Abstract

In this essay I will analyse in depth Jim Butcher’s and George R.R. Martin’s female protagonists in Butcher’s Dresden Files and Martin’s A Song of Ice and Fire. The essay will demonstrate how both Butcher and Martin depict their female protagonists and companion characters and how their female characters cope with violence in a different manner than how most female writers let their characters do. Moreover, I will analyse and explain how Butcher and Martin’s female protagonists and companion characters are good examples of strong female characters.

Both series will be discussed and analysed separately, and subsequently compared to each other, as well as to similar series by female authors, in order to demonstrate how Butcher and Martin depict their female protagonists differently from female authors.
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Introduction

Jim Butcher and George R.R. Martin are two very different writers, both in style and genre. However, when it comes to their female characters, they have certain points in common. Both Butcher and Martin are skilled in writing about strong women as well as not romanticizing violence against women. In addition to that, many of their female characters are not stereotypical female characters.

The American writer Jim Butcher is best known for his series *The Dresden Files*, but is also known for his *The Codex Alera*, showing that he can be versatile in his writing by not limiting himself with urban fantasy (Famous Authors). According to Butcher himself his interest in fantasy and science–fiction novels began at the age of seven after reading *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time (Butcher, *Changes*, 547). *The Dresden Files* is a series of currently fifteen novels about the American wizard Harry Dresden. In addition to those the novels have been narrated to audiobooks, several graphic novels based on the series and there has been created role–playing game based on the series as well (Famous Authors). Set in the primary world, *The Dresden Files* is classic example of urban fantasy which, according to Farah Mendlesohn, would fall in the category of intrusion fantasy. The main reason for that is that magic and monsters are intruding the real world and becoming a part of the world as most people know it to be (Mendlesohn 114-116).

All urban fantasy novels have the same basic elements in common and *The Dresden Files* is no exception. Alexander C. Irvine writes in his essay, “Urban Fantasy” published in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*:

> The elements common to all urban fantasies - a city in which supernatural events occur, the presence of prominent characters who are artists or musicians or scholars, the redeployment of previous fantastic and folkloric topoi in unfamiliar contexts – hint at a characterization if not a rigorous definition. With those common elements, there are two fundamental strains of urban fantasy, which might be loosely differentiated as those in which urban is a descriptor applied to fantasy and those in which fantasy modifies urban. (Irvine, 200).

*The Dresden Files* novels are consistent with Irvine’s statement on urban fantasy, with the setting in a modern city, Chicago, and the protagonist is a scholar in his own field, as a wizard. The fantastic world of *The Dresden Files* wherein both the supernatural and
the normal coexist is a good example of Irvine’s statement above. In a modern city of Chicago, supernatural creatures—such as wizards, Sidhe and vampires to name but a few—live and practice magic, cohabiting with the seemingly oblivious regular people (Butcher, Side Jobs 63-101). The supernatural and folkloric elements of the magical world that Harry Dresden lives in is separate from the world were regular people live in, even though both share the same city.

As Butcher, George R. R. Martin is an American author, who is best known for his A Song of Ice and Fire series which was adapted to the hit TV series A Game of Thrones (George R. R. Martin). A Song of Ice and Fire is almost textbook example of high fantasy, which is also known as epic fantasy. It is very different from urban fantasies and C. W. Sullivan III explains high fantasy as following:

The literary or compound term ‘high fantasy’ is enormously evocative and, like most evocative terms, it is pluralistic in meaning and therefore difficult to pin down with a neat or precise definition. ‘High’ can refer to style, subject matter, theme or tone. It can also refer to the characters themselves - their elite or elevated social status or the moral or ethical philosophies which they espouse or exemplify. It can even refer to the affective level of the story itself. ‘Fantasy’ as a literary term, refers to narrative possibility limited, at least initially, only by the author’s own imagination and skill as a story-teller. When combined, ‘high fantasy’ identifies a literature genre which includes some of the most universally praised books for young readers. (Sullivan, 436).

A Song of Ice and Fire falls well within Sullivan’s explanation of high fantasy, in reference to the characters, especially the protagonists, high social status as well as subject and theme of the novels. In the series the wars and powerplay of people of high society is consistent with Sullivan’s writings, even though the tone of the series can hardly be interpreted as high, due to the colloquial use of language. When it comes to A Song of Ice and Fire, it is clear, that it is set in a pure fantasy world, even though it has certain European medieval theme. The fact that the novels take place in a purely made up world is a good indication that they are high fantasy.

Before discussing The Dresden Files and A Song of Ice and Fire further, the difference between primary and secondary world must be explained. J. R. R. Tolkien explains this well in his essay “On Fairy Stories”. According to Tolkien, the primary, or
the real world, is the world in which the author lives. In that world there is no room for supernatural events or creatures, only what can logically be explained. A secondary world is therefore the contrast to the real world (Tolkien, 12). In the secondary world is a place where the reader can enter with his mind and willingness to belief the unbelievable. According to Tolkien the author creating the secondary world also creates what is “true” within that world (Tolkien, 12-13).

Although Harry Dresden is the main character of the series Butcher’s female protagonists in the series are far more interesting. Butcher shows that he is more than capable of creating interesting, strong and powerful female companion characters in his story. In *The Dresden Files*, Butcher often chooses female characters over male characters when it comes to creating either allies or enemies of Harry Dresden. For a narrative series that is more male-oriented this is very interesting, especially because many of Butcher’s female characters do not rely on their sex appeal or being helpless dames in danger, even though such characters are certainly found within the series. Usually those are minor characters, rather than recurring female characters.

