

# The Representation of Women in the Army in Contemporary American War and Fantasy Literature

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Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i  
književnosti i povijesti

Valentina Markasović

**Prikazi žena u vojsci u suvremenoj američkoj ratnoj i fantastičnoj  
književnosti**

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Mentor: doc.dr.sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki, Assistant Professor

Co-supervisor: Dr. Ljubica Matek, Assistant Professor

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## **Abstract**

*Love My Rifle More Than You* by Kayla Williams and *Shoot Like a Girl* by Mary Jennings Hegar represent two instances of the rising genre of women's military memoirs. They offer women's views on the social constructs within the military, not only the nature, but also the perception of which is considered to be highly masculine. In addition to the memoirs, a conduit for women to engage in battles and express their experiences is the genre of fantasy. The paper therefore compares and contrasts the memoirs mentioned with *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin and *Throne of Glass* by Sarah J. Maas. The temporal distance between both the memoirs and the fantasy novels allows for a chronological overview of the development of women's position in the army and the public's perception of women soldiers both in real life and in fiction.

Keywords: Kayla Williams, Mary Jennings Hegar, George R. R. Martin, Sarah J. Maas, military, gender, identity, stereotype

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## Introduction

The paper discusses contemporary American women-authored military memoirs *Love My Rifle More than You* by Kayla Williams, which deals with the Iraq War (2003), and *Shoot Like a Girl*, in which Mary Jennings Hegar presents her experiences from the War in Afghanistan from 2009. The paper juxtaposes these two non-fiction narratives with two high-fantasy novel series: *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) by George R.R. Martin and *Throne of Glass* (2012-2018) by Sarah J. Maas. The percentage of women in the American army is low and their media presence is substandard, so women soldiers' memoirs are a conduit well-suited for exploring the position of women in the military. On the other hand, the works of the fantastic frequently feature female characters who have an affinity for battle and who actively join the military ranks. The paper explores how women soldiers function in the army – a traditionally masculine environment – and compares the view of actual soldiers with a fictional representation found in fantasy literature to see how the two differ. The paper aims to suggest how the position of women in fantasy literature evolves not only to reflect the contemporary social changes, but to surpass them and grant women opportunities they do not necessarily have in the real world.

The paper's opening chapter offers an overview of the novels referenced throughout the paper. By briefly explaining the background and plot of the novels, it aims to grant a better understanding of the key points brought to light later on. It also explains the framework of the comparison of the novels belonging to different genres and the possibility of contextualizing the written text within the events of the real world.

The subsequent chapter traces the gradual inclusion of women in the military, both in the American army and fantastic literature. It casts light on the general experience and position of women in the army and compares memoirs and fiction to understand how what is considered a typically masculine environment is transformed in a genre that is loosely, if at all, ruled by the contemporary social norms. The third chapter explores the phenomenon of companionship among soldiers, considered to be an integral part of any functioning army unit, and explains how women may be prevented from developing strong bonds with other soldiers due to their gender.

The fourth chapter deals with discrimination against women in the military and delineates it through several parameters – the exposure of women to derogatory language whose goal is to utilize one's gender to insult them, the frequent disbelief of a woman's skill set, and finally, the inability of women to achieve their goals due to gender stereotypes being thrust upon them. The

following chapter explicates the soldiers' perception of identity and the duality of their roles as women and soldiers to show how fantasy literature might prove to be a platform in which female soldiers may encompass both traditionally female and male characteristics.

The final chapter of the paper touches upon the sexual violence committed in the military and by the military. While the experiences of women on and off the page differ, the paper describes them to underline how women suffer in the military environment.

## 1. The Novels: Utilizing the Genres

A review of Tracy Crow's memoir *Eyes Right: Confessions from a Woman Marine* published in 2012 marks: "You might not know that the female-soldier memoir is a genre. Perhaps you don't know that because so few of these true accounts were written by professional writers like Tracy Crow, enlisted women who later became creative-writing professors" (*Village Voice*). But indeed many women, be they professors or not, shared their military experiences in memoirs that launched a new genre; a genre that could only have commenced to develop as women started to take a more active role in the military. This paper deals with two such memoirs. The first one is authored by Kayla Williams. Her novel *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* (2005) narrates the Iraq invasion in which she took part as a member of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. The second memoir, *Shoot Like a Girl: One Woman's Dramatic Fight in Afghanistan and on the Home Front* (2017), is penned by Mary Jennings Hegar and describes her training to become a pilot, finally realizing her goal, and taking part in combat in Afghanistan. Besides describing the fight against the Taliban, the novel also speaks out about the fight against the discrimination of women in the army, as the author herself was one of the people who filed a suit against the Secretary of Defence of the United States of America in 2012, making it clear that it was time to remove the outdated 1994 policy that forbade women to serve in combat military units.

Whereas in the United States women soldiers were not allowed to engage in combat until 2015, literature evolved much sooner and moved beyond the stereotype that women cannot function in combat. Thus, the paper also references works of the fantasy genre to explore how women warriors are represented in the settings that do not adhere to the reality. The first fantasy series to be explored is *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin. It first appeared in 1996, with the most recent book, at the time of writing this paper, being the fifth of the seven novels planned. The books follow the complex politics of the worlds called Westeros and Essos, narrating the schemes and quests of characters from noble houses: Daenerys Targaryen, who considers herself the rightful heir to the throne of the Seven Kingdoms, from which her father has been disposed during the rebellion of Robert Baratheon; the Starks, a Northern noble house once faithful to the crown and now scattered all around Westeros; Cersei Lannister, who has acted as the Queen Regent for her underage sons – Joffrey and, after the elder's murder, Tommen Baratheon. Key female characters of the novels thrive in their positions of power, but rarely wield weapons

themselves. The paper analyses the notable exceptions – those women who attempt to become warriors in Martin’s pseudo-medieval world.

The last novel series that is included in this paper is Sarah J. Maas’ *Throne of Glass* series. The first novel was published in 2012 and it centres on Celaena Sardothien, a famous assassin. Celaena is the most capable hired sword in the Kingdom of Adarlan, and, as the readers later find out, the rightful queen of Terrasen – whose actual name is Aelin Ashryver Galathinius – hence also her country’s supreme military commander. Aelin is on a quest to take back her birth right, but also to thwart the plan of Erawan, a king of demons called the Valg, who wants to take over Erilea, Maas’ imagined world. Except her combat skills, Aelin also has magic to aid her. A plethora of other female warriors also play indispensable roles in the novels and some of them will be included in the paper to present different aspects of women’s military engagement.

By analysing both the soldiers’ memoirs and the actions of the characters of the fantastic in military settings, the paper aims to shed light on the possible comparisons between the two. Fantasy is considered to be a propitious platform for examination of realistic, often emotive topics, whilst providing the emotional distance which is harder to obtain in realistic fiction, but is necessary for an objective overview of the pivotal problems of the social environment (Kurkjian et al. 492). Lynsey Mitchell also argues in favour of the possibility to draw parallels between real life and popular culture; these parallels enable the reader to have a better grasp on contemporary society and the problems that arise within it (231). One such issue is gender equality; in the context of this paper, the emphasis is placed on equality, or the lack thereof, in the American military, compared with the same or similar situations in the American fantasy novels listed above.

