

# WOMEN ON THE THRONE: ACRITICAL LOOK AT THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THRONE OF GLASS SERIES.

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## **Abstract**

*A steady step in the high-fantasy genre, the 'Throne of Glass' series by author Sarah. J. Maas portrays a variety of characters that display conventional characteristics and yet are far from being so. Not only does it present a seventeen year old female protagonist as the most feared assassin in the kingdom of Adarlan, it also showcases a myriad of female characters who constantly break stereotypes. Upon superficial reading, the female characters appear to be just like any other, but throughout the series, we see an outshining development in character as we see women standing by each other, exhibiting the true meaning of strength. The focus is not only on the primary characters. The secondary characters see a great deal of importance and all-round character development too. This series is a successful step in promoting gender equality in the fantasy-fiction genre as it aims at breaking the shackles that categorizes women and undermines the extent of their growth and abilities.*

**Key Words:** Gender Studies, fantasy fiction, magic, feminism

In this paper, we will see how the "Throne of Glass" series by Sarah J Maas is a step forward in terms of the portrayal and representation of women characters in fantasy fiction genre. This particular genre, for women, is largely offensive regarding the picturization and characterization. The women are portrayed from a very misogynistic perspective and have been given extremely shallow and superficial characteristics. The physical characteristics of such women is very similar in almost all high fantasy books- A slim, perfectly shaped woman with shapely breasts, long hair and porcelain skin. One of the main roles these women play is to distract the main hero from his quest of revenge and bloodlust or to put him back on the path of righteousness and morality. Women in these novels have no other role other than playing the supportive partner or sidekick to the main hero. The high fantasy genre is one of male-order where the hierarchy begins and end with the males. Feminism takes an extreme backseat. Even though the genre is high fantasy, the women are still portrayed to be docile and domestic. Taking care of the men and existing as a backbone to the male is shown to be the only aim in their lives. Sarah J Maas, in her series tries to break through the conventional and stereotypical female of the fantasy fiction genre and create a niche for herself and her characters. Not only does she have a majority of female character in her books, they are also well-rounded, with lives of their own, that exist separately from the men of their life. The females do not completely stray from femininity. They still have the pleasing appearance but accompanying that are fierceness, an iron will, compassion and strong headedness. As the novels and the story progress, the characters show an outstanding development as their personalities flourish under the circumstances and it is refreshing to see all the women, holding their own. The trials and tribulations faced by each one of them is interesting to see as some of them break their will but they only break down to emerge stronger than before. That being said, the women are not afraid of being weak. They know that they will reckon with forces beyond their ken and sometimes, they walk on the path of defeat. What outshines in Maas's characters is their unending will to live in a better world, one filled with hope. Through their characters, the readers too, find a hope of the emergence of a newly developed fantasy genre that focuses on women as individuals and not just plot tropes who need to be saved. They are their own saviours and heroes.

Feminism and literature go hand in hand. For a long time, the high fantasy genre has been excluded from the realm of literature and therefore the misogyny and stereotypes forming there went unnoticed by and large. This genre is now not only consumed by teenagers. The entire demographic has changed. More and more adults have begun to consume this genre which is now coming to be commonly known as Young-Adult fiction. As the number of adults reading such novels increased, so did the number of people disgruntled with female representation in them. The need for strong female characters came to light and more literature in this genre with female leads that could be respected came into being. The readership for these novels increased as the plots and character developments of these novels began to agree with the feminist movement. Feminism does not stand for women over men. It stands for equal and correct representation of women as has been given to men. The women in the novels that appeared after the feminist movement showed a drastic difference from the kind of roles being assigned to them earlier. Where earlier, the only storyline for women characters was their love interest with hero and their domesticity, now they began to have quests and challenges that contributed to their development. The physical descriptions of women began to change too. They came to be less sexualised in

terms of their appearance and were given more believable and normalised appearances. They had stronger literal and metaphorical voices that they weren't afraid to use. The meek personalities gave way to stronger, well-rounded personalities with scope for development. Women's sexualities were better expressed and more characters with bold sexualities were written. The trend of animosity between two female characters gave way to women standing by each other and helping each other even if they did not share a common ground. This kind of development brought about a huge change in readership. Women began to read this genre over the usually preferred classic literature. One such revolutionary novel in this genre is the "Throne of Glass" series by Sarah J Maas.