George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* series is very different from Butcher’s *Dresden Files* both in style and genre. Westeros, the medieval setting of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is well known as an epic or high fantasy setting (Sullivan 436-440). Farah Mendelsohn states in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* that longer series are difficult to put in just one category. *A Song of Ice and Fire* being a good example of this. It can either belong to the portal–quest fantasy since it is set in an entirely secondary world, with secondary belief system. It can also belong to the intrusion fantasy- due to the fact that the monsters- magic and supernatural elements in the series are intruding on the real world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which clearly not the primary world of the author (Mendlesohn 1-4, 114-116).

Like Butcher, George R. R. Martin also writes about women in a believable manner, creating strong and powerful female characters in an environment that is very hostile towards women, where women are forced to endure physical, mental and sexual abuse, which they not only survive, but often become stronger than they had been before.

Both Butcher and Martin use many female characters in their works, and despite different styles and genres the two of them have in common that their female
protagonists are not one-dimensional character. Butcher’s and Martin’s female protagonists have personalities and layers, often leaving it up to the readers to understand them completely. When discussing Butcher and Martin’s female characters it has to be addressed how both authors provoke the common gender stereotyping when it comes to female characters. The traditional stereotyping when it comes to gender roles in literature is to depict females in passive and domestic roles. They are more often secondary characters and often in situations in which the female needs to be rescued by a male character. Women are often given the role of a caretaker such as nurse, a mother or a teacher of young children. Female characters seldom are depicted as leaders, the more typical role is follower. Male characters are in the contrast often the decision makers, fighter or even king, generally giving them the position of a leader. Male characters are also often depicted as strong, brave and independent, and more typically given the central roles (Turner–Bowker, 462-465).
Jim Butcher’s Female Protagonists in *The Dresden Files*

The three female companion characters that will be analyzed from *The Dresden Files* are Susan Rodriguez, Lara Raith and Queen Mab. These characters are all extremely different from one another. They are from different cultures, times and even species. However, they all show how Butcher builds his female characters. It is worth mentioning that even though none of the three is a leading character or a protagonist they represent strong female characters.

Susan Rodriguez is one of the few female companion characters who goes through serious mental and physical changes in the series. After being bit by a Red Court vampire seeking revenge on Harry Dresden in *Grave Peril*, Susan has to figure out who she is and what she wants to be (Butcher, *Grave Peril* 391-392). Susan decides to use her strength as a half vampire by joining the Fellowship of St. Giles. The organization appeals to her sense of justice, in line with her work as a journalist (Butcher, *Changes* 12-15). Susan establishes that she is more than just a pretty girl, who uses her looks to her advantage in order to get a good story for the paper she worked for (Butcher, *Storm Front* 56-62). Susan is given room to develop and change in the story. She grows from the sexy reporter role into the role of a hero giving the ultimate sacrifice when she gives her own life in order to save her daughter from the Red King (Butcher, *Changes* 518-523). This is a very common characterization of a mother, a character willing to sacrifice herself in order to save her child (Marcu, 64-66). It also gives Susan the complete role of the mother who is supposed to be nurturing, kind and willingly sacrifices herself for others (Marcu, 64-66). The way Susan is able to fight the urge to give in and become full a vampire of the Red Court shows incredible strength of character and willpower. This is typical for Butcher’s female characters. Their strength is not necessarily physical, but they often show inner strength in finding ways to overcome the difficulties that their gender may cause. Susan’s main problem, however, is not her gender. It comes directly from the fact that she is stuck in transformation from human to vampire, a decision she has made for herself. Susan is in many aspects a complex character, being a mixture of a traditional female character with motherly attributes to a fierce warrior of the Fellowship of the St. Giles.
Another of Butcher’s interesting female companion characters is Queen Mab. She does not have anything in common with Susan and is a striking contrast to her. While Susan is the mother who will sacrifice even her life for her child the same thing can not be said about Queen Mab. When facing similar decision as Susan, Mab’s choice to sacrifice her daughter seems cruel, when in fact it shows the difference between Susan’s humanity and Mab’s fae side, the fact that Mab is not human and not bound by human concept of motherhood and compassion (Butcher, *Cold Days* 585-598). Queen Mab is easily one of the most powerful characters in the series, regardless of gender. As the Queen of the Winter Court in the Nevernever, wherein the Sidhe live, Mab is not only extremely powerful when it comes to magic but also completely ruthless when it comes to getting her own way. Queen Mab is no friend of Harry Dresden’s. In fact, her interest in Harry is to use him to serve her own agenda and she does everything that she possibly can in order to get her own way. Mab is manipulative and political. Moreover, she always thinks at least five games ahead of everyone else as well as being easily offended and takes much pleasure in getting revenge when crossed (Butcher, *Skin Game* 489-498). Since Mab is being purely supernatural being, she does not care much for humanity and does not feel much sympathy for the sufferings of few humans whose short lives will end soon anyway (Butcher, *Small Favor* 517-520). Additionally, Mab does not have any problems with making deals with her enemies and then betraying them again, in order to reach her ultimate goal (Butcher, *Skin Game* 489-495, 584-586). By taking the description of Mab into consideration many of her characteristics seem to be more fitting to a male character than female characters. Female characters tend to be motherly, kind, helpful, offering warmth and love, controlled by their emotions. Mab does not show any of those characteristics unless it suits her agenda to do so.

