two books of the series will be affected by female

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[53] Ursula Le Guin, "Chronicles of Earthsea", theguardian.com, March 12, 2015
[54] Ursula Le Guin, "Chronicles of Earthsea", theguardian.com, March 12, 2015

stereotypes or assumptions on how a woman should be portrayed, though it seems more evident in the first book of the series.

The first book *A Wizard of Earthsea* revolves around a wizard named Ged, and is almost completely devoid of female characters. There are several mentions of beautiful women who have no actual purpose, one of whom Ged attempts to call from the dead. Otherwise there are two older women: Ged's aunt who helps him discover his talent for magic and an originally unnamed woman on an abandoned island who gifts him with the half of the ring of Erreth-Akbe, both of whom appear only in a single section of the text. All the women in the text appear only shortly and have little effect on the tale itself, with the exception of an enchantress Serret who appears multiple times.

2.3.1   Lady Serret

Lady Serret is first shown as a no more than a girl, yet even then she manages to influence Ged and lead him astray from his path, presumably under the instruction of her mother, who is an enchantress as well. She reappears latter in the text as Lady Serret, the wife of Lord Benderesk, who tries to seduce Get with the power of the stone Terrenon. She first appears as a "very ugly"[55] to Ged, but her power over him is not caused by her beauty but rather by her goading him and his need to exceed her expectations. When she appears the second time, she is transformed into a "beautiful woman dressed to match her beauty […] like the white new moon"[56] and bears little resemblance to the girl she was before but she still uses the same technique, goading Gad and flattering him so that his pride would force him to do her bidding and talk to the Terrenon.

She is an obvious Seductress, using her charms in order to manipulate Ged, though she uses Ged's pride to try and control him, more than her beauty. As was

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[55] Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Kindle 261
[56] Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Kindle 1498

already mentioned, as a child she was not even considered pretty. But when she turns into a woman, she gains other female charms, which she uses to try and trick Ged and her husband to rule them, as her husband says, "both by your beauty and use the Terrenon to your own ends[57]".

Her function is that of a villain, even though she is not a main villain like Ged's shadow, as she appears only twice and is herself an instrument of greater forces - first her enchantress mother, then the Terranon.

Historically, she is many precedents and is quite stereotypical. She is beautiful when she is older and seemingly more powerful but even then she is first characterized by her husband. The same occurs when she is a child and is characterized by her father, the Lord of Re Albi, and mother (an enchantress who uses her as tool against Ged). While she seems to have power, once her nature is exposed she becomes dependent on others, such as when she needs Ged to find the gate to escape her castle. She functions much like the seductress in medieval romances, such as the lady in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where she directly confront the hero and tries to make him do her bidding by both her beauty and wit.

The second book of the series, *The Tombs of Atuan,* is written from a more female perspective, even if LeGuin states that she was still not writing as a 'woman' at this time. While Ged remains as one of the main characters, the real focus is on Tenar and her nearly exclusively female community of priestesses. Yet while the book is set in an almost exclusively female environment, there are far fewer characters than in *A Wizard of Earthsea* and again we have only a single woman which truly affects the story and who can be observed: Tenar. There are several secondary female characters: Tenar's mother, Penthe, Thar and Kossil. While these characters are important for the story, they appear relatively infrequently and offer little possibility of analyzing their character.

2.3.2   Tenar

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[57] Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Kindle 1516

The main character is Tenar, whom we observe from childhood until maturity. We first see her as a vulnerable child who is ripped from her parents and kept in absolute isolation from the world and partial isolation from the rest of her community. The illusion of power and responsibly (given to her by the nameless gods and the community) makes her act cruelly, but once she realizes that she, in fact, has no power whatsoever, she starts to behave meekly and dependently.

Based on Savitt's distinction she seems to have the most of the negative characteristics of an Old Maid (being pitied, unhappy, cold and alienated from the real society), partially combined with some characteristics of a Virgin (chaste, religious, and ignorant of worldly life).