The novel essentially deals with a seventeen-year-old girl who is Adarlan's most feared assassin. The books talk about her journey from being a slave in the salt mines after a betrayal from her master to the revelation of her identity as the rightful heir of a once powerful kingdom of Terrasen. The novels begin with her being a seventeen-year-old assassin. Though a fearsome being, she is often portrayed as childish and indulgent in frivolous activities. She is fixated on the fine things in life that include good clothes, jewellery, a luxurious means of living and indulgent amenities. She wishes to be desirable and attractive despite her profession. She shows an inclination towards good food. On superficial reading, she appears to be like any other seventeen-year-old but as the book progresses, we get to see parts of her that stand out from the characters we have seen so far in high fantasy. In spite of being an assassin, she is a voracious reader, which is step away from the typical description of one. All the feminine qualities she has can be seen as Maas' attempts to step away from the typical description of both, a female character and a fearsome assassin. The men she meets in the first book are afraid of her and are not fully able to accept all facets of her personality. Chaol Westfall seems to accept her abilities but does not trust her as she is an assassin. Dorian Havilliard seems to ignore that part of her and only looks at the part that is fond of pretty dresses, eats chocolate and reads romance novels. None of them are able to fully accept her for who she is and this is visible when none of them can digest it when she willingly carries out the assassinations assigned to her by the king of Adarlan. It is difficult for them to face her true character but they are eventually able to do so. Celestia's character flourishes even more when she becomes friends with Nehemia, the princess of Eyllwe, who was in Adarlan to court Dorian Havilliard. Nehemia is another strong character who shows strength right from the moment she is first mentioned in the book. She looks like a seemingly harmless female who is an outsider stranded in a land she knows nothing about and whose language she is not familiar with. Towards the end of the first book is when the truth about Nehemia comes out. Employing the "damsel in distress" trope, Nehemia successfully fooled every single person in all of Adarlan into believing that she was nothing but a helpless outsider. In her time there, Nehemia managed to gather a secret force to revolt against the king of Adarlan to free Eyllwe from its clutches. Her death at the hands of the king of Adarlan brings about a fierce change in Celaena, urging her to grow up and work for the cause her dear friend gave her life for. She sets in motion, the events that follow in the rest of the series. She introduces Celaena to the magic symbols known as Wyrdkeys that play an essential role throughout the course of the series. She can also be considered partly responsible for unleashing Aelin Galathynius, Celestia Sardothien's true personality, her true form. Aelin Galathynius is the true heir of Terrasen, the princess who went missing at ten years old when Terrasen was attacked by Adarlan.

Aelin is the true protagonist of the series as she is the one responsible for saving Erilea from the Valg king monsters that plan to attack the world and take it under their clutches. The growth of Aelin as an individual and her growth into the queen she was meant to be is one of the main storylines in the entire series. She is on the verge of breaking down when she meets Rowan, who trains her in how to wield her magic. Throughout the training, Aelin sinks deeper and deeper into herself as the crushing weight of everything that she has gone through threatens to overcome her sanity. Towards the end, with the help of Rowan, she learns how to fully accept her past and her magic and learn how to wield it in combat. A step away from the usual concept on High-Fantasy genre where the woman aids the man's development, here, Rowan is the one who sets Aelin on the journey of growth and discovering her true self. Once she overcomes her past, learns how to control her magic and wield it to her abilities the readers realise that she is in fact, the true hero of the series. She is the one who frees from the evil queen Maeve, whom he was bound to in eternal servitude, owing to the blood oath. Her stance as the hero of the series is reinstated when she frees Dorian Havilliard from the Valg who had possessed his body. She also helps him regain his empire back after freeing his father, the king from the Valg's possession, eventually killing him. She sets things in motion for Dorian and leaves Adarlan to go home to Terrasen. She is accompanied by a loyal court consisting of Rowan, her cousin Aedion and Lysandra, a former courtesan whom she worked things out with. Another strong character, Lysandra's importance in the series slowly grows as we see a magnificent growth in her character. From a mere courtesan to being an integral part of Aelin's court that helps her win the battle for Terrasen against the Valg king, Lysandra plays a key role as she too, possesses magic. She is a shape shifter and has endangered her own life on multiple occasions to help win battles for Aelin. When Aelin secretly left to gather an army for Terrasen, Lysandra shapeshifted into Aelin and remained so until Aelin came back. The developing friendship and trust between the two females is something uncommon in the high fantasy genre.