When looking closely at Mab it becomes apparent how different she is from Butcher’s other female companion characters. Instead of being a victim of violence Mab more often inflicts violence on others, both male and female. Moreover, Mab does not seem to care about others unless it will benefit her in some ways. When Mab does show kindness, it is a calculated effort which results in a personal benefit. A good example of Mab’s true nature can be seen in *Cold Days*. Mab arranges for Dresden’s physical therapy after he is shot. It seems like a kind thing to do, but there is an ulterior motive.
Moreover, Mab’s idea of physical therapy and motivation is to try and kill Harry. If he manages to survive, he is recovering, if not Harry is useless to Mab and therefore not worth her time or effort (Butcher, *Cold Days* 1-11). Mab loves her daughter Maeve, or at least as much as she can love another person. That does not mean that Mab will not kill her when finding out that it is Maeve who has been working with the Outsiders, in a carefully laid out plan to get revenge on Mab. Ordering Harry to kill Maeve is not easy for Mab, and that is the first time she shows any real feelings for her daughter. (Butcher, *Cold Days* 74-75, 585-598). This shows how different Mab is from other female characters in the series. Susan Rodriguez gives her own life to save her daughter from the Red King (Butcher, *Changes* 518-523). Lara Raith similarly does everything she can do save her siblings, both from their father and other enemies (Butcher, *Blood Rites* 146-159). Mab is willing to sacrifice her daughter in order to keep the balance and keep the Outsiders out of the world (Butcher, *Cold Days* 585-598). This does give an interesting insight into Mab’s character. She is a mother, but she does not act as a mother, or in fact as a female opposite to the other female characters. Mab does not show typical female characteristics. On the contrary she seems to have more in common with male characteristics even though Mab is clearly female.

Lara Raith of the White Court of Vampires is the third and last female companion character from *The Dresden Files* to be discussed and analysed. Like Queen Mab, Lara Raith, is not human and therefore does not have the same human restrictions as Susan Rodriguez. Furthermore, Lara has learned to embrace, and even enjoy, her vampiric side while Susan refuses to let the monstrous side gain control over her actions. Lara likes the strength her vampiric side gives her and does not feel ashamed to give in to her Hunger. A part of the power given to the White Court vampires is good looks and sex appeal, which Lara uses to the fullest, in order to get what she wants. As vampire of the White Court, Butcher describes Lara Raith, through Harry Dresden, as:

Tall, even without the heeled faux - Victorian boots of Italian leather. Her hair was so dark that its highlights were nearly blue, a torrent of glossy curls held partially in check with a pair of milky ivory combs. She had eyes of dark grey with hints of violet twilight at their centers. Her clothers were all effortless style: natural fabrics, black skirt and jacket embroidered with abstract dark crimson
roses with a white blouse. Thinking back later, I couldn’t clearly remember her facial features or her body, beyond the notion that they were superb… I could sense the nature of the woman – strength of will, intelligence, blended with a sardonic wit and edged with a lazy, sensuous hunger (Butcher, Blood Rites 111).

However, Lara’s appearance is not what is the most interesting about her. She is the White King’s oldest daughter and has a considerable amount of political and supernatural power to her name. Her father runs the White Court business in name only, but the family is another matter (Butcher, Blood Rites 411-413). Since the White Court vampires feed on lust and sex – rather than the typical trope of vampires who subsist only on blood, sexual and carnal relations become a tool that the White King uses to control his daughters. The White King carefully controls when his daughters are first introduced to the Hunger, the equivalent of bloodlust for the other types of vampires in the Dresdenverse. The Hunger is the White Court Vampires demonic side. They are all born with it, it is what gives them they extra strength, endurance and longevity among other things. However, the Hunger also comes with a price. It drives them to feed, making them hunt for their pray. If the Hunger is denied feeding it will eventually make the vampire go insane (Butcher, Blood Rites 44-45). Moreover, the White King also feeds on his own daughters in order to keep control of them and establish his superiority to them. (Butcher, Blood Rites 169-178, 194-195,413-415). As a vampire of the White Court Lara is very strong, ruthless, determined as well as very focused on the different possibilities when it comes taking victory over her enemies (Butcher, Blood Rites 146-154). The way Lara deals with Lord Raith and his abuse, both to herself as well as to her sisters is done in a convincing way. Lara seems to be under her father’s influences, obeying his orders because she has to do what he wants (Butcher, Blood Rites 167-171). However, when it comes to saving both her younger brother and sister Lara finds enough inner strength to break free from her father and save them all from his abuse:

“Wizard,” she said, “I suggest you take your friend from this place. And my brother, if he managed to survive the injury”. Her skirt joined the belt, and I made damned sure I wasn’t looking. “Father and I” Lara purred, “are going to renegotiate the terms of our relationship. It promises to be interesting. And you
might not be able to tear yourselves away, once I begin.” (Butcher, *Blood Rites* 415).

This short passage above, showcases Lara’s personality. Even though she is outwardly ruthless, she loves her siblings. Protecting them all against their father takes precedence over everything else including using the Hunger against her father. This in and of itself does not make Lara seem immoral or even a bad person because the knowledge of the White King’s sexual abuse of his daughters invokes the readers sympathy for Lara and her actions as well as justifying them.

