Women and Madness in *Game of Thrones:* A Feminist Critique

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Abstract

Historically, women do not appear to be escaping the determination to be insane either by adopting prescribed patterns of femininity or by opposing the attributions. No matter how strong or weak a woman is, in the end, there is always a possibility of the loss of the self that turns them into *mad women*. This paper examines why and how several female protagonists in *Game of Thrones* are depicted as insane and hysterical as over time their characters grow stronger. The analogous arrangement of madness and femininity blocks their access to the position of normality in this fictional world. Moreover, female abnormality is a clear form of female normality since, weak or strong, women like Daenerys, Sansa, Arya, or Cersei end up being labeled as insane or hysterical by the patriarchal normativity. In the fictional world of Westeros, madness and gender performative discourses form the framework of behavioral traits that lead its female protagonists towards madness. This paper will use gender theories and Butler's performative acts to explain the attitudes of the writer as well as the creators of *Game of Thrones* towards female insanity and the reasons behind the depiction.

Keywords: madness, hysteria, feminist criticism, performative acts, *Game of Thrones*

Introduction

The world of *Game of Thrones* is a hard, unyielding place. There is no room for weakness. Anyone who hesitates is sorted out and quickly eradicated. One would think that women have a difficult position in the universe of George R. R. Martin, but the female protagonists outshine all the male protagonists. Be it the ascent of Daenerys Targaryen, from docile little sister to the tough, all-conquering ruler who commands whole armies or the intriguing Cersei Lannister who quietly pulls the strings in the background of her family and strikes her control deep into the royal house; the audience clearly witnesses that the female protagonists are the driving forces in this universe. Moreover, the world of Westeros in *Game of Thrones* is based on the European Middle Ages and has similar patriarchal social structures. However, the protagonists break the prevailing conventions and develop ways to gain and consolidate power and political influence. In this context, the female characters can be described as empowered female figures in a world dominated by male characters.

In a world where the disastrous relationship between man and woman is discussed at length, *Game of Thrones* is an example of how one can create interesting characters for both sides that constantly and decisively influence the development and progress of history as well as depict the reality of empowered women who emerge victorious but are demeaned and forced down with the label of madness. George R. R. Martin deliberately places his

84

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faith in a divergent image of women in his world and the creators of the TV series depict the madness within the strong female characters who otherwise deny all the normative and hegemonic gender roles. Here, the confrontation with the marginal existence of women and the feminine discourse of insanity makes a complex and detailed critique of the normativity of society and patriarchal dominance possible. The female protagonists thus appear on the one hand as rulers and heroines, but also have to struggle with oppression by social norms on the other and thus, are depicted as "the mad queen," "the mad mother," "the crazy assassin," or "the hysteric damsel in distress."

Madness: "A Daughter's Malady"

Whether we understand gender in the structure of a social relationship or how we analyze and deal with historical and current conflicts between men and women depends on how gender is thought of, talked about, and negotiated. This is not the same in all parts of the world and has not been the case during various historical epochs. As an object of social observation and everyday disputes, understanding of gender guides our perception and experience which is simultaneously produced in processes of cultural social construction (Donaldson 112).

Phyllis Chesler in her 1972 study, *Women and Madness,* describes female madness as the effect of patriarchal conditions, as an expression of the "intense experience of the biological, sexual and cultural castration" of women and the "striving for potency" condemned to failure (31). Moreover, much psychiatric theory regarding women's mental condition is revealed as more ideological than scientific, according to Busfield (99). Moreover, Adrienne Rich identifies that with the help of the stories of suffering, Chesler addresses the suffering of women in madness to design a critical perspective on patriarchal structures (Chesler, cited in Rich 1). Besides, women are deemed as "normal or neurotic according to a male ethic of mental health based on the invisible and sometimes explicit assumptions of patriarchal society" (Chesler, cited in Rich 1). The patriarchy in our society, in this context, can be seen through the characters in the TV show *Game of Thrones.* When looking at the women of *Game of Thrones* in interaction with the male characters, it becomes clear that their positions of power are not completely independent of those of the men in their surroundings. Overall, the kingdom of Westeros is dominated by men and masculinity serves as a symbol of power and success which later unfolds as the cause behind some of the main female characters' harrowing actions in the fiction.