## **2. Women Soldiers**

### **2.1. Women Soldiers in the American Army**

The concept of the female warrior is not a recent one. Mythology and history provide examples such as the Amazons, the goddess Athena, Queen Boudicca, Joan of Arc, and Calamity Jane, which prove that a female in a military context is not unnatural to the human culture (Peebles 81). However, the undertaking of steps towards an active and equal participation of women in the American military has been a long journey that has not yet come to an end.

The first steps toward enabling women to take part in war were completed in the mid-twentieth century. During the Second World War, the grave circumstances and the need for a great number of soldiers made it possible for women to enlist in the army. This created the grounds for establishing the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Women's Naval Reserve, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), and Marine Corps Women's Reserve (Peebles 84). However, they were not allowed to engage in close combat. The American society of the time would have considered this to be a "radical inversion of the traditional roles of women as the passive sweetheart/wife/sex object whose ultimate mission was to wait for their virile menfolk to return from their masculine mission of fighting and dying" (Campbell 302).

The first time women took part in a war in a more significant number was during the Gulf War of 1991. Around 41 000 female soldiers served in combat zones or in their proximity during this conflict. A policy that was put into effect in 1994 prohibited women from serving in units that actively take part in direct ground combat (Peebles 84). Jennings Hegar explains that the policy was put in place by Secretary of Defence William Perry and was intended to mollify those who protested women being allowed to serve in combat cockpits. The lifting of the ban on female pilots "had been met with doomsday predictions of overly emotional women ruining the Air Force with their periods, babies, and breast milk" – prognoses that have since been proven wrong, as the army continued to function without "the predicted downfall of the American way of life" (Jennings Hegar 280). In 2005, at the time Kayla Williams was writing her book *Love My Rifle More Than You*, women made up around "15 percent of the military's active duty force" (Peebles 84) and 91 percent of all army career fields, 67 percent of Army position were available to women (Williams 15) – but the percentage is still worrisome. Williams asks an important question: "But isn't Congress keeping women out of combat? There are no women in artillery, no women in the infantry. We are not permitted to drive tanks. We can't be Rangers or Special Forces" (15).

Williams proves that women can be just as competent as or even more competent than men. Already during her basic training Williams surpasses the minimum standard for men, which differs from the female minimum standard – to exemplify, women have to run two miles in less than twenty minutes, whereas men have to achieve the same in less than fifteen minutes. Williams mentions that men often point out the inequality of it: "*Girls get off easy... Girls can't hack it*" (44, emphasis in original). Further evidence of women being worthy of a place in the army can be found in an instance where it is underlined that the weapon of the physically smallest member of the team, Lauren, is the "most serious-looking weapon" (Williams 107)

Williams' team has. Lauren commands respect, despite her appearance, and the weapon implies her qualifications: "When this little woman with the stern look and the dark shades moves to my side and holds her SAW [squad automatic weapon] up for everyone to see, there's a real hush in the crowd. This weapon says: *Respect me*' (Williams 107, emphasis in original). Another example is again Williams herself. At one point, she and two other members of her team, Quinn and Reid, are driving up a steep, rocky mountain in a Humvee – a dangerous drive that could have resulted in the vehicle flipping over. Her two male companions lose their nerve and exit the vehicle, but she persists and triumphantly reaches her goal. At the top, the team they are supposed to meet "were grinning. Said they'd been watching us through binos the whole way up. Said they were betting *for sure* we'd flip. Surprised to find a girl behind the wheel" (Williams 161, emphasis in original). The soldiers' train of thought shows that they are ready to acknowledge that women can be as brave and resolute as men, even if they are not used to that idea.

During her own training, Jennings encounters the same double standards as Williams and exhibits the same resolve to surpass expectations and prove to herself, but also to the men and her commanding officers, that she is able to pass the tests designed for men: "the drill instructors shocked us with the news that the women wouldn't have to complete this particular obstacle. I shook my head in fury and immediately stepped to the front of the line. There was no force on earth that could have stopped me from getting over that obstacle" (Jennings Hegar 26). When faced with suspicion about her physical abilities and endurance, Jennings wastes no words trying to explain why her being a woman should not cloud the judgement of her co-workers in regard to trusting her enough to accept her as one of their own. Instead, she challenges them: "'Right now . . . push-up contest,' I continued from the ground. 'Let's see who wins.' Throughout my career, this was my go-to rebuttal for blatant jabs at my physical ability" (146). She points out that she has never lost such a contest, meaning that she is more than equal with the men in the army.

When it is time for Jennings to leave her current position in the army and she is on the lookout for another job, she comes across a perfect opportunity that would cater to her capabilities. She considers becoming a Special Tactics Officer, but then becomes aware that she is not allowed to even apply for it: "The job was not open to women because there was an antiquated policy on the books called the Ground Combat Exclusion Policy, which was intended to keep women out of combat" (Jennings Hegar 272). Here, Jennings is, like Williams, bringing attention to the aforementioned 1994 policy and commenting ironically: "The policy was news to me and to the

deep scars on my right arm and leg, and I chuckled while thinking about the combat I had seen and the clear, direct ground combat I had medevaced other women out of in Afghanistan” (272-273). Jennings joins the fight against the exclusion of women in combat – she cooperates with the Women’s Rights Project team who then file a suit against the Secretary of Defence and the Air Force, demanding the ban on women in combat be lifted. Most of the military personnel have recognized that the policy was not only outdated in terms of equality, but also harmful to the army itself, as the women were frequently transferred from one unit to another so as to maintain their deployment status in combat as temporary, which prevented the imperative development of the feeling of unity and camaraderie amongst the troops: “While there are some misogynistic people left who find the idea of strong female warriors threatening, the reality is that this change is supported by the vast majority of the people actually fighting the wars” (Jennings Hegar 282), and this is one of the reasons why in 2013 the ban was lifted. The changes in military branches were to be implemented by 2016, with the branches obliged to come up with implementation plans (Bumiller and Shanker). Hence, the answer to Williams’ question about being able to partake in combat came almost a decade after her book was published: in 2015, women in the United States became able to join the American special operations units such as Army Special Operations Command (Airborne) and Special Forces Military Free Fall Operations (Tice). In December of the same year, Defence Secretary Ash Carter announced that the U.S. military is opening combat position to women. This decision enabled women to enter infantry, reconnaissance units, to drive tanks, and give orders (Bradner).

## **2.2. Women Warriors in Fantasy Fiction**

Female warriors are not a complete novelty in the realm of fantasy fiction. The first half of the twentieth century saw some prominent authors, like Robert E. Howard, who is famous for his Conan the Barbarian character, write women warriors into their fiction. Some of Howard’s characters included pirate queens Bêlit and Valeria. Howard and his contemporaries drew inspiration from mythological and historical characters such as the Amazons and Joan of Arc. However, the characters from these narratives are usually companions to the male hero and do not occupy the central position themselves. Christine Mains claims that the first female protagonist of the sword-and-sorcery genre was Jirel of Joiry, who was authored by C. L. Moore and who first appeared in “The Black God’s Kiss” (1934) (“Fantasy, 1900-1959” 39-40). Novels belonging to the fantasy genre were not overwhelmingly present on the market before 1970s, but it is one of the most popular genres today and produces critically acclaimed novels. It is a venue also used by female writers to, among other points, “recuperate female archetypal roles that have

fallen into stereotypes” and “deal explicitly with women-centered issues such as rape and gender inequality” (“Fantasy, 1960-2005” 62). Fantasy became the focus of books written primarily for the adolescent audience around the turn of the twenty-first century, when J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series hit the shelves worldwide (Cruger 115).