Lara’s reactions towards her father is written in a convincing way (Butcher, *Blood Rites* 167-168, 414-415). It is hard to make a victim of abuse stand up against her abuser without making it seem strange, but Butcher makes it believable, through Lara’s love for her siblings. Her love for, and need to protect, her younger siblings is the source of strength that she uses to find courage to defy and defeat Lord Raith (Butcher, *Blood Rites* 413-415). Using the Hunger against her father might make Lara look as though she is no better than her father, but it is imperative to remember that the Hunger- along with the sexual appeal White Court vampires have on others- is their most dangerous weapon. For Lara to use that, even on her father, has nothing to do with sex, or even lust on her behalf, it is simply her strongest asset and weapon. This, more than anything, gives the reader a clear insight into Lara’s true personality. Not only does it show what she is capable off, but also that she will do absolutely everything to get her own way.

As can be seen from this analysis of Butcher’s female characters, they all have both good sides as well as bad. In my opinion, that makes them easier for the reader to relate to as a person. The reality is, most people are not perfect. Therefore, it would be hard for most readers to relate to a character that is represented as perfectly good or evil. Butcher allows his female characters to be human. They can make mistakes, be happy or angry, even vindictive without become awkward or forced. What can in my opinion be seen as the biggest flaw of Butcher’s female characters is that they are never main characters in *The Dresden Files*. They are always supporting the main character, Harry Dresden, but it might be interesting to see Queen Mab as a main character in a story.
George R.R. Martin’s Female Protagonists in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

In *A Song of Ice and Fire* there are multiple female protagonists. In this chapter only three female characters will be discussed and analysed. These are Daenerys Targaryen, Cersei Lannister and Arya Stark. While they share common trades and aspects, they are strong female characters that show diversity in the way Martin builds his characters. The main reason for these three characters where chosen over others is that even though all three are very different characters, they all share inner strength, determinations and follow through with their decisions. In addition to that all three women are flawed as well as not being stereotypical female characters.

At the beginning of the series Daenerys Targaryen is thirteen years old, only a child by most standards (Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 236). At that tender age, she is already set to be married to a Dothraki warrior called Khal Drogo, a political marriage that her brother Viserys has decided. Not because it is what Viserys thinks is best for his young sister, but because he wants to use Daenerys as currency by selling her to the highest bidder for an army in order to take back the throne, he believes is his rightful property. The secondary world of Westeros is structured much like a medieval feudal European hierarchy. The king rules the country with absolute power and noble men as well king’s vassals hold some power in the king’s name. Peasants, women and children were powerless and dependent upon their lords (Newman). Due to Daenerys’s young age and the medieval power structure of Westeros it is not strange for her to be firmly under the control of Viserys. Her brother is Daenerys’s only family, which means that she has no one to turn to even though her brother physically and mentally abuses her. Daenerys does not share her brother’s memories of past glory as her brother nor his hatred of those Viserys believes to have wronged him. On the contrary Daenerys is a kind loving child, who is scared of her brother Viserys and what he might do to her if she refuses to comply with his wishes. In addition to this, Daenerys is also afraid of the man she is supposed to marry (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 30-38). After Daenerys is married to Khal Drogo, she understands that her days of being afraid of her brother are over.
He was still screaming. “His hand went under her vest, his fingers digging painfully into her breast. *Do you hear me?*” Dany shoved him away, hard. Viserys stared at her, his lilac eyes incredulous. She had never defied him. Never fought back. Rage twisted his features. He would hurt her now, and badly, she knew that [...] He was a pitiful thing. He had always been a pitiful thing. Why had she never seen that before? There was a hollow place inside her where her fear had been. (Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 230-231 italics original)

The above quote from *A Game of Thrones* is an excellent example of how Daenerys finally overcomes her fear of her brother and resists Viserys authority after years of abuse. After living in fear for Viserys’s anger for a long time Daenerys is treated with kindness and respect as Khal Drogo’s Khaleesi. She is at long last freed from the absolute power of her abusive brother and sees her husband as the lesser of two evils. It is a good example of Daenerys’s kind nature that even when Viserys attacks her and she has the power to have him killed Daenerys is merciful (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 230-236). When Viserys is finally killed by the Dothraki people, Daenerys neither tries to save him, or turn away from the spectacle of his death. After years of being hurt by Viserys, it is understandable how Daenerys, when coming into powers as Khaleesi, does not risk herself to save him. This, however, does not mean that Daenerys hates Viserys. On the contrary, it is clear that Daenerys once loved her brother, but with her newfound freedom, and out of pure self-preservation she cannot and will not risk trying to help Viserys (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 495-500). Prior to, as well as after, Khal Drogo’s death Daenerys is forced to take on adult responsibilities and decisions that her young age does not seem equipped to do. Her decision to sacrifice her unborn child in desperate attempt to save her husband, and with Daenerys’s subsequent mercy killing of Khal Drogo are extreme examples of this (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 708-715, 759-761). As a queen, Daenerys wants to be fair and just to her subjects. On the other hand, Daenerys is willing to hurt, maim or kill those she considers her enemies, though in her favour, Daenerys does not seem to enjoy the pain she inflicts up on her enemies (Martin *A Game of Throne*, 798-807). But due to her young age, she is largely controlled by her feelings and being responsible for her people as well as her dragons is tiresome for her. It is hard for Daenerys to be in charge. She is the one who has to make the difficult decisions, and moreover, she is constantly under threat of assassination which is
draining for her. However, her people follow her, whether it is on a long march through the Dothraki lands or leading them into battle that seems to be already lost (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 186-199, Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* 434-445).