While mentioning the growing friendship between characters, one of the most unforgettable duo of the series is Manon Blackbeak and Elide Lochan. Manon is a witch of the Blackbeak clan and has twelve witches under her

that are her closest friends and together, they are called “The Thirteen”. Together, they are fierce and unforgiving to anyone who crosses their path. Manon is an important character in the story and also to explain how monsters are created under circumstances and how it is possible to leave your old ways behind when the time calls for it and when you know better. For Manon, loyalty is of utmost importance and it is clearly visible through the tight bound Thirteen coven. The thirteen lay their trust in Manon and no one else, not even the Matrons who lead the clans. Their loyalty to Manon is what leads them to give their lives up for her at the end of the series. The sacrifices she made for her coven, the love she gave them, the fierceness with which she protected them makes them return her favour by stepping for the final “yielding” where each witch can yield magic but it would cost them their lives. The thirteen use this yielding to give Manon a little more time to escape and save her own life and the loves of those around you. At Morath, training for battle is where Manon meets Elide Lochan. Elide Lochan is the daughter of Marion Lochan, the woman who helped Aelin escape when Adarlan attacked Terassen. Elide, now captured by her uncle Vernon, lives the life of a slave in Morath, not allowed to leave the tower where she has been imprisoned since her capture. Meek and timid in appearance, Elide uses this faced to gather enough information about her surroundings to plan a successful escape. Manon finds Elide and after a while, she realises that Elide is not the timid being she claims to be and she also senses witch blood in her. She claims Elide as a part of the Blackbeak clan and therefore, protected by the thirteen. This ensures that no one lays a hand on Elide and eventually, Manon is the who helps Elide escape the hell hole that her life had become. Though alone and inexperienced in the world, Elide manages to reach Aelin. Then on, owing to her intelligence, determination and courage, she becomes an integral part of Aelin’s court. After they win the war against the Valg king, Elide regains her ancestral property and becomes the lady of Perranath. Friendships between women play an integral role in the series as this was an attempt by the author to portray women being wholesome individuals with little to no help from the men in their life. Men are an important aspect of their life but by giving us such powerful female characters, Sarah. J. Maas has proven that the female characters can be self- sufficient and believable. Aelin overcomes the misery in life, survives through a childhood abduction, years of abuse by her master, the slavery and imprisonment in the salt mines, the King’s competition where she faces and survives multiple attacks on her life and emerges out as one of the strongest women in the series. She is broken, she is afraid, she sometimes makes the wrong choices but she does not let these things set her back and away from the path she has to walk. “My name is Aelin AshryverGalathynius. And I will not be afraid” (Maas, Kingdom Of Ash) is what she tells herself as she suffers through the torture she is put through when she is held captive by Maeve, the Valg queen. A narrow escape from her clutches is what saves her soul and spirit from completely breaking and the thought of a better world and a home for herself seems to be the only things keeping her from completely breaking down to the point of no repair. Rowan helps her on her journey of healing. With the support of Rowan, her court and the dream of home, of Terrasen, Aelin is able to find herself again. Though not what she sued to be, Aelin has emerged from the torture stronger and a better person. She puts her own life at risk when she tries to close the wyrdgte but she manages to survive that too. She loses her magic to the point where only a fraction of what it used to be is left. She is willing to make that sacrifice for the sake of a better tomorrow. Lysandra overcomes years of sexual abuse she faced during the time she was a courtesan and becomes a warrior who plays an integral part in saving Terassen. On more occasions than one, her selfless attitude and her belief in the world Aelin promised them has saved the lives of her friends. Like Aelin, Lysandra too, put the collective need ahead of her own life. Elide, through her wit and bravery, regains not her only her lands, but also her sense of self. She blossoms into a strong woman who is capable of great things should she wish them. Manon and the thirteen are proof that if monsters can be made, they can be unmade too. Aelin and the females in her court are in no way stronger than the enemies they face. But they have one thing that the enemy doesn’t- unyielding trust in one another and the power of friendship. All of Maas’ s characters portray extraordinary strength and a strong sense of friendship that gives all of them a sense of belongingness. Sarah J Maas successfully portrays heroines that are larger than life and gives them humanlike qualities that make them extremely relatable. The heroines are not without flaws. They have their flaws, they make mistakes and they misjudge situations. But at the end, they overcome all of it in the face of adversity. Through these novels, the author has taken a huge step forward in the high fantasy genre by giving us such strong female heroines.

#### WORKS CITED

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