According to Joan Busfield, insanity as a differentiating moment only emerges as an aspect of enslavement and the resistance of women (99-100). It can be seen when Martin divides the women portrayed in the books into groups of victims or presumed victims of sexual violence during childhood or even while being an adult. Like Martin, in the context of the "victim discourse," madness has only an illustrative function for Chesler as well as for Showalter and Ussher as it serves as particularly urgent evidence of the general oppression of women. Here in the fictional world of Westeros, hysteria is the answer to the unlived lives of all women and that is why it is dismissed by specialists, as suggested by Jane M. Ussher as a "malady of representation," a simulated or at least auto suggested disease attributed

only to the strong women (10). The same inner conflicts as well as societal oppression have been seen happening with the female protagonists of *Game of Thrones*. Thus, insanity as the forbidden, contradictory, and feminine concept is also seen in the world of Westeros.

Feminized insanity produces forms of representation of pathologized femininity by fixing certain images of women which decisively co-constitute women's self-perceptions and possibilities of representation. Thus, at the end of the 19th century, medical discourse produced a clear analogy between insanity and contemporary idealism of femininity in the theories of "women's diseases," namely hysteria and anorexia nervosa (Showalter 2). Furthermore, any fictional world mirrors and projects the surrounding and the environment the creator of the world lives in; therefore, it is important to investigate how and why the ideas of gender dominate the denotation and the connotation of hysteria and insanity in the fictional world of *Game of Thrones*. In this world, the strong female figures portray different aspects of female suffering in society having one thing in common: the "Female Malady" (Kromm 507). Therefore, while the fictitious world shows patriarchal structures, at the same time it exhibits a broad, convincing spectrum of female characters within the paradigm of the "Female Malady."

In *Game of Thrones*, the strong female figures are mainly explored through the lens of hysteria, and only one male character is characterized as mad, namely the Mad King, and that too is not exactly shown but narrated. Since women have been considered irrational in Western thinking organized through binary oppositions, strong and empowered women were always marked as mad and insane (Showalter 8). In Westeros, several female characters were depicted as mad through the eight seasons, while the creators tried to give reasons behind their madness. Although there are given reasons behind the characters' actions, the patriarchal norms played a pivotal role in the female portrayal of these characters. While the male protagonists are mostly good and chivalrous, the female protagonists are mainly deemed to be either insane like Cersei or Daenerys, or so fragile that they lack self-will, like Sansa. Moreover, at the end of the TV series, while the empowered women are turned into madness incarnate, the weak and docile character Sansa is given some power while constraining her from the shackles of her brother's rule.

Cersei Lannister: The Mad Mother

First of all, the audience as well as the readers come across the strength of Cersei Lannister when she shows in the very first episode that she is not just a trophy wife and queen to the king but has the will to voice up ("Winter is Coming"). However, the patriarchal norms do not allow the creators to keep their female characters as strong and empowered as they probably would have if these protagonists were male. Since female characters like Cersei do not follow societal norms or oppose all the attributes of femininity that society imposes on them, they are simply labeled as insane and hysterical.

The most important scene for Cersei's character in the TV series might be in season 5 episode 1, "The Wars to Come," where the witch Maggy the Frog prophesied Cersei's destiny. The action of seeking a prophecy in the darkest corners of the forest by a young girl like Cersei indicates the "drive to self-knowledge" (Rich 18). In the medieval period, a

search for knowledge like this is more than "a search for identity" and in actuality is "the refusal of the destructiveness of the male-dominated society" (19) as Adrienne Rich asserts in "When We Dead Awaken." While this search for identity continues throughout Cersei's adult life as well, the naive girl later turns into a heartless woman by realizing her position in the male-dominated society. Cersei was given power in the TV show; however, it "still conveys how little power she has in this male-dominated world" (Jones 14). No matter how hard she fights she is not given the right to rule. She is either a queen to a king or a mother to a king.

