

Spring 5-19-2017

The Female Bildungsroman in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*

Lena M. Nunez
University of New Orleans, melton.lena@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), [American Popular Culture Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nunez, Lena M., "The Female Bildungsroman in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*" (2017).
University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations. 2349.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2349>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

The Female Bildungsroman in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
English
American Literature

by
Lena Melton Nunez
B.A. Loyola University, 2013
May, 2017

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Chapter 1.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2.....	3
Body of thesis.....	3
References.....	35
Vita.....	37

Abstract

This project examines the concepts of the female bildungsroman in literature. In particular it looks at two female characters created by George R.R. Martin, the sisters, Sansa and Arya Stark. The project focuses on the characteristics of the female bildungsroman and whether or not the female bildungsroman is a valid literary concept. This has been done by examining what is a bildungsroman and is there a difference between male and female bildungsroman. The goal is to show that the female bildungsroman is valid and that Sansa and Arya are perfect examples.

Female bildungsroman, George R.R. Martin, Sansa Stark, Arya Stark, Game of Thrones, Feminist criticism

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The typical bildungsroman, also known as a coming of age story, focuses on a character's moral and psychological growth. Dr. Anne Boyd Rioux, a professor at The University of New Orleans, outlined some of the common traits of the bildungsroman:

- Growing up requires a journey away from home in search of livelihood or an alternate family
- It often involves learning new skills
- A protagonist must learn to negotiate the peculiar social order into which he/she is thrust, adjusting one's own needs and desires to the demands of rigid social expectations
- A protagonist experiences deprivation, hunger, or poverty
- A protagonist must learn life lessons, fundamentally who is true and who is false
- Obstacles to maturity are often internal

Logically, the female bildungsroman focuses specifically on a female's growth and development. However, Carol Lazzaro-Weis has called the existence of the female bildungsroman into question. In opposition to Lazzaro-Weis, many scholars believe the female bildungsroman is alive and well. Through an examination of the narrative arcs of the sisters Sansa and Arya Stark from *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin, I will argue that the female bildungsroman is a valid genre and the sisters are perfect models of it.

The female bildungsroman is focused on the all-around growth and self-development of an individual within a defined society. The journey to this self-development is initiated through loss or discontent at an early age that separates the character from her home or her family. The process of growing up is long and arduous, particularly for a woman, and can involve repeated clashes between the character's needs and desires and the society in which she is growing up.

Chapter 2 - Body of Thesis

Lazzaro-Weis explains in her article, “The Female *Bildungsroman*: Calling It into Question”, how female novelists speak positively of the use of the female bildungsroman.

As Lazzaro-Weis notes the opposition to her position,

It would appear that most critics who use the term female *bildungsroman* view it as one of the last bastions for the defense of an experientially based feminist critique, one based on the belief in the possibility and necessity of the representation in writing of women’s experience and with the goal of finding a new definition of female identity (Lazzaro-Weis 19)

Lazzaro-Weis states that questions surrounding the existence of the female bildungsroman are far from being resolved. Questions still remain, such as is the female bildungsroman more a critical myth than a reality? Is the bildungsroman a useful tool for analysis and a useful genre for writers? She argues that the typical themes of alienation and failure to achieve coherence are the same features typical of both male and female protagonists. Her article also questions whether or not there is such a thing as female experience. Lastly, Lazzaro-Weis says there is probably not such a thing as a female bildungsroman, and this has made it necessary for women and critics to invent one.

Not everyone agrees, however: many scholars have debated the existence of the female bildungsroman. The questions include:

- Is there such a thing as a female bildungsroman?
- What are the definitive characteristics of a female bildungsroman?
- Can examples of the female bildungsroman be found in literature?

For example, can novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Little Women* be considered examples of the female bildungsroman? In the article, “The Limits of Domesticity: The Female Bildungsroman in America 1820-1870,” Beverly Voloshin examines the concept of the

female bildungsroman and its place in American literature. She looks at several characters in different novels, exploring the female bildungsroman and how this concept has changed over the years as women's roles have changed and more women writers are adding to this genre.

