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Recensão a *Medievalism in a
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Thrones,*
de Shiloh Carroll

Patrick Masters

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Shiloh Carroll

*Medievalism in a Song of Ice
and Fire & Game of Thrones*

Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2018. 214 pp.

Patrick Masters*

Shiloh Carroll draws upon several critical theories ranging from Masculinity to Orientalism to produce an engaging detailed thematic study of George R R Martin's worldwide acclaimed book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-2011), and its adaption to screen in the popular TV Series *Game of Thrones* (Benioff and Weiss, 2011+). *Medievalism* addresses the archetypal conventions of the medieval historical setting or medieval inspired fantasy fiction and deconstructs their depiction for a modern audience. The analysis of medieval conventions and tropes included in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is structured around five chapters, each addressing the themes of romance literature, masculinity, sexuality and colonialism. Carroll addresses these themes alongside close readings from Martin's fantasy series, which draw upon numerous engaging, but also thought-provoking examples to underpin what impact these popular medieval archetypes have upon wider society.

Carroll's detailed study is not about addressing Martin's historical influences or his adherence to historical accuracy, but Martin's attempts to create a sense of medieval authenticity through his "desire to move past the romantic archetypes or neomedievalist fantasy". This concept of the realistic medieval is addressed with the acknowledgment of the implausibility of historical accuracy in recreations and

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taking into account the geographical vastness and time period encompassed by the term Medieval. Carroll explains that Martin's desire for realism is often used to justify his depiction of violence and cruelty suffered by the occupants of his fictional world, one of the major threads that runs through her thematic analysis of the book series. Although the book's introduction references an interview where Martin demonstrates his disdain for modern fantasy literature dubbed a "a sort of Disneyland Middle Ages, where they had castles and princesses and all that" Carroll's close thematic analysis details the societal impression these medieval archetypes and iconography leave when examining them from the perspective of realism.

Medievalism is not purely a study of Martin's medieval perspective, Carroll also addresses the relationship of Martin's work with medieval literature. Chapter 1 – Chivalric Romance and Anti-Romance introduces the fantasy archetypes within *A Song of Ice and Fire*, but Carroll asserts these are used as mythical tales the characters tell each other, contrasting with the oppressive violent medieval society that Martin has created.

Carroll highlights that for Martin's first novel in the series, *A Game of Thrones* (1996) he used the structure of conventional medievalist story by initially painting Ned Stark as the archetypal hero to subvert the fantasy genre conventions and kill his main protagonist and assumed hero of the saga. The examination of the subversion of traditional fairy-tale conventions is further addressed when Carroll explains that this theme is embedded in the story through the character of Sansa, (who Martin dedicates several POV chapters to in the first novel) who after watching her father's execution, learns that fairy-tales are unrealistic and informs the reader that these books do not follow the conventions of the traditional Tolkien fantasy story.

The theme of chivalry is a major archetype of fantasy and medieval literature, which is addressed by Carroll from the perspective of those who are not strong noble male warriors and explores what a society built on these traits would mean for the vastness of the popu-

lation. The myth of chivalry is exposed by Carroll's evaluation of the books' depiction of masculinity, highlighting the fallout for characters who cannot meet these requirements, such as Brandon Stark whose dreams of knighthood are in ruin when he is left paralysed after being pushed out of a tower. *Medievalism in a Song of Ice and Fire & Game of Thrones* underpins the lack of self-worth felt by Bran and characters who do not conform to the toxic masculinity aspects of supposed chivalric archetypal characters.

Although the academic study showcases the impression of a society governed by Martin's realistic archetype of chivalry, Carroll particularly draws attention to Martin's depictions of the major female characters and is critical of his novels for conforming to preestablished archetypal female characters such as Brienne of Tarth who Carroll explains adheres to the "exceptional woman trope". However, Carroll clarifies that Martin does heavily involve his female characters in the narrative and uses the female POV characters to voice their frustration towards their oppressive culture with their actions showing they do not accept their roles within the patriarchal hyper-masculine world.

The effect of Martin's version of chivalry on society is further addressed, analysing the depictions of the relationship between toxic masculinity and sexuality. Carroll uses Martin's own words to highlight the harmful impact the 'chivalric' culture has citing an analogy from *Clash of Kings* (Martin, 1998) that the war of the five kings represents "Westeros as a woman being savaged and raped by four rat-like men"¹. Carroll highlights that Martin's medievalist construction shows the perils of a women's sexual liberation using the example that Lyanna Stark's act of eloping with Rhaegar Targaryen leads to her death, demonizing her for taking control of her sexuality. This coincides with Carroll's examination in relation to women's disadvantaged positions in medieval society in regard to societal constraints such as succession and marriage.

1 Shiloh Carroll, *Medievalism in a Song of Ice and Fire & Game of Thrones* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2018), 86-87.

There is a diverse tapestry of characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, a diversity whose depiction Carroll examines within a society dominated by the toxic masculinity of chivalry. Despite the novels' diversity of perspective, Carroll is critical regarding Martin's depiction of same sex relationships, highlighting that Martin does not depict male on male sex in detail and does not have them as POV characters. She does articulate a compelling defence of Martin's approach, arguing that this absence traces back to the book's overall theme of historical realism suggesting that Martin created his book that way due to the intolerance and condemnation of medieval society.

The final thematic engagement with Martin's fantasy examines the problematic connotations that arise from the novels' ambitious, intercontinental narrative, which places the white hero Daenerys into a different culture to that of the western inspired Westeros. Carroll examines how Daenerys's role of liberator of the oppressive foreign culture suggests problematic connotations of colonialist perspective and places Daenerys within the role of the 'white saviour'. Carroll draws upon Said's concept of the Orientalist view to argue that Martin's eastern geographical creations coincide with the imperial perspective of the east and its populace such as the Dothraki Horse Lords, portraying it as a place of barbarity, mystery and magic.

Where the author excels in constructing the critique of Martin's work is addressing the impact a chivalric authority would have upon on real world setting, drawing upon feminist critical theory to examine how toxic masculinity impacts on those that cannot conform to this narrow parameter. Carroll explains that Martin's desire for realism was often used to justify his depiction of violence and cruelty and therefore examines how this realism narrative affects the multi-faceted wider society that exist in that archetypal medieval culture.

The last chapter in Carroll's study, Chapter 5 – Adaption and Reception, addresses the popular television adaption of the book series, *Game of Thrones* and explores the previously addressed themes within the 'realist' medieval world depicted in the television series. Unlike the

analysis of the books, the critical examination is confined to a single chapter, which limits the level of detail provided in the close readings of the novels for the six-television series released before 2018. While this does not diminish the quality of critique of the adaptation as this book focuses mainly as a literature study, it does provide the possibility for further study into the television show, examining Martin's concept of realism from the perspective of the television production.

Carroll's book provides a detailed thematic overview of *a Song of Ice and Fire*, drawing upon the contrast between Martin's claim of authenticity and influence of medieval romance literature. The vastness of Martin's series could suggest that readers who are not familiar with the five novels in *A Song of Ice and Fire* would find difficulty in fully engaging with Carroll's arguments but this is not the case. The book's carefully chosen examples are presented in a clear distinguishable context with articulated critical theories that run alongside the main thread of examining Martin's claim of adherence to historical accuracy.

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