Using Propp's characterization, she seems most likely to be a Princess. It seems slightly odd, as a princess is usually a passive role and Tenar is introduced as a character that is to achieve absolute power over her community, but her situation is revealed to be the opposite, with her actually being a captive of the Dark God's whom she serves. After realizing her situation she requires a male hero to save her, following which she becomes completely dependent on him.

Except for the cruel exercise of power, she is a highly stereotypical character. Again we are faced with an extremely beautiful female. She has no actual skills and when robbed of her illusion of power she becomes dependent on a stronger male figure "like a child"[58]. She never thinks or acts for herself, and except on a whim not to kill Ged quickly, all her behavior is affected by other figures - first the elder priestesses and the nameless gods and later, Ged.

2.4 *A Game of Thrones*

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[58] Ursula Le Guin, *Tombs of Atuan* , pg. 159

A Game of Thrones presents a wide array of female characters who continue to evolve all throughout the long series. Due to the series' length, however, we will only analyze the beginnings of a few of the important female characters, who survive beyond the span of the first three books.

George Martin himself believes that he strives for the most realistic portrayal of characters, distinguishing between "clichés" which "ultimately harmed the genre"[59] and the "universal themes"[60] which cannot be avoided. Strictly in terms of female characters, when asked how he manages to write them 'really well and really different', he replied by saying that he always considered "women to be people"[61] and that he writes them as having the exact same conditions, motivations and desires as the men, only taking into account their physiology.

His series should show the most unique and revolutionary characters, both by the virtue of his own admission and by the fact that they are the most recent from the analyzed texts, written after the 'rebirth of feminism', which should have influenced the portrayal of female characters significantly.

There is a great number of female characters to be found in *A Game of Thrones,* many of which play an important role, however only a few major ones shall be discussed. They are: Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, and Sansa and Arya Stark. Yet while we are not referring to all the female characters found in the series, there are still more characters discussed for this book than for the previous two authors. This is done for several reasons. First of all *A Game of Thrones* is longer than the first two books of the *Earthsea* series combined, so it is logical that there are more and complex female characters. George Martin is also employs roughly an equal number of both male and female characters, which is a far greater ratio than that found in Tolkien and Le Guin.

It is worth noting that the female characters mentioned could all be characterized as Warriors based on Pearson's and Pope's criteria, as they all "transcend the limitations of their heroine roles and those revolutionaries who reject

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[59] Strombo, "*George R.R. Martin On Strombo: Full Extended Interview*", YouTube.com, March 11, 2015
[60] Strombo, "*George R.R. Martin On Strombo: Full Extended Interview*", YouTube.com, March 11, 2015
[61] Strombo, "*George R.R. Martin On Strombo: Full Extended Interview*", YouTube.com, March 11, 2015

those roles"[62]. The one exception to this is Sansa Stark, who only becomes more 'active' in the later books.

2.4.1 Cersei Lannister

The first woman of power the reader is introduced to is undoubtedly the queen, Cersei Lannister. She is beautiful, as a mirror image to her twin brother, "tall and golden, with flashing green eyes and a smile that cut like a knife"[63] but she is also "cold as an ice sculpture"[64]. A description of her character is given by Lena Headley, an actress who plays Cersei in the *Game of Thrones* series, in an HBO character feature where she states that Cersei's "quest is to stay in control, no matter what that might mean to her or to anyone else"[65]; she keeps everything "behind closed doors and lets only those know who she trust"[66] and she trusts only those who are "faithful and loyal to her politics"[67].

In terms of Savitt's role distinctions, she is a mix between a Mother and Seductress, though she is more active than Savitt's roles presuppose. The only powerful positive emotional attachment she has is to her children, and she is willing to do anything in order to protect them. Yet while she excels in her mother role she has few attributes of a wife, and instead enjoys using the advantages of her sex to manipulate the men around her, using her "dominating […] harsh [...and] driven"[68] characteristics.