There is no doubt that Daenerys is a very strong female protagonist. She has to overcome an extremely difficult childhood but still remains sane. It must be mentioned, however, that after all Daenerys’s experience of violence towards her and those she cares about, a darker side to Daenerys begins to emerge. Like Viserys, Daenerys believes that she is the rightful queen of the country, and by that right she should use all means to take back what it rightfully hers. Even if that means starting a war or inflicting extreme pain on others (Martin *A Game of Thrones*, 798-807). Furthermore, Daenerys shows numerous signs common in adolescents that have suffered abuse as children. Withdrawal, depression, anxiety and aggressive behaviour are all common symptoms found in adolescents who have suffered abuse, which I would argue to be part of Daenerys’s personality as well (Silverman, Reinherz and Giaconia, 709-723). One of the biggest elements of Daenerys’s character and personality is how she acts as a mother even though she does not have children (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 806). It is very interesting that— in spite of all the hardship she has had to endure— Daenerys remains kind, caring and protective of those she sees as her people, and those hardships have not managed to damage that. This more than anything shows what kind of person Daenerys is.

Cersei Lannister is very different from Daenerys. She is older, highly skilled at politics and does not have any illusions or engage in any pretence about her actions benefiting others. While Daenerys does not take pleasure in inflicting pain on others the same cannot be said about Cersei. From very young age, it has been a part of Cersei’s personality to hurt those she does not like, and those she believes to have wronged her. The hatred she feels for her infant brother, Tyrion, is a clear example of Cersei’s sinister demeanour (Martin, *A Storm of Swords*, 525-526). As Cersei gets older, she is better able to hide this part of her personality, even though she still takes much pleasure and pride in the pain she inflicts on others.

Cersei Lannister is one of Martin’s most unlikeable female protagonists. She is ruthless, cold, selfish, strong willed and there is not much Cersei will not do in order to gain power (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 80-85, 154-159, 528-529). She is also an
extremely proud character who will never forgive when she is wronged or not treated according to her status (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 415). Her incestuous relationship with her brother Jamie gets much attention in the series. It gives a strong indication what image the author wants to give of Cersei. She is not to have any sympathy, so everything she does for, or out of love for her children, brother and family is tainted by this relationship. The same is not true for Jamie, the other person in the relationship. This is even despite the fact, that Jamie is the one who tries to murder a child to keep their relationship secret (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 80-85, 485-488). It is very clear that Cersei is not to have Martin’s readers’ sympathy since every good thing she does is to directly benefit herself in some ways. Cersei offers her younger cousin Lancel knighthood, in exchange for his help to see to it that King Robert, Cersei’s husband, dies when injured by a boar (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 61-63). Moreover, Cersei has no compunction using what she has in order to gain power, which often means offering access to her body in exchange for what she wants (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 446-448). While this is true of many women in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, it is clearly Cersei who is most harshly judged for this. There does not seem to be much good in Cersei, only blind ambition, cruelty and disregard for others (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 428-429). Cersei is convinced that many of her problems comes from being a woman, and Cersei feels that she would be far better Queen than any of the men in her life are kings as the following passage from *A Clash of Kings* shows well:

“I should have been born a man. I would have no need of any of you then. None of this would have been allowed to happen. How could Jamie let himself be captured by that boy? And Father, I trusted him, fool that I am, but where is he now that he’s wanted? “(Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 320).

Cersei’s constant thirst for power and what independence she can have is a big part of her personality. For a person such as Cersei who wants to rule instead of being ruled it is extremely hard to be constantly under power of others. To be a woman in Westeros means that she is always dependent on men, never having a voice of her own nor the power over herself. Her father, Lord Tywin, uses her in exchange for power and political connections, her body being the only value he sees in his daughter (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 260-261). In spite of Cersei’s blind ambition, and thirst for power, she is also very insecure which she hides behind a mask of cruelty and disregard for others.
Traumas in Cersei’s childhood, such as losing her mother and being separated from her brother Jamie due to inappropriate relationship between the two of them as young children are helpful when understanding Cersei’s personality (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 286-287, 529). Similarly, being rejected by King Aerys as a suitable bride for his son Rhaegar, and the deep hatred Cersei had for Robert, who would later become her husband, for killing her first love was a certain trauma for Cersei (Martin, *A Feast for Crows* 513-516). Those events in Cersei’s life might very well explain this lack of compassion and disregard for other people’s feelings (Glaser et al, 229-236).

Arya Stark is very different from both Daenerys and Cersei. As the youngest character, only a child, Arya is not after power, or becoming a queen. Arya is, much to her dismay, forced to participate in other people’s thirst for power. What Arya truly wants is to go home and be with her family in Winterfell- and wanting her life to go back to the way it was before the war started. When Arya realizes that this will not happen, her main focus becomes- to get revenge on the people she believes to be responsible for the destruction of her family. Despite this, Arya proves to be one of the most interesting characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, surviving incredible horrors.

Arya is arguably the strongest of all the Stark children. At the beginning of the first novel, *A Game of Thrones*, Arya is only nine years old but still shows incredible strength and character for someone of her age after being separated from her family following the death of her father (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 49-51, 726-728). In the pseudo medieval secondary world setting of Westeros children seem to have to grow up fast and take on adult responsibilities from a very young age. Arya does not care for what is seemingly appropriate past times for young girls from a good family and would rather be able to ride horses, practice with swords and be friends with whoever she wants (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 68-70, 96-97). Arya wants access to more than what her gender provides opportunity for. It might seem that Arya is given many of the characteristics typically found in a male protagonist. However, it must be taken into consideration that in Arya’s world being a girl or a woman would not allow her to do any of the things she truly wants to do.