The paper first deals with the characters from George R.R. Martin’s widely popular novels. The world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is rooted in traditional and patriarchal order – fathers are those who wield authority over families, lords execute their power over lands, kings rule the kingdoms (Fathallah 104). However, there are some prominent women characters who subvert gender stereotypes. A notable example is Daenerys, although it could be argued that her power is derived from being a wife to the Dothraki Khal Drogo and a mother to three dragons and to a whole people, both of which are distinctly feminine roles (McGarry and Ravipinto 23). The dragons are the main source of her authority and the lavish fire-breathing shows of power are what reminds those who would oppose her of her capabilities (Fathallah 110). Another example is Cersei, Queen Dowager of the Seven Kingdoms; despite her high position of political power, she rues not having “a sword and the skill to wield it” and curses the gods who “in their blind malice had given her the feeble body of a woman” (*DwD* 787).

Throughout the series and its companion books, Martin recognizes the problem of discrimination against women in the military and the subpar representation of women warriors. Despite being undoubtedly patriarchal, the Westeros’ history does acknowledge several women warriors. One such figure is Nymeria, a warrior queen who “brought her ten thousand ships to land in Dorne, the southernmost of the Seven Kingdoms, and took Lord Mors Martell to husband. With her help, he vanquished his rivals” (*GoT* 830). However, the tradition of women warrior culture seems to have been brought to an end – the first novel of the series establishes the oddity of women involved into war, battling, and, for that matter, politics. Tyrion Lannister comes across a band of clans; clad in scraps of animal hides and wielding stolen weapons, this group of people allows women into their ranks and, interestingly, reaches decisions through what Tyrion calls an “absurd notion”: everyone has the right to express their opinion in a council, and “[e]ven their women were allowed to speak” (*GoT* 608). In a scene in the second book, one of the protagonists of the novel, Jon Snow, is deployed on a mission with a task to eliminate a group of the so called wildlings, the free folk who live behind the Wall. When he is to kill the last opponent, “[h]is hand froze. ‘A girl’” (*CoK* 742). And while the other men of the Night Watch are not surprised at the presence of a “spearwoman”, as they call Ygritte, meaning that it is common for the free folk women to engage in combat, it is obvious from Jon’s reaction that the same standard is not



applicable in the Seven Kingdoms. In Essos, both men and women combat in the fighting pits designed to cater to the blood-thirstiness of the audience. One such fighter is Barsena, who allegedly “[f]or eight years (...) had slain every other woman sent against her” (*DwD* 169). The female combatants are evocative of the rare, but still present, female gladiators of the Roman Empire (McCullough 955). Essos is also known for being a home to societies such as the ones in fortress cities of Bayasabhad, Samyrana, and Kayakayanaya, where the belief that those who give life (by giving birth) are the only ones allowed to take it, to kill, conditions that the military occupation is reserved exclusively for women (Martin et al. 293). Such customs are, from a Westeros perspective, described as strange (Martin et al. 300). From its onset, *A Song of Ice and Fire* codes the women warriors as atypical, and, by placing them into the societies considered less developed or even belonging to legends, corroborates that women fighters are a remnant of barbaric traditions.

A character who prominently challenges gender stereotype and fights for her place in the army is Brienne of Tarth. Brienne comes from a noble family and her father allowed her to independently stand with King Renly in the anarchy following Renly’s brother Robert Baratheon’s death. She displays her combat skill in a melee: “the victor of the great melee at Bitterbridge, last mounted of one hundred sixteen knights” (*CoK* 344). This victory earns her a place in Renly’s personal rainbow guard. It is interesting to observe that Renly, himself derided by many for being a homosexual, is the one who has no qualms about allowing a woman into his guard, trusting her with his life. The overwhelming majority of other observers do not share the sentiment: “[W]ho is that man, and why do they dislike him so?” Ser Colen frowned. ‘Because he is no man, my lady. That’s Brienne of Tarth, daughter of Lord Selwyn the Evenstar’” (*CoK* 343). An interesting parallel may be observed in the classic of the fantasy genre: *The Lord of the Rings* series by J. R. R. Tolkien. In a scene in the third instalment of the series, the Witch King of Angmar boasts that “[n]o living man may hinder” him (Tolkien 1101). However, he is startled to find out that he is fighting a woman, Éowyn, at whose sword he meets his end: “maiden of the Rohirrim, child of kings, slender but as a steel-blade, fair yet terrible. A swift stroke she dealt, skilled and deadly” (Tolkien 1101-1102). Éowyn is known to have previously challenged the social norm imposed by the men of the Middle-earth: “All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house: But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield a blade, and I do not fear either pain or death” (Tolkien 1027). Jessica Yates describes her as a classic woman warrior, who possesses a

sense of identity and purpose, military training, armour, good weapons and a horse, magic powers, and a due regard for chastity and modesty (McCrorry Hatcher 46). She is represented as a skilled warrior, but the fact that she has to hide her true gender and identity shows that it was unacceptable for women to engage in combat. Tolkien's influence which, as Edward James puts it, "looms over all the fantasy written in English" (62), may have played a part in the appearance of female characters in fantasy works who also cross-dress for at least a portion of a novel – such are Tamora Pierce's Alanna from the series *The Song of the Lioness* (1983-1988) (Kaplan 271), Princess Miriamiele from Tad Williams' *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* trilogy (1988-1993), and Brienne of Tarth.

The same phenomenon of legendary female warriors is to be found in the *Throne of Glass* series. In Erilea, women seem to have been granted the same opportunity to become militarily engaged. In a flashback, Aelin's father tells her: "And you (...) like the many women and men of this House, shall use [the shield] to defend our kingdom" (*KoA* 94). Aelin, whom we meet as an orphaned and ruthless killer Celaena – in line with the classic trope of mysterious parentage – becomes "the world's most famous assassin" (*ToG* 26) during her adolescence. Being of royal Fae origin, she later develops her fire-wielding powers. This ability grants her almost indomitable strength and unrivalled value in a fight. But even with her powers taken away from her, as happens in the concluding novel of the series, Aelin still reigns supreme: "She had been an assassin long before she'd mastered her power. It was no hardship to fall back on those skills. To let Goldryn draw blood, to engage multiple soldiers and leave them bleeding out behind her" (*KoA* 854).