Vladimir Propp's functional distinction, however, is almost completely unusable to analyze Cersei to any greater depth, as his distinction is based on stereotypical

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[62] Carol Pearson, Katherine Pope, *Who am I this time,* Pg.243

[63] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 36

[64] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 37

[65] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Cersei Lannister (HBO)",* youtube.com, Web. March 14. 2015

[66] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Cersei Lannister (HBO)",* youtube.com, Web. March 14. 2015

[67] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Cersei Lannister (HBO*)", youtube.com, Web. March 14. 2015

[68] Jill Savitt, "*Female Stereotypes in Literature"*, yale.edu, Web. 15. Jan. 2015

functions of simple characters in a clearly defined black-and-white setting. The role which would probably seem most accurate is the role of the villain, bearing some similarity to an 'evil queen'; however this description has its limitations. While she is responsible for violence and murderer, it is mostly for the protection of herself and her children, which in itself is not an act of villain. In terms of family, she is truly cruel only to her younger brother Tyrion, yet in the course of the first book she manages to coexist with him without much difficulty.

As her nature is truly complex it is difficult to point out a single historical precedent, but it would be equally unreasonable to assume she is completely original. In terms of her appearance she follows the stereotype of female beauty (though blond hair and light eyes were commonly associated with positive characters). Her nature is more unique. She is unhappy and manipulative, capable of almost anything in order to keep her control over others; furthermore, she continuously evolves and presents the readers with a wide array of ever-developing characteristics, making her more realistic but also more difficult to categorize.

2.4.2   Daenerys Targaryen

Daenerys Targaryen undergoes the greatest character change of all the characters in the series. The first time we see her she is a beautiful obedient child with no power over her life, albeit intelligent and observant. From the start, she is used as a tool by her brother Viserys whom she knows "better than to question"[69] as she is afraid of 'waking the dragon' - in the beginning she is afraid of almost anything. Slowly she builds her confidence once she becomes the Khaleesi of the Dothraki and starts to reassert herself, fist as good wife striving to Khal Drogo, then as an actual queen who is

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[69] George Martin, A *Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire* , pg. 21

the leader of her people, proving to everyone that she is an "incredibly strong powerful woman"[70] who "can only trust herself"[71] to reach her destiny.

The beginnings of her change start after receiving Khal's gift when she "forgot to be afraid"[72] and becomes filled by "a daring she had never known"[73]. When that daring is appreciated and she is treated kindly by her husband and people, she begins to learn "to talk like a queen"[74] and 'feel' like one. From then on she continues to grow stronger, first defying Viserys and losing her fear, then achieving the same level as Khal and commanding all of his Dothraki. Those that remain with her after his death become "hers now, today and tomorrow and forever, hers as they never been Drogo's."[75], marking the end of her first transition from a frightened child into a true Khaleesi.

Daenerys combines the characteristics of all of Savitt's roles, being Virginal in the sense that she "brings life and nurtures it"[76] and becoming the subject of near "worship"[77] of her people. She also fulfills a Mother role, being a mother both for her people, who are the only ones with whom she can "have a relationship"[78] as they are "her everything"[79] and for her dragons as "in her eyes, they really are her children"[80]. She also shares some of the qualities of a Seductress, being attractive, "sensually pleasure producing"[81] and using this trait to manipulate men.

As opposed to Cersei her function in the first book is clearly outlined as that of a hero. Even though the first impression of her makes her seem like a princess, who is

[70] GameofThrones, *"Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Daenerys Targaryen (HBO)"*, *youtube.com*, Web. March 14. 2015

[71] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Season 2 - Character Feature- Daenerys Targaryen (HBO)*", youtube.com, Web. March 14. 2015

[72] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 74

[73] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 74

[74] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 154

[75] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 553

[76] Jill Savitt, *"Female Stereotypes in Literature"*, *yale.edu*, Web. 15. Jan. 2015

[77] Jill Savitt, *"Female Stereotypes in Literature"*, *yale.edu*, Web. 15. Jan. 2015

[78] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Season 2 - Character Feature- Daenerys Targaryen (HBO)*", *youtube.com*, Web. March 14. 2015

[79] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Season 2 - Character Feature- Daenerys Targaryen (HBO)*", youtube.com, Web. March 14. 2015

[80] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Season 2 - Character Feature- Daenerys Targaryen (HBO)*", *youtube.com*, Web. March 14. 2015

[81] Jill Savitt, *"Female Stereotypes in Literature"*, *yale.edu*, Web. 15. Jan. 2015

little more than a great prize with her beauty and birthright, she soon begins to reassert herself.