Arya’s strength and interests are more suitable for males according to her society, such as her affinity to sword fighting instead of needlework, these interests suggest she would never subjugate herself or surrender power simply marriage for the
sake of marriage. The power structure between individuals in marriages in Westeros would make Arya powerless to her husband and her personality would never allow that (Martin, *A Game of Thrones* 68-70, 96-97). After her father’s death, Arya disguises herself as a young boy on her way to Winterfell. This is supposed to protect her on the long journey, which Arya sees as a better choice, instead of giving into the will of the Lannister’s like she believes her sister Sansa has done (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 30-40). After travelling with the recruiter for the Night’s Watch and being captured by Lannister men Arya is no longer an innocent loving child. She is full of hatred and cold after seeing – and doing – more horrible things than any child should have to do (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 456-470, 685-695, 900-903). Arya eventually takes an inward turn and begins displaying obsessive behaviour:

Arya watched and listened and polished her hates the way Gendry hand once polished his horned helmet […] Every night Arya would say their names. “Ser Gregor”, she’d whisper to her stone pillow. “Dunsen, Polliver, Chiswyck, Raff the Sweetling, The Tickler and The Hound, Ser Amory, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, King Joffrey, Queen Cersei.” Back in Winterfell, Arya had prayed with her mother in the sept and with her father in the godswood, but there were no gods on the road to Harrenhal, and her names were the only prayer she cared to remember. (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 417-418).

The passage above is Arya’s nightly prayer. She is repeating the names of men she wants to kill or see dead– but killing them herself is not necessarily Arya’s main focus – their deaths are what is important to her. This is a deep change in a child’s personality, especially in a child such as Arya’s, who had before her father’s death and events following that, never experienced any real hardship (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* 30-40).

Even though this change in Arya’s character may seem extreme it does fit with what is known about the emotional effects of war have on young children as well as the disruption of all emotional attachments, loss of home and opportunity to education (Santa Barbara, 891-894). Though all of this, Arya simply tries to cope with all the horrors of war the best way her young age allows her to, and it is done in a very believable manner. Arya might also be viewed as a very good example of a child soldier, having experienced numerous traumatic events common among child soldiers (Derluyn et al, 861-863). Examples of such traumatic events might include seeing
someone killed during their abduction, seeing a close relative, killed and forced to participate in fight without military training or preparation (Derluyn et al, 861-863). Furthermore, Arya shows many symptoms that are common in children that suffer from PTSD, sleep disturbance, nightmares, repetitive thoughts, avoidance of reminders, anger outbursts and avoidance of thoughts and feelings of the traumatic events (Green et al, 945-951).

As can be seen above Martin’s characters all have their own problem and issues and are far from being all good or all evil. However, due to the dark nature of Martin’s novels his characters tend to display more of their sinister nature. Even though both Daenerys and Arya manage to hold on to their humanity and kind nature through the horrors of the war in Westeros it also becomes the perfect excuse for Cersei to fully display her darker elements. In my opinion this does not make it harder for the reader to relate to the characters. The fact that the story takes place not only in a secondary pseudo – medieval world but also in a time of war, makes it easier to understand the actions of the characters. In A Song of Ice and Fire, Martin also provides important background information about what made his characters the way they are in present time of the series.
Assessment of Butcher’s and Martin’s Female Protagonists in *The Dresden Files* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*

It is interesting to note that Butcher chooses female characters as almost every powerful character. In *The Dresden Files*, many of the most powerful vampires are females, the Sidhe is ruled exclusively by the Queens, the Ladies and the Mothers. Harry has a female apprentice as well as Murphy as his partner. More importantly Butcher puts a lot of effort in his female characters. They do not serve as one-dimensional characters whose only place in the story is to make the main male protagonist seem stronger and more powerful. On the contrary, the female characters in *The Dresden Files* have a tendency to have as much impact on the story, as Harry Dresden himself.

In my opinion the biggest flaw in Butcher’s work is that all his female characters are Harry Dresden’s companion characters. They are never the protagonists. Despite this, it is interesting that the three female companion characters discussed above are all independent, fierce and strong-willed. In *The Dresden Files*, Harry has his own idiosyncratic rules about how women should be treated by men (Butcher *Storm Front* 11-12). Harry Dresden is old-fashioned as well as overly protective of women. So protective, in fact, that his enemies can, and often do, exploit this character flaw against him (Butcher, *Changes* 518-519). Taking this into consideration, it might seem strange to mention that the female characters in *The Dresden Files* all have in common that not only do they not need Harry’s protection, they usually do not want it. It does, however, show more clearly how strong the female characters are when they refuse and do not need rescuing. Another issue that Butcher takes on is violence against women. As stated above, Harry Dresden does not consent to any kind of violence against women or children (Butcher, *Death Masks* 169). The way Butcher’s female characters react when subjected to either physical, mental or sexual violence is believable, not awkward or romanticized in any way. A good example of this is from *Summer Knight* where Karrin Murphy is struggling with the aftermath of the psychic attack of the Nightmare. No matter how strong Murphy is usually depicted Butcher shows her struggle in a convincing manner, showing that strong people can also have problems of their own (Butcher, *Summer Knight* 81-88). The characters in *The Dresden Files* are all at one point or another in the story subjected to violence of some kind. Even though that may seem extreme this mirrors the real world for women. Studies have shown that one in
five women are sexually abused at some point in her life and as many as 51% of all women in North America experience some type of violence in their lives ("Statistics About Sexual Violence", Robinson, 185-191).