Voloshin starts by noting that even though early novels of the 19th century in the United States depicted the female bildungsroman as the story of a young girl deprived of support and finding her own way in the world, they also value the opposing idea of female independence and equality, such as depicted in Catharine Sedgwick's *A New-England Tale*, where there is tension between domestic values and the opposing value of female independence and equality. In other novels such as *Beulah* and *St. Elmo* by Augusta Jane Evans, the female heroine desires to escape male power and influence and to compete in the world of men to prove her equality. In these novels the heroines are more interested in developing self-discipline and self-reliance:

While the heroine's independence is necessary to her own development and sense of worth and thereby to her ability to choose a good husband, her interest in having a significant vocation and in being independent is also a temporary rejection of the domestic role, an attempt not to rely on men for financial support or for self definition (Voloshin 285)

This examination will be extended to the high fantasy genre in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Fire and Ice* (often referred to by the name of the first book in the series, *The Game of Thrones*).

In *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century* Esther Kleinbord Labovitz proposes that there is a viable female bildungsroman structure. She states, "Further, having located the female heroine in the bildungsroman, one might understandably question whether an important contribution has been made to the tradition

of the genre and to literature as a whole” (Labovitz 8). Labovitz’s studies reveal that the journey of the male bildungsroman may not represent the goals of women. In her book, she describes the concept of a twentieth-century bildungsroman by suggesting that

The familiar evaluation of a young woman’s development that poses the question whether they can have an identity before they know whom they will marry and for whom they will make a home is a premise sharply challenged in the theoretical setting of the female bildungsroman. For women writers as well there had to be a resolution between cultural pressure towards feminine duty and the independence and assertiveness that imaginative writing requires to fully realize a fictional heroine who goes through the process of developing an identity and a self (Labovitz 7)

Labovitz discusses how the novelist Dorothy Richardson in her novel series *Pilgrimage* defined the female bildungsroman. Richardson describes the female bildungsroman as a character having a choice and choosing her own identity on a journey that leads to the development of her personality, and argues that this is different from the male bildungsroman. Labovitz feels that until the female bildungsroman heroine can resolve her condition in the society in which she lives, she proceeds with her quest for self-identity.

Labovitz offers the following nine suggestions when defining the twentieth-century female bildungsroman:

1. The female protagonist in the bildungsroman does not always have formal education like her male counterpart. She learns to educate herself and to function in society and her experiences contribute to her growth and development.

Education plays a role in the development of both the male and female bildungsroman. At one time only males were formally educated and they were encouraged to find a career for some ultimate goal in life. There were certain subjects such as politics from which women were excluded. It was felt that only men could understand the complexities of politics. Women had to educate themselves and they were not educated for a career. Instead of having a career, women were advised to find a husband. Over time society has opened up to women and they can now participate in any endeavor. Women are no longer held back and confined only to certain fields of education.

2. Goes on a journey or pilgrimage and experiences freedom and independence to discover her new life and new identity.

The female protagonist's journey can be seen as a total growth process. Her journey not only traces her growth to maturity but also reveals her potential for the future. In early literature, the female bildungsroman's journey ended in marriage. With the advent of the women's movement, more novels were written featuring a narrative from the perspective of a woman. In these narratives the female protagonist goes on a journey to experience independence and freedom and move away from traditional stereotypical female behavior. They have been conditioned to be dependent, but they use their journey to take risks, find freedom, discover their own identity, self-confidence, a career, and may not often end in marriage.

3. Before she marries she must find her own identity

Marriage for the male bildungsroman normally occurs over the course of his life. He gets to choose his own mate and is free to pursue his career. For the female bildungsroman protagonist, the idea of marriage begins with their vocation and characters having a career not being in her future. Women in the female bildungsroman are breaking this tradition and finding their own identity, choosing when or if they will marry and what kind of career (in addition to marriage) they will embark on. If they want to have kids or not.

4. To aid in the formation of her personality, she sometimes goes through a spiritual quest or philosophical journey of life and death.

In the area of a philosophical journey, the women of the bildungsroman in general experience some type of religion or religious idea. During their journey, they encounter different ideas and values that they use for personal development. This can include instances where they reflect on life and death.

5. The female bildungsroman focuses on women's sexual roles and role models. The circumstances of the female bildungsroman, most begin to act out their lives in the roles offered to them by society and conform until they become aware of their own self-identity. Many times there are few female role models to follow.

The female protagonist has many roles in her journey and few female mentors. She is usually powerless and this makes her journey different from that of a male. The female uses her roles to suit her purposes. Males have more opportunities than females and don't need to inhabit multiple roles because they belong to a class with more benefits, privileges, and unlimited choices.

6. They retrieve their lost childhood as part of their development and growth.

Their memories are more conflicted than those of their male counterparts.

Males tend to leave their paths behind them; they don't typically dwell on the past.

Females use past memories to shape their becoming women.