In terms of a clear historical precedent we are faced with a similar problem we encountered with the character of Cersei, and much more so as Daenerys has an even more rapidly changing nature, which results in an almost completely different character by the end of the first book, and her later absolute independence from men, is also not highly common in female characters.

2.4.3 Sansa Stark

Sansa Stark is a highly passive character. She is shown as the ideal daughter of the nobility, though she has a tendency towards peevishness due to her status of a child. Sophie Turner, an actress who plays Sansa in the HBO series, says that "Sansa has a very independent view on the world"[82] as she is "very unaware of what happens"[83]. Sansa also undergoes changes during the series, gradually losing her innocence and questioning her views of the world, though the effects of these changes do not truly manifest themselves in the first books of the series.

She is clearly a Virgin by Savitt's distinction, being "chaste, innocent and ignorant of worldly things"[84]. While her beauty and birthright, which make her desirable to other male characters, combined with her desire to be likable should suggest some traits of a Seductress, she maintains this role from the start of the series (though she finally adopts some of the Seductress traits in the later books).

Her function is equally clear as being a princess. She displays little of her own initiative and is considered a fair prize for the other characters. Likewise, it could be

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[82] GameofThrones, "Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Sansa Stark (HBO)", *youtube.com*, Web. March 14. 2015
[83] GameofThrones, "Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Sansa Stark (HBO)", *youtube.com*, Web. March 14. 2015
[84] Jill Savitt, *"Female Stereotypes in Literature"*, *yale.edu*, Web. 15. Jan. 2015

said that she becomes abducted by a villain and needs to be rescued, though such a rescue is offered only later in the series.

Unlike the two previous women, Sansa draws heavily on historical stereotypes. She is beautiful, docile and resigned to her fate. She possesses the virtues of kindness and chastity which are rare among the other characters. Yet even she starts to 'play the game of thrones' in her own way, trying to manipulate people by saying what she thinks they want to hear, though she is not greatly successful in her endeavor.

2.4.4 Arya Stark

Arya Stark is a confident child who knows exactly what she wants and how she can try to get it. She always "stands out a bit"[85] and is "a bit different"[86], which is why she has such a close relationship with her half-brother as he is also an outcast. From the start readers are continuously reminded that she acts and looks more like a boy, taking "after her lord father"[87] with her short hair, "hands of a blacksmith"[88] "needing refinement"[89], which heavily foreshadows her future action. Like the other characters she changes, though not significantly during the first book. She has been 'willful' and tomboyish from the beginning, finding no fault in fighting, but she starts to change, becoming harsher after exposure to violence against those she cares about, starting with Mycah and ending with her father.

Due to her male characteristics, which give her the strength and courage to resist the limits of her female role, she does not completely fall into Savitt's categories, though she possesses some characteristics of the Old Maid, as she is not endowed with beauty and is seen by others as slightly odd.

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[85] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Arya Stark (HBO)*", youtube.com, Web. March 14. 2015
[86] GameofThrones, "*Game of Thrones: Character Feature- Arya Stark (HBO)*", youtube.com, Web. March 14. 2015
[87] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 49
[88] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 48
[89] George Martin, *A Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire*, pg. 45

Her function is that of a hero, as one of the plotlines centers around her and as she sets on and completes different quests, determined to fight the villains.

There were cases of tomboyish heroines in the more modern examples of fantasy, but she still manages to be quite original. While endowed with birthrights and living in a distinguished family, she does not truly suffer when her comforts are taken from her. Furthermore, Arya shows remarkable ability to adapt and surprising ruthlessness and calculating personality when dealing with her foes, which are more than surprising for a girl her age with her background. From the start it is clear that she is a very strong and independent character, which is only a more recent possibility for a female character in fantasy literature, though we can find other examples of this phenomenon (ex. characters such as Lyra in *The Golden Compass* series or Hermione Granger or Professor McGonagall in *Harry Potter*).