The main character is not the only strong, military-orientated female character – the series is filled with them. One of the examples are the witches, warriors by nature, who function in army-like organizations called clans (*HoF* 67). Throughout the series, the witches and their leader Manon are commended for possessing a deadly set of skills, each of them polished almost to perfection. This is evident when Dorian, the new King of Adarland – who, given his upbringing, has had the chance to practice with the best instructors – learns "swordplay, archery, knife-work, tracking" from them (*KoA* 44). Maas' representation of witches diverges from the narratives in which witches are recurring stock villain characters; this is in line with the tendency of female writers to present witches as "empowered and liberated from oppression", as opposed to the male depiction of witches as purely evil ("Fantasy, 1900-1959" 41). However, witches are placed in an all-female environment, for they have no male counterparts. The elitism of their clans is the

other extreme of real-life American Special Forces units, to which a woman has for the first time earned access as recently as November 2018 (Myers).

The next one on the list of female fighters is Nesryn, who has a job in the royal guard and is deployed in scouting and combat missions (*QoS* 40). Another one of Aelin's close co-workers is Lysandra, who is first introduced as a high-ranking courtesan (*TAB* 239-240), but she later abandons her position and joins Aelin's inner circle. After it is revealed that she is actually a shapeshifter (*QoS* 310), she becomes an even more invaluable asset to Aelin's army: "Lysandra had learned these months that battle was no orderly, neat thing. It was chaos and pain and there were no grand, heroic duels. Only the slashing of her claws and the rip of her fangs; the clash of dented shields and bloodied swords" (*KoA* 100). Although she harbours no illusions about the battle itself, she is devoted to the country and the cause, which makes her a reliable soldier. Her common sense contributes to her value. Despite having had a row with Aedion, a general and Aelin's cousin, she admits that she is ready to follow his orders: "I obey no man (...) But I'm not fool enough to believe I know more about armies and soldiers than you do. My pride is not so easily bruised" (*KoA* 109).

Ansel of Briarcliff, the Queen of the Western Wastes, also acts as the commanding officer of her territory's army, and, like Aelin, takes an active part in combat. A situation she finds herself in showcases the hardships of being a commander and facing the annihilation of your soldiers: "Tears slid down her freckled cheeks. The heads of her men lay scattered in the snow around her" (*KoA* 545). At the same time, the scene is important because no one mocks Ansel's tears or ascribes her crying to her gender. While the situations are not the same, it could be possible to contrast this reception of female crying to that which Kayla Williams exhibits when her commanding officer cries in front of her: "You *never* cry in front of a subordinate. Especially if you're a woman in position of authority. They guys already think we can't handle this" (91). Similarly, Jennings seems to understand tears – hence, more broadly, the public showing of emotions and feelings – as unacceptable to the military surroundings: "I was in warrior mode, refusing to shed a tear" (28). The unrealistic setting allows the characters in *Throne of Glass* to show their emotions without losing the grasp on their authority; ergo, some characters of the fantasy genre can be said to embody the desired code of conduct that remains unrealized in actual life.

An interesting character to look at is one of the main villains of the series, Maeve. She is a Valg queen who has escaped from her husband Orcus, travelled to Aelin's world to be rid of him, and

has been posing as a Fae Queen for many years. The reason for her escape seems to be the need to cease being a passive observer of Orcus' military successes: "Tell Orcus that I grew bored of waiting for him to come home from his conquests. (...) I would much rather have joined him" (*KoA* 606). As a Fae queen, she has the opportunity to command her own armies and her goal is to rule the new world she has inhabited.

Not only are many of Maas' main characters strong women warriors, but the readers are also given clues about the existence of common women soldiers in the armies. Dresenda, a Fae warrior, commands a group of five male warriors (at least) (*KoA* 206). Hints about the presence of women soldiers appear throughout the last book of the series – a rider in the joined army of the Southern Continent and Anielle's forces (*KoA* 381) and a soldier in the fabled Mycenian army (*KoA* 834) are just a couple of examples. This suggests that the women in *Throne of Glass*, unlike the ones in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, are most probably given equal opportunity to pursue a military career, given their different provenances that are obviously not limited to barbaric tribes. In this, Maas diverges from Martin's purely descriptive approach to handling the gender discrimination. His approach is that of acknowledging the problem, while simultaneously offering no solution. Instead of preserving the *status quo*, Maas utilizes the fantastic setting to resolve the problems present in the real society.

### 3. Companionship

Camaraderie is an important concept in the army. It is the glue that keeps the soldiers, most of whom are initially strangers to each other, together and allows them to hold out against the physically and emotionally taxing perils. As Williams explains, "[w]hen you get deployed, your whole life – everything – is intimately bound up with the people on your team" (58). At first, Williams does not manage to bond with her female comrades – for example, she criticises her superior, Staff Sergeant, and describes her as an incompetent figure not worth the respect (Williams 89) – and soon discovers that the men from her team also regard her as different; "Guys in my platoon I drank and partied with back in the United States, but here it was not so easy to feel a connection. These guys were not even saying hello to me. They wouldn't even look at me. But they greeted the men on my team" (Williams 159). When she pushes for an explanation, Quinn says, "They think you're a slut. And they don't want to have anything to do with you. Because they think you're a slut" (Williams 175). This reasoning unvaryingly links her ostracism with her sexuality. During her deployment, Williams mentions only one team as being

a group of people in which no one gave her a hard time on account of her being a woman: “I was treated like a professional. . . . This unit was the *only* unit in which I never experienced any discomfort or harassment. . . . Even months later, when I ran into those guys, they always said, ‘Hey! You were our linguist in Baghdad!’ They never said, ‘Hey! You were that chick we had with us!’ – as so many other Army guys did” (Williams 123, emphasis in original). Williams highlights the need for evaluating the soldiers with regard to their skills, not their gender, and explicates that in the early 2000s, such an approach was a rarity. Because she is a woman and also a soldier, Williams “is not accepted in the ways she wants to be” (Peebles 97); still, because she manages to establish some bonds with her team, in “this story of failed potential for a new way of conceiving comradeship, one can see exactly that: potential” (Peebles 97).

The potential for stronger bonds between male and female soldiers is achieved to a greater extent in the case and experiences of Jennings. After the initial rough patch, she and Keenan Zerkel become friends and their reunions are always filled with genuine glee. Finn is a pilot who hired her and enabled her to come to New York and continue to advance in her career. She also develops meaningful and supportive friendships with Steve, Dave, Rhys, Mat, and others, even referring to her team members as “family” (Jennings Hegar 254). However, not all the teams and situations that she finds herself in are ideal. In one instance, she is challenged by Richard, who explicitly says he does not want to be in the same team as her because she, as a woman, “can’t hold [her] own in an evasion scenario” (145). Jennings dismally comments, “I wasn’t sure what pissed me off more—Richard’s outward sexism or everyone’s tacit acceptance of it” (147). The implicit acceptance of the sexist worldview and the rejection of Jennings on account of her gender is further evidenced by Richard spreading harmful rumours about her sexual activities and no one, yet again, standing up for her. The underlining meaning of this situation is that this particular team value Richard more than Jennings and are ready to accept him into the circle of companionship, thereby marginalizing Jennings, even though she “would have taken a bullet for any one of those guys” (161). Nonetheless, it is not to say that all soldiers are still reluctant to accept a woman among their ranks, as shown by the positive examples mentioned above. Compared to Williams’ situation, the military society has progressed in that sense, even though Jennings acknowledges that she “was also working in a career field that was highly male-dominated and filled with people who treated [her] as if [she] didn’t belong” (47-48).