7. They search for a self lost with childhood, unlike their male counterparts who start off with a sense of self. Women wrestle for a rightful place within society.

For females to grow they have to move beyond the myths of their role. They have to prove that they are capable of being more than a wife or mother and move beyond the stereotypical image that society has assigned to them. Males don't have a culturally conditioned role in society. They can do or be whatever they want, usually finding their place in society earlier than a female.

8. They challenge the structure of society by questioning equality of class and of sexes.

The male protagonist has a comfort zone within society and has no need to challenge it.

The female protagonist has a need to challenge society in order to prove she is equal to men. She needs to be active in changing the structure of society in order to destroy her stereotypical role.

9. Another feature of the female bildungsroman is shedding. They have to get rid of the things that hindered their growth and development such as guilt, fear, prejudice, and self hate.

The female protagonist needs to get rid of the characteristics that hinder her development. She must give up guilt and despair, and find courage to search for knowledge that will enlighten and develop her. Males may also have occasion to experience shedding but they're operating from a position of strength and have fewer attributes to shed.

Sansa and Arya Stark both share some of the common traits associated with a bildungsroman. In *The Song of Ice and Fire* novels the sisters are far away from their home as part of their quest narrative. Their journey starts after the death of their father, Eddard Stark. The girls come from a noble family and have lived a life of privilege but that changed dramatically when Sansa was eleven years old and Arya was nine when their father was beheaded, forcing them to negotiate a world often hostile to them.

To understand their journey, one must understand the society in which they lived. The sisters lived in the fictional country of Westeros, in circumstances comparable to English medieval times. During these times women did not hold much power and the only hope for a woman was to marry well. Women in the society of Westeros, who were unprotected by family, were often raped and had little or no power unless they were noblewomen. Boys and men didn't have to worry about being raped as women did, not to say that boys and men couldn't get raped, but this was a greater threat for girls and women.

Men were sexually free and it was common for men to have children out of wedlock. Women could not even choose their own spouse and many times marriages were arranged when they were young girls. There were a few women warrior types such as Brienne of Tarth, Asha Greyjoy and Arya whose journey placed them on an alternate path.

Violence was prevalent and an accepted part of Westeros society. As one character, The Hound, said in *Game of Thrones* when speaking to Arya, “I’ve killed my first man at 12, I’ve lost count of how many I’ve killed since then. High Lords with old names, fat rich men dressed in velvet, Knights puffed up like bladders with their honors, yes, and women and children too- they’re all meat and I’m the butcher” (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 756). The class to which you belonged determined quality of life in Westeros. At the top were kings and queens who held the most power. The next class was the lords and ladies of the noble houses and their families. Each noble house had its own house sigil. The sigil was an animal that represented each house; for example the wolf represented House Stark. The noble houses were wealthy and lived a privileged life and they pledged their loyalty to the king, at the beginning of the novel, Robert Baratheon. This is the class to which Arya and Sansa belonged. Below them were the knights and the warriors who fought the battles. There were also merchants and tradesman and at the bottom of the class structure were the servants, the poor, the prostitutes, and lastly the wildlings.

The ultimate power struggle in the novel was to determine who was going to be the king or queen to sit on the iron throne and rule over the seven kingdoms. Any means necessary were used to obtain the iron throne. The iron throne is a chair made out of

swords wielded together. Only the king or Queen of Westeros sits in the iron throne. Children were used as pawns to marry or to pledge in marriage into other noble families so that more power and support would be gained for the house that was fighting to rule on the iron throne. The power struggle in *Game of Thrones* started when the current king, Robert Baratheon, died and this set in motion violent clashes among the noble houses as to who would claim the iron throne and to whom the houses would pledge their loyalty. The environment was warlike and there were too many nobles who wanted to be king. Allegiances changed quickly depending on who was in power, and vengeance was a regular part of life. Eddard Stark, the father of Sansa and Arya, was branded as a traitor and beheaded after Robert Baratheon's death. Prior to his death, which Sansa witnessed, Eddard had traveled to the south region to serve as the king's advisor. This move separated the Stark family. The death of Eddard Stark was the catalyst that started the girl's journey of self-development into the treacherous world of Westeros. Both the loss of their protective family and their gender created the difficult path of the female bildungsroman for Sansa and Arya.