It was shown in the previous chapter that contemporary female characters have changed in several key regards while still largely conforming to their gender roles and stereotypes. Due to this it could be difficult to decide whether contemporary female characters truly have become exemplary or revolutionary, as there are valid arguments both for and against this claim. For this reason, a questionnaire was made to analyze the beliefs and opinions of a selection of readers of contemporary fantasy. This was in order to establish if readers are aware of the gender stereotypes imposed on the heroines and other female characters and, furthermore, what leads readers to perceive female characters as unique or revolutionary.

3.1   The Questionnaire

For the purpose of learning what are average readers' attitudes and opinions concerning female characters in contemporary fantasy a questionnaire was created. It was partially formatted as "yes/no" and partially as a "free response" questionnaire. It was aimed at active readers of fantasy and distributed to students ranging from their last year of high-school up to the fourth year of university.

The questions were constructed not to measure knowledge of fantasy but reader's opinions. The questionnaire was designed to establish if readers feel that female characters in contemporary fantasy are subjected to stereotypes, or whether they even perceive the stereotypes. Also, it attempted to learn if the respondents believed that there was a change in the depiction of female characters in contemporary fantasy. Moreover, respondents were asked to make general statements on why or why not are the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones* 'original'.

3.2   Summary of Results

Of the group surveyed (high-school and college students) there were a total of eighty-six responses. Out of these, seventy one percent agreed that modern heroines are stereotypical and fifty nine percent believe that the female characters have not changed significantly in modern fantasy. However, several of these respondents agreed that there was a change in that female characters became slightly more realistic and independent, but they did not see this as a 'significant' change. The realistic and independent characteristics were also seen as the 'significant' change by the readers who indicated that a change had occurred.

When asked to name the most common attributes of a female character and to write the most notable characteristics of their favourite heroine, respondents gave similar replies to both of these questions. Even though there was great variety in the responses, three characteristics were listed most frequently: beauty, bravery and intellect. Beauty was listed as the most common female attribute (forty responses) with bravery (thirty-six responses) and intelligence (twenty-eight responses) following. There was slightly greater variability in response to the respondents favourite heroines' most notable qualities, but the same characteristics as before were the most common, only in reverse order with intelligence (thirty-two responses) being the most notable followed by bravery (twenty responses) and beauty (sixteen responses).

Yet while the respondents mostly agreed with the previous general observations, they were not so uniform when asked to grade the originality on concrete examples of heroines in *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire.* When determining if the female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are original, the respondents were equally divided – one half claiming that *The Lord of the Rings* presented only 'stock characters' and gave the women only stereotypical 'minor romantic roles', while the other half considered the characters highly original and complex (especially Lady Galadriel). This came as a surprise as one would assume that Eowyn would be seen as the most original as she 'fights like a man' and has 'special characteristics', but while she was specifically mentioned a few times, most

respondents considered Lady Galadriel as the most original in spite of being 'feminine' due her 'regal' character, 'strength' and magical 'power'. To them she seemed as one of the most powerful and unique characters. Another interesting fact was that several people used the same observations as reasons for the heroines being both original and unoriginal.

A similar situation occurred when describing characters from *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where the readers made similar observations of the characters, but thirty seven percent of respondents could not answer either yes or no to their originality, but wrote that it is 'difficult to decide' and that it 'depends on the character' or 'on the point of view'. Forty seven responded that the characters were original and sixteen that they were not. However, they mostly agreed that the female characters started out as 'typical stock characters' which later became more 'complex' and 'realistic', but that their originality came from the 'development' of the 'original roles' they filled. There were several respondents who even compared the heroines with typical fairy-tale characters, much as Propp does, though these comparisons were used only for Cersei and Sansa.