The issue of camaraderie is also discussed or alluded to in fantasy fiction. Since there are no women in the regular Westeros army, there is little companionship that involves military-oriented women. Arya Stark’s role as a student of the Faceless Men’s craft is more of a Special

Forces position and she is, to utilize the symbolism of the Stark emblem, a lone wolf. Even though she is not welcomed into the military ranks, Brienne may be in the best position to form a relationship of mutual respect with another male fighter. Brienne is tasked by Catelyn Stark to escort Jaime Lannister to King's Landing and trade him for Sansa and Arya who were being kept there. The dislike is instantaneous and mutual – Jaime constantly jabs at her and pejoratively calls her a wench, whereas Brienne often refers to him as Kingslayer, a title he is not proud of. However, during their journey the two help each other – Brienne keeps his morale up after Jaime's hand is cut off and he prevents their captors from raping her. Finally, Jaime interrupts the fight between Brienne and a bear that served as entertainment for Lord Bolton by jumping into the pit and causing his new escorts to kill the bear. This episode is the turning point in their relationship. Jaime comes to her rescue after seeing Brienne in a dream that he describes: "In this light, she could almost be a knight" (*SoS* 610). Once he sees her as an equal in both skill and the title of a knight, Jaime is prompted to come to her aid. Henceforth they both discard the derogatory titles and call each other by their names (*SoS* 617-619). They transcend the identities that are based only on one's gender and past, which allows for a further development of the feeling of loyalty.

When it comes to Maas' characters and their approach to (female) companionship, the situation is different. As a fighter and a charismatic leader, Aelin commands respect and inspires loyalty. There are countless fights in which she engages and she and her friends, fellow soldiers and fighters, back each other up. They are fiercely loyal to each other, fearing for the wellbeing of their comrades. Recognizing the high number of female fighters, Aedion comments: "You know, you ladies *can* let us males do things every now and then", and Aelin muses how difficult it will be to willingly step down from the point of ultimate control and allow others to show their support by fighting alongside her (*EoS* 224, emphasis in original). Manon is also explicit in stating that in the army, loyalty is not "blind obedience, but forged in pain and battle, in shared victory and defeat" (*EoS* 163).

One of the most important factors of Aelin's military might is her ability to rally soldiers behind her. As mentioned, in the later books of the series Aelin develops fire powers of immeasurable strength – but she does not strictly rely on them to be enough to keep her soldiers devoted to the fighting and the cause: "Aelin did not need an ounce of flame to inspire men to follow. There she had been waiting, yanking at the bit, to show them what she, without magic, without any godly power, might do" (*KoA* 491). It proves to be a favourable strategy, as in the last novel, she is

stripped of her magic powers and can summon considerably less fire, but she has won the loyalty of her soldiers and they still follow her lead.

## 4. Discrimination

### 4.1. Gender-Based Insults

Peebles argues that sexism is inherent in the military, which is why the members of the military clique regard competent and assertive women as “bitches or ballbusters” (93). The isolation of Kayla Williams is deeply rooted into her gender: “And now the guys I considered my friends were treating me like a *girl*. I was tits, a piece of ass, a bitch or a slut or whatever, but never really a *person*” (Williams 214, emphasis in original). Evidently, the verbal abuse is present and utilized to widen the gap between Williams and other members who were in her team. The abuse runs so deep that Williams comments how she still cannot forget the insults aimed at her for being a woman: “Sometimes, even now, I wake up before dawn and forget I am not a slut” (13).

Jennings Hegar is also exposed to disparaging language by a brother-in-arms, Zerkel, who “never missed a chance to call [her] ‘babe’ or ‘honey’ in a dismissive way” (45), but was actually promptly called out for his behaviour and punished by the superiors (Jennings and Zerkel later become friends and Jennings helps him get the accusation of sexual harassment off his permanent record) (46-47). It is a step forward in the regard to gender-based insults, as Jennings Hegar is less frequently subjected to them than Williams and the authorities recognize this form of harassment and discipline those who commit it.

Verbal discrimination also occurs in the case of fantasy characters this paper deals with. Brienne of Tarth is constantly referred to as “wench” by Jaime. According to a dictionary definition, a wench is a young girl or woman, but the term is also used to denote a prostitute; the Middle English word *wenche*, from which the word is derived, also referred to a servant (“Wench”). Brienne stands up to him by saying, “My name is Brienne, not *wench*” (*SoS* 21, emphasis in original), but he persists in using this derogatory term that positions her as inferior to him in terms of age, skill, and prestige, even though she bests him in combat. Similarly, Aelin does not escape the pejorative terms used by her enemies; most prominently, she is given the moniker of a bitch. During the culmination of the first novel, an opponent, Grave, calls her a bitch. Her reply is firm and resolute: “‘My name is Celaena Sardothien,’ she whispered. ‘But it makes no difference if my name’s Celaena or Lillian or Bitch, because I’d still beat you, no matter what

you call me’” (*ToG* 351-352). Throughout the rest of the series, she is frequently referred to as “fire-breathing bitch queen”, but her reply remains, in line with the always applicable *acta, non verba* doctrine, a show of force rather than a verbal defence from the derogatory term ascribed to her.

As claimed by Jung’s theory of contrasexual aspects in the psyche, in which men possess the inner feminine side anima and women the masculine side animus, a bitch is a female whose animus is the dominant side of her psyche. The bitch is looked down upon by men for possessing those same characteristics men are praised for – acquisitive nature, intellect, persistence, ambition, and self-preservation instincts (Appleton Aguiar 7-8). In accordance with the Jungian theory, the women who strive to become more like men are ostracised for it in the world of Westeros and Essos (McGarry and Ravipinto 24). In Erilea, however, Aelin embraces her “bitch side”. Feminist fiction postulates that the bitch is a key component of the female protagonist’s personality. The bitch side is what keeps the female characters from being subjected to the hero or other male characters of the story (Appleton Aguiar 6). Maas, unlike her predecessors, the second-wave feminist writers of the late twentieth century, is not afraid to write her key female characters as having more nuance than the idealised heroines written only in positive light (Appleton Aguiar 1-2).

#### **4.2. Equal Skills**

Sexism in the military is not present only in the soldiers’ register. The skills of a woman warrior are often doubted. The already mentioned incident involving a perilous drive up a rocky hillside that Williams undertakes is significant for another reason – it shows that even with women playing an active part in the army, their presence is still surprising. Upon reaching her destination, Williams is commended for bravery with these words: “this one’s got *boobs*” (Williams 161, emphasis in original). A male soldier improvises a new slang term – female breasts have replaced male genitals in a phrase that is used to describe a courageous person. At first glance, it could be interpreted as a positive step meant to include women in what is linguistically and socially perceived as a male sphere, but the praise places emphasis on the sexual body and therefore Williams is still isolated due to her gender (Peebles 88).