Furthermore, according to Michel Foucault, the woman is only deemed as a woman completely permeated by her sexuality (149-151); whereas, "women's normative reactions to life events [are] associated with marriage, motherhood, menstruation, or menopause" (Ussher 89). Yet the mother as the positive figure represents the same characteristics as the negative image of the "hysterical" woman. In this context, women in their motherly image are seen to be the paragon of womanhood, whereas the same attributes of mothers are thought to be their weaknesses (Chesler 31). Moreover, sometimes motherhood is even deemed to be one of the main reasons behind a woman's hysteric behavioral traits. Whenever a mother speaks her mind she is labeled as mad anyway, since "the contrast between the reality of the demands of the mothering role, and idealized cultural constructions of motherhood" has drained all their energy (Ussher 168).

In the book *A Game of Thrones*, Martin also describes the same notion when Jaime Lannister, Cersei's brother, says that motherhood alters a woman's mind where all the mothers turn mad and in that instant, he calls Cersei mad and irrational because of her motherhood where previously she had been ruthless and more intelligent than any other woman (61-62). Moreover, if a mother is strong-willed and has the tendency to question the societal norms they are instantly put down with the weapon of labeling them as insane or demeaning their actions by calling them off. Hence, Cersei is hysterical and abnormal since she wants to break the patriarchal norm by becoming more powerful than a man; however, paradoxically, possesses motherly love and at the same time the same amount of hatred towards the world that took her children away from her.

However, the most important turn in Cersei's character is shown when she is stripped of her clothes and is forced to walk naked through the entire city in the name of the "walk of atonement" (Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 732-740). Mortified and humiliated, Cersei walked through the streets of King's Landing only to become more vicious and abominable. "The Walk of Atonement" therefore was the last blow to transform Cersei Lannister into a despot ruler who only cares for her power and thrives on revenge. Here, the patriarchal normativity once again projects an incomparable female villain, namely The Queen Regent Cersei Lannister. After the death of her children, she is beside herself and plans every step to eliminate her enemies. However, when examined closely, it is clear that Cersei is only a pawn whose actions are merely a projection of the depravity that she faced throughout her life. Thus, the creators of *Game of Thrones* project Cersei Lannister as the paragon of insanity through her actions but forget, only in support of patriarchy, to showcase the conflicts that a woman has inside herself for being deprived of her desire and free will.

Daenerys Targaryen: The Mad Queen

From the beginning of *Game of Thrones*, the later Dragon Queen, Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen has been suppressed by her older brother Viserys, who considers himself the rightful heir and prospective king of Westeros. In the beginning, Daenerys has no power over her own life. It is clearly shown when her objections to the imminent marriage are verbally countered by Viserys. The forced marriage shows that Daenerys has no controlling power over her own life. Rather, she has to subordinate herself to his patriarchal perspective of the world. Consequently, the relationship between the Targaryen siblings reflects the traditional understanding of patriarchal norms in Westeros, where the men and at the same time the eldest son has the right of inheritance.

Women who loathe being women and spend all their time convincing others that they are just as good as (or better than) men often assume the role of men and are strong (Felman 8). Daenerys, in her book encounters, is uncertain, conflicted, and occasionally panicked. However, her inner turmoil from the book's point of view faded in the visual depiction. In the series, she is the one who changes societal norms as a woman by leading a huge army of Dothraki as well as the Unsullied to abandon slavery. This makes her one of the most influential characters within this fictional realm with the great power of three mighty Dragons at her command. "Confidence, ferocity, aggressiveness and a capacity and willingness to use force are key masculinized traits employed by Daenerys as she develops as a leader" and her evolution "as a ruler and leader both depend" on her incorporation and demonstration of "masculinized traits" (Clapton and Shepherd 13).