3. 3   Analysis of Results

From the answers, it is evident that the readers are aware of some female stereotypes (such as women being 'beautiful', 'sexualized', 'naive', 'kind' ...) and that they are continually being employed, They are also aware that there were certain changes in the approach to female characters, though they differ in their opinions as to whether the changes were significant.

While the respondents made mostly synonymous observations of the characters, they chose to interpret them in completely different ways, each according to what they considered to be subjectively the most prominent. This was shown most clearly in the questions concerning the heroines in *The Game of Thrones* where, while mostly agreeing that there was a progression from stock characters to those of greater

complexity and originality, some chose to focus only on the initial characteristics which marked them as stock characters and so they perceived them as unoriginal even in the later parts of the series, while others chose to focus on the originality of their developing roles and so marked them as original.

To summarize, readers generally reach the same conclusions as the critics mentioned in the first chapter about the female roles and positions in contemporary fantasy, but they, nevertheless, have very subjective opinions as to what qualities must be employed and, to what extent, to render a heroine 'original'.

3.4   Validity and generalization

The results are for the most part valid, but they are not easy to generalize. There were only eighty-six responses, so there is not enough data for a broad generalization. The respondents had several features in common: they were all relatively young (between 17-25 years of age), were active readers of fantasy, and were also all Czech. On the other hand, they had different educational backgrounds and the responses were given by both men and women. We could possibly make the general statement that the results are true for Czech students, but it would not be valid to make a larger generalization applying to all readers of fantasy.

There was also another potential problem concerning the validity of the responses because it is questionable whether the respondents answered the last four questions of the questionnaire based on their impression of the characters from the books or from the movies/ television series. This is slightly problematic as there are significant differences between the texts and their filmed equivalents. This is especially relevant in *The Lord of the Rings* where the movie version of Arwen is far more active (saving Frodo, outrunning the Nazguls, helping Aragorn from afar and convincing Elrond to have the sword of Narsil re-forged).

There was an attempt to avoid this by specifically stating that the questionnaire is only concerned with women in fantasy literature, but it is doubtful

how many respondents reacted to it. A similar problem occurred in deciding who is an active reader. The respondents were informed beforehand that the questionnaire is aimed at active readers of fantasy; however the decision as to whether they fit this category was left to them.

After the answers were collected and analysed it was also noted that the questionnaire should have possibly included a question about what makes a heroine original, as that seems to be a highly subjective issue to the readers. However, the usefulness of this question was not anticipated as it was assumed that originality would be correlated with the character observations.

3.5   Conclusion

To conclude, it must be said that the readers have a clear idea about typical female characteristics and roles, as well as with the changes occurring in them which correspond to the observations made by a number of critics (some mentioned in chapter one); however, the readers possess different subjective views on the originality of characters regardless of the similarities in their observations. Of course, the results gathered cannot be widely generalized, even if they are sufficiently valid to be of use.   Either way, the questionnaire was not conclusive in determining whether the contemporary female characters truly did become exemplary or revolutionary. It proved that the readers perceived that there were changes in their portrayal and that they became more active and their range of roles widened, but whether they consider this as 'significant' enough to consider them original remains subjective.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

4.1 Summary

The thesis analyzed several contemporary high fantasy texts attempting to portray the changing and constant factors in their female characters to determine whether they are revolutionary or exemplary. We chose to define contemporary high fantasy as texts written after 1945 of the "genre of imaginative fiction involving magic"[90] set into a fictional world that has its own system of laws and rules by which it abides.

Also, it was shown that women were and are continuously forced to conform to certain gender expectations and stereotypes and that they often fill the same range of roles and functions, which is far narrower when compared to that of male characters. It was shown that female characters continuously evolve, albeit more slowly than men, and are gaining greater importance in more modern examples of fantasy literature.

