A game of genders: comparing depictions of empowered women between a game of thrones novel and television series

A Game of Genders: Comparing Depictions of Empowered Women between A Game of Thrones novel and Television Series

Rebecca Jones

Abstract

The main women in George R. R. Martin's novel Game of Thrones, first published in 1996, and the adapted television series in 2011, are empowered female figures in a world dominated by male characters. Analyzing shifts in the characters' portrayals between the two mediums conveys certain valences of the cultures for which they are intended. While in the novel the characters adhere to a different set of standards for women, the television series portrays these women as more sympathetic, empowered, and realistic with respect to contemporary standards. Using literary archetypes of queen, hero, mother, child, maiden and warrior and applying them to Cersei Lannister, Catelyn Stark, Arya Stark, Sansa Stark, and Daenerys Targaryen, provides a measure for the differences in their presentations. Through the archetypal lens, the shifts in societal and cultural standards between the novel and series' airing reveal changing pressures and expectations for women. By reading the novel and watching the series with the archetypes in mind, the changes in gender norms from 1996 to 2011 becomes clear. The resulting shift shows the story's changes in the realm of fantasy in relation to the American society that consumes it.

Keywords

Women, Fantasy, Archetypes

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21. E-mail Citation ». Jones compares and contrasts the portrayals of female characters as described in the novels versus how they are seen in the show; specifically, Cersei Lannister, Catelyn Stark, Arya Stark, Sansa Stark, and Daenerys Targaryen. In Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones, and Multiple Media Engagements. Edited by Anne Gjelsvik and Rikke Schubart, 79–103. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. E-mail Citation ». A commentary on the representation of female characters in Game of Thrones video games. (The women of Game of Thrones use this tactic, as well.) Tyrion's experience with this method is likely what leads to his understanding of and respect for both Sansa and Daenerys. (Recall his line about Sansa when she keeps up appearances after Joffrey has her beaten in season 2: 'Lady Stark, you may survive us yet.') Game of Thrones does, however, shed light on rape culture in the modern world. For example, let's examine Lyanna Mormont's introduction in season 6's "The Broken Man." After Lyanna receives Jon Snow and Sansa in her audience chamber, Jon assures her that House Stark is not gone.