George R.R Martin has been criticised by many for his *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, mostly on blogs and various articles claiming the series to be misogynistic, endorsing rape culture and gender inequality (Crider). Whether or not this is the case, it is crucial to remember that *A Song of Ice and Fire* series take place in a pseudo-medieval society, where women in fact enjoyed less power than in modern society, often only holding power in the name of their husbands, or sons too young to rule in their own right (Martin *A Game of Thrones*, 523-529). In addition to that the whole series evolves around war. It is well known fact that the danger of violence against women and children escalates in times of war ("Violence against women – In Situations of Armed Conflict and Displacement"). When it comes to strong protagonists or companion characters in a story it is not only physical strength that is important. How to survive imaginable horrors, abuse and violence is strength, and Martin’s female protagonist show this type of strength. It is also important to recognize that there are not many resources are open to women when it comes to fighting for themselves in the pseudo–medieval secondary world setting of *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. It is, as mentioned above, heavily male–centric world where women use what they can in order to gain some power and that is usually obtained either through sex, marriage or their children.

Unfortunately, due to the huge success of the adaption for television series *Game of Thrones*, characters in the novels and the television series get confused, when in fact there is significant difference between the two. In the TV series *A Game of Thrones* women’s strength and character do not get as much space as in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and one of the other significant difference is that most of the characters in the TV series are much older than in the novels. Cersei is a good example of the difference between the TV series and the novels. In the TV series Cersei is presented as cruel, heartless woman willing to do anything to get her own way and to maintain her incestuous relationship with her brother Jamie is given much space in the story ("Breaker of Chains"). Even though they are both in this relationship the narrative focus always reinforces how evil Cersei is because of it. It might seem that Jamie is never faulted by
the relationship showing clearly the double standards when it comes to men and women and sex both in the TV series and the novels. A major contributing factor in this is Jamie’s renowned skill with a sword. He is one of the strongest swordsmen in Westeros, and protected by his reputation as a fighter, as well as his status in the society (Martin, *A Storm of Swords* 156-160). However, *A Song of Ice and Fire* provides the background and history needed to understand Cersei and the reasons behind her decisions and actions. This is something that the TV series fail to do, resulting in Cersei becoming one of the villains of the story, one who should not have any sympathy. Even though Westeros is a pseudo–medieval secondary world, women’s reality and fear of violence is linked directly to their status in the world. This is consistent with reality for many women. Women’s status, both in real world as well as in Martin’s Westeros, is largely controlled by men, who in many cases, govern political–social– and economic institutions as well as family as an institution. Feminist theories have concluded that women are mostly controlled with fear (Yodanis, 656-658). In *A Song of Ice and Fire* this fear is very real. Fear largely controls and motivates all three characters discussed above, especially the fear of violence, which becomes a familiar feeling for Daenerys, Cersei and Arya as the series progress.
Butcher’s and Martin’s Female Characters Compared to Female Characters Created by Women.

Even though neither *The Dresden Files* nor *A Song of Ice and Fire* can be viewed as a feminist series, this does not mean that the female characters of both series cannot be seen as feminist heroes. Feminist literary criticism comes essentially from the women’s movement of 1960s and one of its major concerns being the representation of women in literature, which affects how women are seen and how women think they should be. Moreover, how women are represented in literature affects how women see themselves (Barry, 116-118). Feminist theories focus on gender and gender difference as well as on women’s issues on global scale. While the first wave of feminism focused largely on women’s emancipation and equality the second wave of feminism focused more on female oppressions. Finally, the third wave of feminism focuses mainly on individual empowerment, equal pay and protection against violence (Nehere, 3-20).

When applying feminist criticism in literature it is a direct product of the second wave feminism as well as focusing on the more modern third wave (Barry, 116-130). When a using feminist criticism perspective to view both *The Dresden Files* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* the focus is mainly on the representation of women in the work, focusing on the six female characters that have been analysed above. When examining how these six female characters are depicted and represented as being, it is interesting to note that both series are written by men. This becomes especially interesting when comparing the characters discussed thus far to other female characters written by women. All six female characters created by Butcher and Martin are independent, resourceful, intellectual and driven by inner power. Moreover, both Butcher and Martin are careful about not endorsing violence against women in any way in their novels.

To examine this further Butcher’s and Martin’s female characters will be compared to the way two female characters from similar literature genres are depicted. Those also have in common that they are written by female authors. Firstly, Laurell K. Hamilton’s Anita Blake from *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* series and secondly Faith Hunter’s Jane Yellowrock from *Jane Yellowrock* series. Both series are urban fantasy like Butcher’s *The Dresden Files*, and moreover, both series feature a woman as the main protagonist. Even though both series present strong female protagonists they are
still problematic in the way these series— even with strong leading female characters— endorse and normalize violence against women.

In Laurell K. Hamilton’s *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* the eponymous protagonist is a zombie raising animator and vampire executioner among other things (Hamilton *Guilty Pleasures*, 26-27). In the first novel in the series, *Guilty Pleasures*, Anita Blake is afraid of the vampires she hunts and kills and with a good reason as she has been assaulted by at least one of them (Hamilton *Guilty Pleasures*, 76). Anita even states her fears for vampires herself when she says: “I’m afraid of them. It is a very natural human trait to destroy what frightens us.” (Hamilton *Guilty Pleasures*, 79). As the series progress Anita does change her mind, at least to some degree, befriending and even loving vampires (Hamilton *Cerulean Sins*, 43-50). And while that may seem a good thing and expressing how Anita is growing emotionally it is still problematic. It sends the message that even though women are hurt and abused by a boyfriend or a spouse they should forgive their abusers. Even with only few studies on the subject scholars suggest that popular culture, including novels such as *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* can be harmful because of the normalizing of abuse and violence in intimate relationship (Bonomi et al, 733-735). This can easily apply to both *Anita Blake* and *Jane Yellowrock* series.