Overall, the kingdom of Westeros is dominated by men where masculinity serves as a symbol of power and success. Moreover, Daenerys does not question this hierarchy until she renounces her brother and watches undeterred when her husband murders him in the episode titled "A Golden Crown." This moment is liberating for Daenerys as she finally gets rid of her crazy brother. But at the same time, it certainly has left another crack in Daenerys' psyche to watch her supposedly last relative die in front of her eyes in this cruel way. In this episode, the young subordinated girl becomes a woman and realizes that she has her voice and free will. Here, Daenerys "breaks the wheel" by breaking the shackles of male dominance over her. Although this moment is considered as the key moment of Daenerys' empowerment, it is also when the audience is introduced to her hysterical heredity. Besides, in the TV series, she always affirmed that she was going to "break the wheel" which can be seen as a symbol of breaking societal norms. Daenerys, being empowered by knowledge and her own experience, wanted to begin a new era devoid of slavery and discrimination. She even wanted to obliterate the hierarchy within the system. However, her promise to break the norms was shown to be the reason behind her own demise.

When everything seemed to be smooth and good for Daenerys, she was hit by the fall of her child Dragon Viserion ("Beyond the Wall"). Although, with this depiction, it seemed like she could overcome this loss with the loving shelter of Jon Snow, the creators show that a woman can never be self-dependent. No matter how strong and powerful they might be, they always need a male shadow above them be it as a loyal follower like Jorah Mormont,

or advisers like Ser Barristan Selmy and Tyrion Lannister, or a lover like Jon Snow. This is when patriarchy triumphs once again and demeans the spirit of an empowered woman as if the transcendence is only meant for men and a woman's transcendence is towards men (Beauvoir 17).

Moreover, in "Translating Medea's Infanticide: A Critical Analysis of Euripides' Medea," Sohana Manzoor alludes to the potential for upheaval and social transformation that a resolute figure such as Medea could instigate. This perspective serves to enrich the understanding of Daenerys' character within the context of the fictional realm depicted in *Game of Thrones*. This is the "womanhood in a woman" that drags them down instead of letting them have their transcendence and causes conflict within their psyche. Both Elaine Showalter and Jane M. Ussher explain in their books that the abandonment of identity is denounced as suffering under society, thus taking on the role of "madness" within the boundaries of societal norms (Showalter 68 and Ussher 11). A destroyed individual and not an empowered being is shown to us here with the mental breakdown of Daenerys which actually was inevitable since she was suffering from identity-lessness for a long time.

Therefore, the actual blow comes in the episode titled "The Last of the Starks" when, already succumbed to the patriarchal norms, Daenerys loses her most loyal follower and ally. Finally, when her best friend is killed brutally in front of her, she loses it all. Moreover, her lover becomes distant because of their family relations and she loses two of her beloved children (Dragons) for the crown. According to Rich, "Women must protect a mate or child at any cost for the sake of self-preservation that goes beyond the essence of the feminine within them" which turns them to be mad ("Women and Madness"). Here, Daenerys' attempt to save her child Dragon pushed her one step closer to her hereditary malady of being mad. All of these had the culminating effect on the most influential and empowered female figure in Westeros. Daenerys, therefore, could not stand the view of her childhood home, "The Red Keep" in King's Landing, and the "Bells" do not help either as it was the rage within her that was giving the cue of the outburst ("The Bells"). This is when the audience encounters an inner turmoil unfolding. This is Daenerys surrendering under patriarchal subjugation and the audience repeatedly encounters the win of patriarchy in the society.

The Hegemonic Gender Norms Behind Female Madness in *Game of Thrones*
The question of the ontological as well as ethnological status of gender difference has been a dominating factor in the search for women's identity. The pressure of nature, be it natural femininity, natural masculinity, or natural heterosexuality, is thus produced by artificial means, where nature seems to be a theatre in whirl density. Meanings are subject to infinite processes of cultural change and displacement, which have had and will have different connotations depending on the historical context. The meaning of gender is constituted within language. Butler calls this the performativity of gender ("Performative Acts" 520). Her thesis assumes that discursive processes produce and materialize gender in the first place; here, materialization in Butler's case means the historically specific appearance of gender ("Performative Acts" 521). Butler says that identity categories such as "the woman"

are not neutral descriptions or even fit under natural categories ("Performative Acts" 522). They are to be understood as normative social settings since they describe what they produce at the same time. In a certain way, here, Butler only radicalizes something that can already be read in Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 293).