This argument was elaborated in the second chapter where the female characters found in the texts *The Lord of the Rings* from J. R. R. Tolkien, *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula LeGuin, and *A Game of Thrones* by George Martin were analyzed. It was shown that there was significant progress in the approach to female characters, though many of their roles and stereotypes kept repeating. All the female characters throughout the analysis were endowed with extreme physical beauty, with the exception of children (young Serret and Arya Stark) though, if grown, they also reached this given standard. All the women were in some ways subjected to the power of the males and needed to conform to their decisions. Also, active female characters often required male assistance or support.

There were, however, two aspects of female representation which underwent significant changes: the degree of elaboration (characters became more realistically

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[90] *"Fantasy". oxforddictionaries.com,* Web. 28 July. 2014

complex, undergoing a change and reacting to it both physically and mentally) and activeness (female characters featured in increasingly larger portions of the texts and became more integrated into the action). This evolution made female characters appear more realistic and gave them greater importance. Due to this, we could, on one hand, say that due to the changes in approach to literary characters, all the more modern female characters which posses these two characteristics (elaboration of character and activeness) are revolutionary. On the other hand, it could be claimed that female characters have not changed drastically as they keep to their repetitive roles and functions and continue be subjected to stereotypes and gender expectations.

As there were these two possible answers for the hypothesis and it was impossible to make an unbiased decision on which answer should be more valid, the third chapter of the thesis focused on the general public, trying to determine how readers perceive female characters. The results, however, did not aid exceedingly in clarifying the hypothesis. The most that could be said was that while the readers were well aware of both the changes and the stereotypes, there was no clear tendency to choose one position over the other.

To summarize, it was shown that female characters of the fantasy genre reinforce stereotypes and gender expectations, as women in these texts are nearly always beautiful or desirable and, need to either react to the expectations of men or are directly ruled by them. This remains unchanged throughout the history of fantasy literature, and the texts analyzed in chapter two confirm this. In this regard, the genre remains conservative.

However, women in contemporary fantasy gained two characteristics which establish them as different from their historical counterparts. One of these characteristics is dynamism, as the female characters gain importance and become more incorporated into the plotlines and action. We saw the frequency of this increasing even among the three analyzed authors: where Tolkien only partially incorporated a single female character (Eowyn) into the action, LeGuin centered her second book around a female character who mostly avoided acting on her own but

several of her more impulsive acts succeeded in shaping the storyline, and Martin had an equal number of active male and female characters.

Female characters also became more complex. This is partly related to the first change, since being more incorporated into action means that the characters are also given more space and potential to express themselves and evolve. This possibility was not overly visible in *The Lord of the Rings,* where only two female characters were given rather limited space to express their uniqueness, and no event caused them to change radically during the course of the series.

4.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be stressed that it is difficult to determine whether the original hypothesis stating that there were no significant changes in contemporary female characters is true. On one hand, it could be claimed that, due to the change in approach, all the more modern female characters which posses these two characteristics (elaboration of character and activeness) are revolutionary. On the other hand, it could be said that female characters have not changed drastically as they keep to their repetitive roles and functions and continue be subjected to stereotypes and gender expectations.

There were valid arguments both for and against either of these answers; however, both claims were nearly equally well supported and choosing one over the other seemed as only a matter of preference. However, while neither of these possibilities was definitely proven, there were strong indications that a negative answer to the hypothesis could be more plausible.

The trend that contemporary heroines are evolving cannot be disputed, as was seen in both the analysis and the respondent observations. The question is whether the changes are significant enough to render them revolutionary. As terms such as 'significant', 'original' or revolutionary' can be interpreted subjectively, it is difficult to answer this question objectively. However, while the terms or reference here are such

that the hypothesis cannot be proven it can be implied that it is negative and that female characters in contemporary fantasy have indeed changed significantly enough to be seen as revolutionary, and there are several observations which can support this implication.

First of all, from the analysis it was clear that female characters are becoming increasingly more complex, thereby becoming more difficult to characterize using a single pre-determined category. The extreme change was evident even between the texts analyzed in chapter two. Moreover, it is possible to observe these tendencies on a number of other texts in contemporary fantasy. When observing texts such as *The Hunger Games*, *The Golden Compass*, *Neverwhere* and many others, it is easy to see that women in them take new roles, qualities and importance they have lacked in the past. They become the protagonists of the story; leading revolutions, manipulating heroes, leaving on quests and otherwise presenting themselves as key for these texts. And there are many more examples which could be named. It could be speculated that it is texts such as these which hold to key in definitely proving that female characters truly have become revolutionary.