Sansa and Arya grew up in the cold northern region of Westeros, and by the age of eleven, Sansa's future had already been decided by her father. She was pledged to marry Joffrey whose supposed father was king of the seven kingdoms and whose mother was Cersei. Both of the girls had to learn their way in the world. Since the girls were of noble houses it was expected that both would marry royalty. Children typically grew up fast in Westeros. The girls were raised in traditional women's roles. They were taught to sew, to sing, to dance and to learn proper etiquette for a lady. Sansa accepted her role as a lady and she was good at all the things she was taught. She loved everything about being

a lady and dreamed of marrying a prince. Arya, on the other hand, rebelled against her lady-like lessons. Arya didn't think she was as pretty as her sister nor could she perform the lady-like duties as well as her sister. She embraced the things that she could do well, which were to ride and shoe a horse. Arya was smart and she preferred to be with the boys. She wanted a sword and wanted to learn how to use it. Arya felt that women were just as important as men. As she said to her brother Jon, "The woman is important too!" (Martin, *Game of Thrones*, 73). Arya thought that life was not fair to women because she felt equal to the men and wanted to be treated equally in the sense that she could learn sword skills or go boar hunting.

Sansa found herself in a cruel environment where she was held hostage by the Lannisters after her father's death. She was mistreated, abused, and beaten by them and she had no one to protect her. The Lannisters are rulers of Casterly Rock, one of the seven kingdoms in Westeros. They were also sworn enemies of the Starks. The Lannister plan was to marry Sansa to one of their family members and gain the support of the Stark family but mainly because the Starks controlled the North region. Sansa's father was dead, her sister Arya was missing, and her mother and her brothers were living in the north region. What effect did this separation have on her self-development? How would she evolve without the support of her family? This environment was the total opposite of the loving family that she once knew. The loss of family support for a female was more critical than for a male. For females, having family support guaranteed their worth. The females depended on their family whereas a male could go out into the world and prove his own worth.

In regard to the male bildungsroman in *Game of Thrones*, Jon Snow did not have the same experiences as Sansa and Arya. He is one male that found his own way in the world without family support. Jon Snow was the fourteen-year-old bastard son of Eddard Stark. He was a typical boy who liked to hunt, fish, and learn how to use a sword. He enjoyed the company of other male youths and liked listening to their stories of hunting, bedding, and battle. Jon could read and write and was very observant. He learned at an early age how to read the truth in a person's eye. Jon's journey led him to the wall to serve in the Night Watch. He was very good with a sword, so it's no surprise that he wanted to serve on the wall. Jon's identity is established at an early age. In the Night's Watch he is assigned to the position of steward to the Lord Commander. Jon objects to the assignment since he sees it as being nothing more than being a servant. However, he realizes that he is being placed in a position that will allow him to grow and be groomed to take the Lord Commander's place. As a reward for his bravery, Jon is given a sword of the best steel and is recognized as a man. Arya and Sansa, being female, would never have the opportunity to serve on the Night's Watch or serve as a knight no matter how great their sword skills. Jon takes the oath to the Night's Watch and therefore will never marry or have children. During his time with the Night's Watch, Jon meets a girl named Ygritte and his sexuality is awakened with her. Unlike Arya and Sansa, Jon got to choose his lover; Arya and Sansa would be forced to marry whomever their family decided. Jon's identity as a man was confirmed when he went on his journey to the wall; he didn't need his family to prove or guarantee his worth. By asserting his manhood when slaying the enemy, Jon proved his worth.

Arya and Sansa both fall under the female bildungsroman category, there are drastic differences between the two girls. The girls represent two versions of the female protagonists as shown by the differences in their characters. Where Arya is strong, independent, and smart, Sansa is lady-like, sensitive, and unrealistic. Sansa would make the perfect wife in medieval times of Westeros whereas it's hard to even imagine Arya getting married. Valerie Estelle Frankel wrote in *Women in Game of Thrones* that the women have different archetypes. Sansa is the innocent archetype. Even though she is older than Arya, she is far more naïve. Sansa believes that people are essentially kind and she tries to be perfect and loveable. She values looks over substance in an individual. Conversely, Arya is the orphan archetype, where she is more cynical. Frankel observes that the orphan archetype comes from a more traumatized and cynical place (Frankel 101). In orphan archetype, people have to take control of their own lives and this is tougher for women. Frankel addresses the different paths of the girls: "These are the contrasting paths of Arya and Sansa, sisters who see their betrayal quite differently. While Sansa tries to charm the Lannisters, then finally withdraws into herself, Arya leaves the system, determined to fight from outside" (Frankel 101). These archetypes describe the roles inhabited by both Sansa and Arya, but as they grow and develop, they will move beyond these roles. Both girls seek to grow into women who will do more than survive as adult women. It is the similarities and the differences in their strategies to come of age that will be explored. This shows that the female bildungsroman can follow many different archetypes.