Thus, in and through madness and gender performative discourses persons become visible and recognizable in the dynamics of subjectification. Moreover, this subjectification happens through the perpetual, never-ending, performative practice of the somatic and linguistic repetition of the society for the female protagonists like Arya, Sansa, or Daenerys to act as they are supposed to and not as they want to. In the process, "the practice of performative acts" is veiled by the staging of a supposedly preceding substance and repetition that leads itself "towards its productive effect" (Butler "Performative Acts" 274). The continuous repetition is inevitably always also a variation, a shift towards an uncontrollable realization. Here, it means that the practices of the performative realization of gender difference are in themselves precarious, unclear, not definable, and therefore not conclusive or determinable. Therefore, the hegemonic patriarchal order of certain performative acts that are denied by the strong female protagonist leads them to become 'hysteric' and mad where in the end the patriarchal society always emerges triumphant.

The question of the ontological status of gender difference dominates in Judith Butler's theory of performative acts. According to Butler, the performativity of gender is understood as an "ongoing process of repetition" ("Performative Acts" 520). Moreover, Butler asserts that the binary structure of gender difference and its heteronormative structure form the normativity of modern gender ontology that are both ostensibly natural and extra-social facts ("Performative Acts" 521). Moreover, the problematization of female insanity can provide a wide range of instruments for an analysis of the functional mechanisms of power discourses and marginalization (Clapton and Shepherd 10). Therefore, the performativity of gender identity comes almost naturally to the female protagonists of *Game of Thrones* who are living in a strict medieval patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, in the world of *Game of Thrones,* George R.R. Martin has shown the performative acts of women with the depiction of his female protagonist with profound eloquence. In Westeros, gender relations lead the female protagonists to subversion when they are within their feminine order. However, this subversion forces them towards performative subversion where they assume the masculine traits to illustrate their power within the normativity framework. To understand the change of gender roles in Daenerys Targaryen, Cersei Lannister, Sansa or Arya Stark's character one has to turn to Judith Butler's performativity theory as, to attain their goals, these characters had to turn themselves into despot rulers, a cruel regent or a faceless "nobody."

Arya Stark: The Faceless Wo(man)
Arya Stark, the intellectual, strong-willed girl from the north, is one of the main characters of the fantasy epic *Game of Thrones* since the beginning of the book as well as the TV series. Arya Stark, the youngest daughter of Lord Eddard Stark and Catelyn Tully undergoes

one of the most impressive character metamorphoses in the series. From a little girl who wanted to be a knight, Arya turned into one of the most cold-blooded psychotic killers in the world of *The Song of Ice and Fire.*

Arya Stark is the modern feminist in the world of *Game of Thrones.* From the beginning of the book series as well as in the visual depiction, Arya has been protesting to have equal rights as the boys such as, when she answers her father that she does not want to be a lady (*A Game of Thrones* 149). She is seen to be more potent with masculine traits rather than perfect feminine traits that are expected of her. According to Judith Butler, a constantly repeated invocation as a girl or a woman then constantly consolidates gender identity anew ("Performative Acts" 521). Here, in the case of Arya, her governess Septa Mordane constantly tries to perfect her as a girl who is destined to assume the role of a lady in the future. Nevertheless, the persistent mention of gender identity and roles reinforces Arya's determination to reject conventional gender expectations while she strives to embrace freedom and resist the confines of traditional femininity, as she "associates traditional girlhood with weakness and inferiority" (Tan 488). This is why she says twice in the series that she is "no lady" ("Lord Snow"). In her case, Arya tries to find her "self" in the "other" only because the "other" was the more privileged one in society.

After her father's unlawful execution, Arya has to assume a boy's identity and that is when her rejection of the gender roles actually starts. However, from the beginning of the story, the readers as well as the audience have witnessed that Arya was performing under a skin that she was not comfortable with. She was never comfortable in dresses and was always repelled by the societal norms and conduct that were strictly followed by women. Transvestism for Arya, here, is "the opportunity to escape the strictures of female roles" (Hunt 11). As a strong-willed independent person who is taught to stand on her own feet, Arya rejects traditional gender roles, gender identities, and all social norms (Tan 489). Strong female characters like Arya have no gender at all and the problem here is the rejection of femininity (Frankel 42). The "selfless" women characters thus become conflicted and the outcome of this conflict results in madness or hysteria.