Initially, Jennings’ environment encourages her to pursue her dream of becoming a pilot. Her step-father, David, never treats her differently for being a girl and always praises her when she excels, without appending that the feats she achieves are an accomplishment for her because she is a girl (Jennings Hegar 15). However, she is not always met with the same approval during her



time in the army, as evidenced by a conversation with one of her instructors during training: “‘that was the best spin recovery I’ve seen . . .’ My smile stretched. ‘. . . from a chick.’ Damn” (99). The praise Jennings is given is hedged, much like the surprised appreciation of Williams’ undertaking.

Similarly, in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, women’s skills are not taken at face value. Initially, Jaime does not believe in Brienne’s competence. He explains: “You can trick out a milk cow in crupper, crinet, and chamfron, and bard her all in silk, but that doesn’t mean you can ride her into battle” (*SoS* 21). He compares a woman warrior to a milk cow who is out of her place on a battlefield. Due to the introduction of a symbol of nurture – a milk cow – his insult is based on gender stereotype. Therefore, women have to prove their value before being accepted into the warrior culture.

However, the situation is different in *Throne of Glass*. It has already been elaborated that women warriors are generally accepted in the army. Aelin’s prestigious status as the most famous assassin is recognized from the start. Chaol, the Captain of the Guard of the Adarlan court, acknowledges her skill: “But I *do* know you were the best, and that people still whisper when they mention your name” (*ToG* 17, emphasis in original). Neither Chaol nor anyone else acts surprised that a notorious assassin is female – they merely admit that they had expected an older woman. The element of surprise or wonder is therefore limited to her age and not gender. Her age is what gives other characters pause in later novels, too: “But she’s barely a woman; she can’t know much about warfare at all” (*EoS* 405). Again, the worry expressed concerns her experience or the lack thereof, rather than her being a woman.

### 4. 3. Gender Stereotypes

A notable hindrance to a female’s involvement with the military are stereotypes about one’s gender. Whereas the stereotype is not expressly stated in Martin’s and Maas’ novels, for there being general consensuses that women cannot or can join the army, respectively, both Williams and Jennings Hegar come face to face with prejudice. Williams admits that one of the reasons she has joined the army is to prove to her abusive ex-boyfriend who insisted that she could “never make it in the military because [she] could never handle people yelling at [her]” (Williams 40) that he was wrong. Williams does not let his taunting discourage her, but instead allows it to fuel her desire to become a successful soldier.

Jennings encounters several men who make it difficult for her to realize her dreams by imposing gender stereotypes onto her. Major Johnson, her first commander, whom she is beyond excited to meet, greets her by saying: “Lieutenant, the first time your time of the month gets in the way of doing your job, you’re fired” (Jennings Hegar 51). Not only is that an antiquated way of thinking, but it is also beyond unacceptable in what is supposed to be a professional environment. Later, her Group Commander almost refrains from giving her his recommendation for a training application she desired, his reasoning centring on her husband, who is also in the military: “Who’s going to watch your kids? What if you both get deployed? If he’s going to be successful in the Air Force, he’ll need a strong support system at home. Don’t you want to be a good wife to him?” (Jennings Hegar 69). Finally, Captain Jones gives her failing grades during her training because “[h]is religion didn’t believe in divorce, and he thought [she] should be taking care of [her] husband instead of being here. He also didn’t think women should be flying” (Jennings Hegar 111). The men Jennings encounters are influenced by their personal beliefs and prejudice; they situate Jennings into a domestic frame and delegate her a role inferior to that of her husband, implicitly or explicitly saying that her place is not in the military, but at home.

## **5. A Warrior’s Identity**

### **5.1. Soldiers as Exceptions**

That competent female soldiers are sometimes considered pleasant surprises rather than the norm has already been touched upon in the instance of Kayla Williams driving a vehicle when no male companion of hers was willing to do the same. Another example is from Jennings’ memoir. During a rescue mission, Jennings comforts a fellow woman soldier, upon which Jennings’ friend comments how women should not be allowed on convoys for being too unstable or overly emotional. He says this to Jennings herself, who stood “covered in [her] own blood and soaked with jet fuel, (...) stared him down hard for a tick, but he didn’t catch on” (Jennings Hegar 231). The soldier who makes the generalization did not immediately understand that the woman who is standing in front of him deconstructs his whole thesis. The soldier, TJ, who is her friend, tries to make the situation better: “Oh, not you, MJ! You kick ass . . .” (231). However, making Jennings different than other women renders her an exception rather than the rule; furthermore, it ascribes to her characteristics regarded as masculine, distancing her from the sphere of the feminine. This brings into question her own identity, but also the possibility for any woman to be regarded as an equal soldier to a man without having to shed the traits traditionally connected to women.

Whatever their skills may be, the female soldiers cannot escape their sexuality, by which they are indefinitely defined (Peebles 85).

In the world created by George R.R. Martin, the women warriors are exceptions by default. Therefore, their identities are construed as belonging to the masculine sphere exclusively, or at least in part. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, there is “no chance of a social transformation which would allow [the women] power while remaining wholly women” (McGarry and Ravipinto 24). Brienne again serves as an example. Her apprehension towards femininity is evidenced in the rejection of the female title “Lady”: “‘What do you care what a monster calls you? (...) Lady Brienne?’ She looked so uncomfortable that Jaime sensed a weakness. ‘Or would Ser Brienne be more to your taste?’” (*SoS* 21) And although a female knight is not unprecedented in history – examples would be the 68 women who were appointed to the Order of the Garter between 1358 and 1488 in England (Frankel 47) – the idea is incomprehensible to an inhabitant of the Seven Kingdoms. Catelyn Stark also notes how deeply connected Brienne is to the warrior culture and the masculinity typically coded within it: “[s]he was like a man in that. For men the answer was always the same, and never farther away than the nearest sword. For a woman, a mother, the way was stonier and harder to know” (*CoK* 659). Despite examples from Westeros’ history, the majority of its populace deems the military an unnatural and undesirable setting for a woman; furthermore, women who do engage in military actions are considered not to be proper women at all, as is evidenced below.

## **5.2. Femininity, Masculinity, and the In-Between**

The discrepancy between what female soldiers feel like or identify as and what is expected of them is felt in both memoirs and fantasy novels this paper focuses on. This can be discerned in the analysis of the traditional female appearance in contrast to the masculine uniforms of a soldier. Williams’ novel features a set of photographs, the last page of this section of the book containing two photographs – one of Williams in camouflage gear, the other of her in an evening gown, made up. The stark juxtaposition serves to corroborate how Williams is able to don different armours – so to speak – when each is appropriate, hence fluctuating between identities, but keeping them separate. As Peebles says, “[s]he can be a butch, and she can be femme” (96).

In George R.R. Martin’s work, Brienne of Tarth adamantly rejects any link to her femininity. Clothes, as material distinction between men and women in a medieval setting, again serve for the explication of her perception of her identity: “Beside her, Brienne’s misery was almost palpable. Catelyn had ordered garments sewn to her measure, handsome gowns to suit her birth

and sex, yet still she preferred to dress in oddments of mail and boiled leather, a swordbelt cinched around her waist” (*CoK* 649-650). Later on, she is dressed in an ill-fitting pink dress for a dinner with Lord Roose Bolton and is then forced to fight a bear in the same inappropriate garb, in which she, according to Jaime, “looked more like a man in a gown than a proper woman” (*SoS* 619).