But that is not all in support for a dissenting inference. When observing the questionnaire responses, there is a definite change between the answers commenting upon 'originality' of female characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Game of Thrones.* In *The Lord of the Rings* there were only clear 'yes/no' answers, which were equally divided but, much like in the analysis, there was a great difference between them and the results from *A Game of Thrones.* While only forty-seven percent agreed that the heroines were clearly original, the percentage of those disagreeing also decreased (sixteen percent). So, if we take the remaining thirty-seven percent which were undecided as an indication that the characters are original (as the respondents were undecided because they perceived both the stereotypes and original features which the characters were endowed with, it makes sense to so), we would have eighty-four percent of correspondents agreeing on the existence of revolutionary qualities in the characters, which illustrates a significant rise between the two texts. Of course, these results cannot be generalized to illustrate a difference between early and late contemporary fantasy. However, combined with the analysis, the opinions of the

critics and the undeniable existence of a large number of new female-centered fantasy texts, these results should help in providing a valid reason for inferring that female characters in contemporary fantasy have changed significantly enough to be considered revolutionary.

4.3 Analysis and Further Suggestions

While it has already been stated that the thesis was not able to definitely prove or disapprove the hypothesis, the research was far from fruitless. The thesis succeeded in providing insight into the development and character of female characters in contemporary high fantasy. It established that its heroines are becoming more dynamic, being more involved in the plots and generally acting more opinionated and active. They have also become more complex, as they are given space for self-expression and for cataloging their development throughout the text.

These changes have not gone unnoticed by the readers of the genre. Even if they are still well aware of the gender stereotypes employed by the authors, these two changing factors were sufficient for the readers (at least as far as was indicated by the questionnaire results) to not consider the characters possessing them as unoriginal. In reference to these results it is logical to make a valid claim that female characters in modern contemporary fantasy have changed enough to be viewed as revolutionary, even if they are still to a large extent influenced by gender stereotypes.

Should the research topic be expanded, it could be interesting to focus more on the most modern female-centered texts, such as those mentioned in the section above, as they are more likely to possess the two 'revolutionary' qualities. Also, it could be better to choose more specific criteria for what constitutes an original heroine in the beginning of the thesis. This definition could not be objective; however, it would have made it easier to clearly answer the hypothesis.

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1. Are modern heroines subjected to gender stereotypes?

2. Do you think modern heroines changed significantly?

3. If yes, what do you think is the biggest change?

4. What are the most common attributes of female characters? (write no more than three)

5. What are the most notable characteristics of your favorite heroine? (write no more than three)

6. Are women in *The Lord of the Rings* original?
7. Why?

8. Are women in *A Game of Thrones* original?
9. Why?

Questionnaire Results[91]

Question	YES	NO	UNDECIDED
Are contemporary heroines subjected to gender stereotypes?	83%	17%	0%
Have contemporary heroines changed significantly?	41%	59%	0%
Are women in *The Lord of the Rings* original?	50%	50%	0%
Are women in *A Game of Thrones* original?	47%	16%	37%
What are the most notable characteristics of your favorite heroine?	Intelligent, brave, beautiful, determined, strong, independent		
What are the most common attributes of female characters?	Beautiful, brave, intelligent, determined, strong, sexualized, feminine		
What is the biggest change in contemporary heroines?	Became independent, active, realistic		
Why are/are not women in *The Lord of the Rings* original?	(-) women fulfill minor romantic roles (+) Galadriel is complex, powerful, unique		
Why are/ are not women in *A Game of Thrones* original?	(-) Initially, the heroines pose as typical stock characters (+) women are realistic/ act in original roles		

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[91] Only those reasons or qualities most frequently repeated by the respondents are listed