According to Butler, the construction and production of gender behavior have been acquired by socially controlled activities at the level of perception, interaction, and everyday politics, which provide certain actions with the meaning of being female or male (*Gender Trouble* 373). Although Arya has to learn womanly traits like embroidering, she always wants to join her brothers in lessons of fighting. She is more at ease with a sword than with a needle. That is why she names her sword "Needle" and explains to her brother Jon Snow that Sansa has her own needle and this is her needle ("Winter is Coming"). However, the everyday activity that is expected of Arya is rejected by her almost instantaneously since she does not approve of the "societal hegemonic order" as she wants to be "constituted by discourse yet not be determined by it" (Benhabib 378). Therefore, when Arya is finished with the training of becoming "a faceless man" in the House of Black and White by Jaqen H'ghar, she excels in archery and can wield any weapon she wants to. However, this gender transformation by Arya is a rejection of her "selfhood" which isolates her from the rest (Tan

488). She does not belong to either gender group and is a "No Body" which is the reason behind her transformation from a little tomboy to a "faceless" assassin.

However, no matter how hard she tries, Arya has been unable to renounce her female identity. Whenever she is called a boy, she corrects them that she is a girl in reality. This dilemma within Arya's psyche must have later formed the twisted mind inside her head since "performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishment both obvious and indirect" (Butler "Performative Acts" 279). Therefore, clearly the reason behind Arya becoming a vicious and cold-blooded assassin is her rejection of the societal gender norms and the essence of gender identity constructed by the societal hegemonic order.

Sansa: The Naive "Little Bird"
From the beginning of the story of *A Song of Ice and Fire* as well as its visual representation *of Game of Thrones,* unlike her sister Arya, Sansa Stark has been the quintessential courtly, polite, and fragile princess who is the embodiment of societal submissiveness of women. Besides her being hopelessly romantic, Sansa is naive and believes that the world is full of goodness and everything is going to turn out well for her since she follows everything and does what is expected of her. While masculine characters like Arya are all about overt strength, outspoken and bold, and fighting the system directly, feminine characters like Sansa are softer. They fight using smiles, kind words, and manipulations. They are often concerned with marriage and motherhood and tend to keep their true opinions to themselves. Sansa Stark has been a perfect example of these feminine features from the beginning of the story until she was tortured and humiliated by the person she was infatuated with and later was even raped by the person she was married off to.

Sansa was dehumanized the day she was raped by her husband on the wedding night. Here, her later found strength could only be explained by her experience of violence, similar to Daenerys. This creates the impression that female figures can only develop strength and self-confidence in fiction if they experience sexual violence beforehand (Frankel 14), a superficially "reinforcing" view, which, however, draws a very dangerous picture of female empowerment. Sansa explicitly takes this view herself: "Without Littlefinger and Ramsay and the rest I would have stayed the little bird all my life," she says to the Hound, who used to mock her in King's Landing as a naive "little bird" ("The Last of the Starks"). In other words, everything Sansa now has in status and self-confidence, she owes alone to her tormentors. This statement indicates the hegemonic male subjectivity while women cannot build such a subject for themselves. And thus, the abandonment of identity that has always been repeatedly forced upon the girls like Sansa in a patriarchal normativity, is denounced here as suffering under society and thereafter taking on the role of "madness." Sansa in her determination to become "the queen in the North" is inconsiderate towards Daenerys' psychological impact on the fact that she is in love with her nephew and exposes this well-kept secret to everyone via Very. This is when the hysteria within Sansa is revealed that helps to unfold the madness within a certain female Targaryen who was supposed to sit on the iron throne and rule over Westeros.

Moreover, according to Adrienne Rich, "women are products of culture and society" where

every single woman acts out the plot of societal norms that were determined for them ("When We Dead Awaken" 21). This statement is relatable with Sansa since from her childhood she has been the "daughter sunshine" who is the embodiment of societal norms. However, the turn on her identity that opposes the performative roles of society resulted in an empowered woman regardless of the sufferings she went through. Besides, Sansa, who had successfully renounced the manipulator, seems to fall back into old, naive behavioral patterns when she had to seek shelter under Littlefinger's umbrella. Confirming Butler's thesis that the body, the anatomical gender, is simply an effect of social hegemonic orders which is "a continual and incessant materialization of possibilities" ("Performative Acts" 521). However, in the end, Sansa has become a strong woman who can hold the scepter in her hand and will make a difference in the world of Westeros, though on her brother's side.