A similar phenomenon is to be observed in the character of Arya. Her own mother describes her as “[h]alf a boy and half a wolf pup” (*CoK* 786) – her feminine side is pushed to the sidelines. In an obvious inversion of gender roles, Arya’s new sword, gifted to her by her half-brother Jon, bears the name Needle. It was named after her “very favourite thing” (*GoT* 98). Of course, the superlative is used ironically and Arya actually wields a weapon – a phallic symbol – whose name is the only remaining thread that binds Arya to femininity. However, Martin distances Arya from the inflexible division of gender roles. When she begins her fencing lessons, Arya’s teacher, Syrio Forel proclaims: “Boy, girl. (...) You are a sword, that is all” (*GoT* 224).

Even though the above explication shows that Martin’s characters have a hard time accepting their femininity while concurrently acting in a masculine way, Westeros is not completely devoid of women whose perception of identity is not so clear-cut. Visenya, sister and wife to Aegon the Conqueror, the founder of the Targaryen dynasty, can here be used as an example. As a dragonrider, Visenya takes part in battle and helps her brother in his conquest of Westeros. Visenya is described as being as comfortable in armour and chainmail as in silk dresses (Martin et al. 35), evidently embracing both the male and female side of her identity.

The female identity in *Throne of Glass* oscillates more freely and more frequently. Although Aelin “embodies patriarchal, militaristic concepts of strength” (Cruger 128-129), she is not limited to the masculine sphere. Despite her recurrent engagement in close combat and the harsh life she is thrust into, she does not lose touch with her softer side. The reader is shown that she enjoys reading, music, and sweets (*ToG* 55, 143, 272). Above all, it is made abundantly clear that she thrives in luxury and adores dressing up in eye-catching gowns. Unlike Kayla Williams, who identifies with masculine qualities (endurance, stamina, willpower) and understands this identification as a simultaneous need to define “herself against the negative qualities associated with women” (Peebles 86-87), the focus Aelin places on combat and honing her physical skills does not take away from her enjoyment in being made-up and decked out (*ToG* 9, 45). Such duality – exhibiting those characteristics traditionally connected to males and those delegated to females – is in gender studies referred to as androgyny (Nelson). In the glimpses of Visenya’s

and Arya's descriptions and in the world of *Throne of Glass* such balancing between the male and female identity may be a sign that the women who enter the army are no longer ready to be confined only to one sphere of public life – military involvement no longer excludes women from their female selves.

## 6. Sexual Violence

### 6.1. In the Military

The problem of harassment has already been mentioned, but except for the verbal attacks, a number of women (and men) in the army are exposed to sexual violence. Williams gives a terrifying account of women coming forward about being raped in the army, only to end up suffering legal consequences themselves, since they, despite being underage, consumed alcohol prior to being assaulted (210). Speaking from personal experience, Williams also narrates how she, too, has been assaulted by her own brother-in-arms. She explains her perception of the horrific experience of sexual violence: “The *shame* of being in a position where you might have to do that. Yell for help. Like some damn damsel in distress” (Williams 208, emphasis in original). She is reluctant to call for help because she does not want to revert to the role of a woman who needs to be saved. Williams considers filing an equal opportunity complaint, but notes that “[e]ven *girls* don't like girls who file EO complaints – they don't want to rock the boat” (209, emphasis in original).

Jennings also lives through an incident of sexual violence. What is more, she is subjected to it by an army doctor, Adams. She tries to explain to him that she has just had her gynaecological exam, but he insists on redoing it, threatening not to sign the papers that she needs for becoming a pilot if she does not comply. Jennings describes: “What followed was in no way a gynecological exam. I lay there crying so hard I couldn't even breathe as he aggressively and painfully conducted his ‘exam,’ as if he was trying to embarrass me, to hurt me, to put me in my place, to assert his control” (75). Ironically, the doctor in question is later on selected as the Medical Group's Company Grade Officer of the Year (80), signifying that, even if his mistreatment of his female patients has been taken up with his superiors, it has not been punished. Furthermore, the protection of Adams by his chain of command and Adams' continuing career in the Air Force suggest the possibility of the incident not being an isolated event – it shows that the women in the military could be submitted to sexual violence on a daily basis and they would have limited options in regard to handling the situation.

In fact, that both Williams and Jennings experience some sort of sexual harassment and violence is in accordance with the statistics that show that female soldiers are “more likely to be raped by fellow soldiers than they are to be killed in combat” (Ellison). Department of Defence’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office announced that in 2010 there were 3,158 military sexual assaults reported; the number is considered to be “just 13,5 percent of the estimated 19,000 assaults that actually occurred” in 2010 (Ellison). Furthermore, the victims who do report their assault are mistreated by the military during the process of filing a complaint, and 90 percent of the victims end up involuntarily discharged (Ellison).

In *A Song of Ice and Fire* there are no regular female soldiers, so there is no woman who can experience sexual abuse from the hands of a comrade. Instead, the women of Martin’s patriarchal world are seen as inferior to men and as sexual objects existing to please, so they are frequently abused by their enemies; rape is described as the standard way for men to show power, mete out punishments, and take sexual pleasure where it is not freely given. When the men who are holding them prisoner approach Brienne with a clear intention to sexually abuse her, they are arguing about “who would go first” (*SoS* 416). There is no question about the morality of it, the only discussion point being of the practical nature – in which order they would impose themselves on her. What finally prevents them from raping her is Jaime’s reminding them that they can ransom her for a bag of sapphires, and their leader Vargo Hoat, who reinforces the point that she must remain a virgin if they want to get the ransom; significantly, Vargo Hoat’s point is based completely on profit and not any moral scruple about the wrongness of sexual violence.

In *Throne of Glass* there are two noteworthy examples of sexual violence against women connected to the military. Firstly, Kaltain Rompier, a noblewoman who acts as one of the antagonists in the first novel, is subjected to rape during her imprisonment in the castle. Her attacker is her former lover and co-conspirator, Duke Perrington – actually a vessel of the Valg King Erawan – and although Kaltain is not a fighter herself, it is later discovered that she is a magic wielder and Erawan wants to use her for his plan of opening the Wyrd Key gate. The violence she suffers is hinted at by mentions of handprints on her wrists and the fact that “[t]he night watch looks the other way when Perrington visits” (*CoM* 70). The rape of Kaltain can be said to have been utilized as a plot device to make her likeable. The implications of using rape as the beginning of character redemption arc are that only “bad girls” are raped – they have it coming (Cruger 124-125). Still, it is crucial to point out that the method Erawan uses for bringing down her morale and making her compliant with his plans is of the sexual nature.

A different example of rape is the institutionalized rape of witches who are supposed to bear Valg offspring. The witches are used as vessels for giving birth to a generation of demons whom Erawan wants to employ to fight in his war. The reader learns about their conditions from the perspective of Elide, a young noblewoman who is partially a witch herself, and what she witnesses makes her physically sick (*QoS* 333). Only this second-hand account is given. The rape is again a plot device to show Erawan's brutality and create a rift in the witch community that pushes Manon's section of witches to join Aelin's cause (Cruger 128). The actual victims are only collateral damage who die in an explosion caused by Kaltain. The reader never learns any of their names and they remain a part of the anonymous, sexualized, and victimized *hoi polloi*.