In Faith Hunter’s *Jane Yellowrock* series this is very similar. Jane Yellowrock is a professional vampire hunter who does not like vampires even though she does work for them. (Hunter *Skinwalker*, 8-19, 30). Just as in Hamilton’s books discussed above Jane Yellowrock has been hurt by vampires while working as a vampire hunter (Hunter *Skinwalker*, 9). The master vampire of New Orleans Leo Pellisier tries to burn Jane to death in her house to avenge is son’s murder (Hunter *Blood Cross*, 7-8). And later Leo forces a blood bond on Jane in a brutal attack, with the help of Brusier, the man Jane loves. (Hunter *Death’s Rival*, 162-172). In spite of those events, Jane still is friends with Leo as well as working for him and even forgiving Bruiser (Hunter *Death’s Rival*, 292-313). It is interesting to look at these three examples, bearing in mind, that those are either Jane’s friends, co–workers or lovers. They all hurt and abuse Jane, yet she forgives them. Something that is out of character for her as she is represented at the beginning of the series (Hunter *Skinwalker*, 8-19).
This, like *Anita Blake* series raises the question about what message is being sent to the readers. Due to the topic and authors both *Anita Blake* and *Jane Yellowrock* series mainly target female readers. In my opinion, authors - especially female writers who’s main readers are women - should use that opportunity to empower women as well as providing strong characters for them. Although both Hamilton and Hunter are skilled writers their works are somewhat problematic. The main criticism on their work, is similar to how Stephanie Meyer has been criticized for in her *Twilight Saga*, i.e. – that is endorses violence in intimate relationship (Goodfriend). Whether this is intentional or the authors simply responding to what is demanded by their readers is hard to speculate about. But it is certain that women should be demanding more complex and stronger female characters in fantasy literature.

As discussed above this is not the case with Butcher and Martin when it comes to their female characters. In both their works the female characters, both protagonists and companion characters, seek revenge and strength instead of accepting they violence that they are subjected to rather than resigning themselves to the role of a victim. As violence against women is enormous global problem, normalizing violence in intimate relationships is a strange way to address the subject. When compared to authors such as Hamilton and Hunter it becomes clear, that Butcher and Martin do well in empowering their female characters in the way they are depicted.
Conclusion

It is thought – provoking to examine the way Jim Butcher and George R.R. Martin depict their female characters in *The Dresden Files* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, both protagonists as well as companion characters. In a way only *The Dresden Files* are problematic due to the fact, that there are no female protagonists in the series. But on the other hand, there are many strong female companion characters in the series who often have much impact on how the story unfolds. In *The Dresden Files*, Butcher depicts versatile female characters, who are not limited to stereotypical female roles. Butcher’s female characters are complex and are given room to grow and are rarely limited one – sided characters. The three female characters analysed above all have both good and bad sides. And although none of them is only good or only bad, differentiate between characters which side is the most dominant which makes them more real and easier to relate to for the reader.

The lack of female main characters is not a problem in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, were many of the protagonists are in fact women, who have as much impact on the story as the male characters. Like Butcher, Martin does not limit his characters to stereotypical female roles, and he is not afraid to depict female characters both as the hero or the villain. This is especially interesting because the secondary pseudo – medieval world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* male centric where women do not have much personal power. Therefore, when it comes to the way Butcher and Martin depict their female characters succeed in depicting strong, brilliant, resourceful females that take charge of their own lives and are not afraid to go after what they truly want. The three of Martin’s characters discussed above show how versatile his character building is. Despite the fact that all three are very different they all have in common that none of them is only good or only bad.

It is clear, that Butcher’s and Martin’s depiction of female characters is considerably different from the way female characters often are depicted, especially by female authors within similar literature genres. As shown in comparison with two female authors, Laurell K. Hamilton and Faith Hunter, Butcher and Martin both do well when it comes to writing about women, especially women who are subjected to violence and abuse. In *The Dresden Files* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* both Butcher and Martin show clearly that they do not approve of any kind of violence against women or
children, even if they use different methods to state their opinions. In *The Dresden Files* it is Harry Dresden and his distinct dislike to those who abuse women and children. Martin however allows his female characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire* to take their revenge on their abusers much rather than stating it directly. This proved to be considerably different from the two series written by female authors discussed above. In both of those series, women were abused or attacked by a male character. The female characters reactions to that is where the female authors differ from the male authors. In both Hamilton’s and Hunter’s novels female characters have the tendency to forgive and fall in love with their abusers and thereby indicating that women should forgive their abusers for the sake of love.

Even though both *The Dresden Files* as well as *A Song of Ice and Fire* are somewhat problematic when it comes to depicting female characters, Butcher and Martin still do well in creating strong and believable female characters that do more to empower the women in the series as well as providing female readers with interesting female characters. Neither Butcher nor Martin endorse or normalize violence against women, and when the subject is addressed in their works, they clearly show through their characters that they do not approve of it in any way, even though neither of them is afraid to use violence in their works.
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