Although Sansa has ruled Winterfell since season 7 and is even crowned "Queen in the North" in the series finale, it is unforgettable that she only came into this position of power after Jon Snow had graciously resigned and let his sister rule. Here again, women are only allowed to have the power not because they are worthy of it but because masculinity in the normative structure only allows them to have it in the first place. Besides, Sansa only had the title of being the "Queen in the North" because she had to bow down to her younger brother Bran when he was crowned the king of Westeros. In Sansa's example, too, it is mainly men who create her, with violence and power not to mention the grotesque assumption that women can only become "strong" through experiences of violence. The scene in which Sansa arbitrarily decides that the North can become independent as the only kingdom in Westeros is a final attempt to give her some independence after all. However, this twist seems very intentional. Societal norms do not allow a woman to become more powerful than any man. Thus, the creators of *Game of Thrones* could not allow its female protagonist to become as powerful as a king. Once again, the result remains the same: patriarchy prevails.

Conclusion

Since the eighteenth century, women have been consistently positioned within Western thought as aligned with irrationality, establishing a binary framework that reinforces men as rational agents and women as irrational beings. This binary opposition can be delineated using the concepts of "self" and "the other." Consequently, this dualistic paradigm leads to the stigmatization of women, as femininity becomes synonymous with irrationality and mental instability. Here, insanity becomes an essence of the feminine (Showalter 21). Moreover, a feminist theory that wants to "free femininity and madness from their mutual definition" should not only "criticize the images that are qualified as patriarchal" (Kromm 508, 531). Additionally, it necessitates the avoidance of reintroducing the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion inherent in normalization discourse into discussions concerning femininity and mental health. Furthermore, it calls for a critical examination of one's engagement with the patriarchal norm and the subjugation of women.

The scrutiny of female insanity provides a valuable lens for dissecting power dynamics and marginalization. This approach offers a nuanced critique of societal normativity

and patriarchal dominance by exposing the marginalization of women and examining the discourse surrounding femininity and madness. In this context, understanding the "self" is essential for comprehending gender relations within societal structures. Gender roles, however, remain deeply ingrained and not solely cultural constructs. Strong women grapple with societal norms and expectations tied to their gender, aligning with feminist perspectives on traditional gender role constraints (Islam 84). This observation aligns with feminist perspectives on the constraints that women often face due to traditional gender roles.

Sometimes the feeling prevails that those female characters who gain power and influence in the course of the story of *Game of Thrones* have masculine attributes or orient themselves towards male role models. Moreover, the recognition of certain norms could lead to difficulties in coping with life, to decentration of identity which is the cause that leads women to an act of performance that puts a mask on them (Benhabib 375). Thus, it can be easily said, as Beauvoir has famously pointed out, that gender roles, in reality, are anything but cultural and social constructs that are not a quality that is innately inherited but produced as well as attributed by societal norms.

All in all, the female personas within the realm of Westeros exhibit profound complexity, encompassing diverse character traits while simultaneously commanding their narrative arcs. Nevertheless, certain formidable female characters in the television series *Game of Thrones* are perceived to manifest qualities typically associated with masculinity, thereby transcending conventional gender roles. This phenomenon is noteworthy in light of the understanding that discussions surrounding gender are not static; they are performative, representing actions that construct and emulate a specific societal framework, rather than mere static declarations or descriptions. In the case of Daenerys Targaryen, for example, to become powerful in the patriarchal society, she had to assume the character traits of men which later led her to unfold as a mad queen instead. From this, it can be concluded that George R. R. Martin as well as the series makers do not deviate in this aspect from the classical image of women in the societal hegemonic order. However, the representation of empowered women becoming mad and hysteric is alarming and provides a negative image of every empowered woman in society.

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