Interestingly, the women (witches) here take on the usually masculine role of protecting (other) women. Mitchell notes that it is the reports of sexual violence that are often utilized as a rallying call, an incentive for (men) to join a conflict to defend (their) women. Simultaneously, the rape reports serve as negative propaganda against the enemy (231). In the case in *Throne of Glass*, both objectives are achieved – witches begin to be swayed into joining Aelin's troops, whereas Erawan's ruthlessness is again accentuated.

## 6. 2. Civilian Victims

Rape is described as being one of the harshest forms of violence against women that is being used in wars. It is a way of simultaneously punishing and insulting women, and many victims feel guilty and ashamed (Isgandarova 177-181). Ana Milena Gonzales claims that “war strengthens patriarchy in such a way that it favors the actions that subordinate and dominate women at all levels” (qtd. in Thompson et al. 436). Throughout history there are innumerable instances of mass raping of women during war conflicts – for example, the Serbian-organized rape camps in Bosnia that were supposed to “dilute the ethnic identity” (Thompson et al. 436) and the rape conducted by Armenians as part of ethnic cleansing of the Azerbaijani during the Nagorno-Karabakh War (Isgandarova 175), to name only a couple. Although neither Williams' nor Jennings Hegar's memoir offers accounts of violence inflicted on civilians, both the Iraq war and the War in Afghanistan saw civilian populace violated by American troops – at checkpoints, during house searches, and systematically in camps and prisons (Fukushima and Kirk).

Whereas the authors of the memoirs remain silent about the issue of civilian rape, focusing rather on the issues within the military itself, rape is often referred to in Martin's novels. In Westeros and Essos, the violence is described as spiking during the time of unrest, for example when the

Night Watch rapes Craster's daughter-wives; at other times, it is severely punished (the punishment consisting either of being castrated or sent to serve at the Wall) (Frankel 15-16). Soldiers' sexual crimes are overwhelmingly aimed at civilians – the common people and even royalty. The alleged rape of Lyanna Stark that serves as an impetus for Robert Baratheon's rebellion and is an excuse for his just war waged to protect her honour is one that occurs off-page and the reader only learns about it through second-hand retellings. Mitchell likens it to the kidnapping of Helen of Troy – in both narratives, the woman is presented as a victim without her own agency and the fact that Lyanna Stark willingly married Rhaegar Targaryen is overlooked, if known at all (235). The myth of raising armies to rescue a woman “galvanises the masculinity (...) of war” (Mitchell 232). The war for Lyanna Stark's honour is unsolicited and mainly serves as an excuse for bringing down the old ruling house. On the other hand, another casualty of the same rebellion, Elia Martell, wife to Rhaegar, does not receive the same treatment. Her pain caused by the killing of her children and her rape by Ser Gregor Clegane is sidelined by most. A memorable exception is Elia's brother Oberyn, who seeks revenge and confronts her murderer in a gruesome duel. Clegane states: “I killed her screaming whelp. (...) *Then* I raped her. (...) Then I smashed her fucking head in. Like this” (*SoS* 975-976, emphasis in original). Clegane is framed inside the trope of the “lone wolf”; meaning, his actions are described as being deviant. He has acted without orders and the crimes he has committed are “a result of one lone offender, and not a natural consequence of masculine militarised culture” (Mitchell 238), relegating Elia and other women who may have suffered by the hands of the army to collateral damage.

In Essos, the eastern continent, Khal Drogo unequivocally presents his plan for the future overtaking of the Iron Throne: “I will kill the men in the iron suits and tear down their stone houses. I will rape their women” (*GoT* 594). Drogo understands the military as strictly masculine – soldiers are to be killed and further emasculated by the violation of their women. Hence, rape is a “naturalised and normal consequence of war” (Clapton and Shepherd 11). The women who are abused are seen purely as sexual objects: “This is how it has always been. Those men have shed blood for the *khal*. Now they claim their reward” (*GoT* 668).

Although subject to objectification, most female characters connected to the war culture in the world of *Throne of Glass* are not sexually assaulted. It has been established that Aelin is a capable fighter so it should be safe to say that her skills and resolve protect her against any attacker. She is noted to have also passed the same knowledge of self-defence to others, not necessarily fighters themselves. In *Tower of Dawn*, Yrene, a healer, says: “Someone once taught me self-defence. What to do against attackers. Usually the male kind” (139). The reader knows



that Yrene is speaking about Aelin, who has met the young healer during the events of *The Assassin's Blade*, a collection of novellas set prior to the events of the series. Yrene also organizes self-defence classes for young girls to enable them, too, to prevent any assault. It is obvious from the quote that the attempts at sexual assault and rape are not uncommon, but the women, for the most part, are not defenceless, and no longer mute in the face of their attackers.

## **Conclusion**

The army is a microcosm in itself, which mirrors the state of affairs in the civilian world – women gaining more rights also means more jobs in the military. This progress translates to literature: with the advent of the genre of women soldiers' memoirs, women's perspective on the functioning and issues of the army has been introduced to the wider public. These honest accounts written by women speak out about the circumstances they live in during their deployment, about their exposure to prejudice, discrimination, and abuse. The logistics of working around the policy of keeping women out of combat, which demand that the women soldiers be rotated through teams, consigns them to the margins of the military society. They are further shunned on the basis of stereotypes about female sexuality, lack of physical strength, and gender roles. The hostile bearing of the male soldiers might escalate into outright violence and many women in the army are subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence. Besides battling the discriminatory behaviour exhibited by their brothers-in-arms, women soldiers also have to come to terms with their own identity and the different aspects of it. Narrative works such as those of Williams and Jennings Hegar allow women to be the protagonists of their own stories, bring to light the problems that are often overlooked and thereby fight for their equal rights and equal job opportunities, more and more of which have been granted in recent years.

However, those same rights have been available to women in fiction in years prior to the actual realization of the fight for equality. Fantasy, always ahead of the real world, is the perfect genre for showing the desired way in which things should play out in reality. The circumstances that women in fantasy novels face are often similar to those of real soldiers, albeit placed in an invented setting, typically medieval-like one. However, the women warriors of the fantastic have matured from being side-kicks to being heroines in their own right. Giving women positions of power and painting them as equally capable as men in literature reveals the need for women to be allowed equal position in the actual military. Although her story begins in the late 1990s, with the ban on women in combat still being firmly in place in the American army, Brienne of Tarth

is not hindered by red tape in her stubborn pursuit of knighthood, even if she is judged by the overwhelming majority of the characters she encounters. The publishing of the first *Throne of Glass* novel coincides with Mary Jennings Hegar's suit against the Secretary of Defence, but while the actual results of the suit were to be reaped as recently as 2015, Aelin's right to partake in battle was effective immediately. Throughout the novels, the military-oriented women characters prove that, in the words of Jennings Hegar, "[b]attle readiness had nothing to do with gender and everything to do with individual capability" (232).

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