After her father's beheading, all Sansa's dreams of being at court, marrying her prince, and enjoying tournaments were over. Her lady-like ways could not save her from the Lannisters. Although she continued to live like a lady, she put misguided faith in Cersei Lannister and Prince Joffrey. This just shows Sansa's naivety. The Lannisters are the sworn enemies of the Starks and with Sansa being a Stark she should know better than to trust the Lannisters. Arya is younger than Sansa but knows better, so why doesn't Sansa? For example, when Arya is running from the Lannister guards, she doesn't hesitate to run and hide as quickly as possible, keeping in mind all the lessons that Syrio Forel, her sword skill teacher, had taught her. When the Lannister's guards come for Sansa, all she can do is cry: the narrator states that "She was such a *child*"(Martin, *Game of Thrones*, 542). Is Sansa not growing up? Is she stuck in perpetual childhood? Women are infantilized by this culture and that is a part of the female bildungsroman as men did not have this issue. Women had to depend on others because they had no political power, unlike their male counterparts. Males were taught and encouraged to grow and become manly which includes having sex with women. Females were taught to preserve themselves until marriage, because their maidenhead was valuable to their future husbands. If they had lost their virginity before marriage they would be considered tainted and not as valuable. Sansa found herself living with the enemy and she would have to do what was necessary to survive, and that meant growing out of her childlike state. All these things place Sansa in the overlapping roles of male and female bildungsroman. She will have to grow, develop, mature, and find her own identity in order to navigate the social order of Westeros. These circumstances occurred at the young age of eleven when her personality, character, and identity were all being formed and

would determine what kind of adult she will become. As a protagonist in the novel, she was placed into the position of having to learn who in life was trustworthy and who was not. Sansa is being forced to grow up; however, sometimes she acts like a perpetual child. There are signs that Sansa is learning, but she still reverts to childish ways. So how does she fit the female bildungsroman? She is learning new skills extremely slowly and she's just not as quick as Arya. Seeing the mean-spirited nature of Joffrey, Sansa's love for him wane and she doesn't want anything to do with him but she hides it well: "His touch filled her with revulsion now, but she knew better than to show it. She made herself sit very still" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 43). Sansa is learning to negotiate the peculiar social order into which she has been thrust and adjusting her own needs and desires to the demands of her new situation. As noted in *Women of Ice and Fire*, Sansa uses her courtesy as an armor to maintain her integrity and her dignity when faced with humiliation and defeat (Gjelsvik & Schubart 31). A male gets to use a sword and shield and most females cannot. Females had to use their minds whereas males had to use their physicality.

Arya on the other hand, had a different path of discovery into adulthood. Prior to going south with her father, Arya exhibited the traits of a fighter and had a warrior spirit, despite being only nine years old. Her brother Jon had a small sword made for her (Needle) and encouraged her to use it. After her father's death and with Jon no longer being around to assist, Arya learned how to wield a sword and this made her lethal even as a nine year old. Would anyone in Westeros be afraid of a nine-year-old girl wielding a sword as they might be of a nine-year-old boy? Maybe not, but Arya killed her first man when she was just nine. The killing was a matter of life and death and her only thought

was of survival. Like Sansa, Arya had no family to protect her, but Arya was smart and strong enough to protect herself. Arya found herself living on the streets with no money and getting food as best she could. She had gone from a life of privilege to a life of need and want. Arya was only nine years old and her personality was still developing. She was learning new skills and learning to negotiate the social order of Westeros.

Arya learns a lot due to her experiences, which resemble more the experiences of a male protagonist but are somewhat different in that she is female. She's distrustful of strangers and knows when to talk and when to keep quiet. She is observant, especially in dangerous situations, but she knows how to stay calm. Arya learns to be a survivor, as she knows when to fight and when to give up in order to live and fight another day. When Arya is making her escape with two boys, they run into three men. Arya hides behind a tree so she can observe the men and assess the danger. Her first thought is to pull her sword to fight, but one of the three men was an archer who she knew could kill them before she could do anything. She eventually backs down because she realizes this is a fight she could not win. She's learning survival skills that she can use as she grows and develops. When Arya was captured with two boys who wanted to escape, she was the leader and gave the orders. Arya made the decision to escape and stole a map and a dagger to assist them. She also went to the stable to get horses for them while she ordered the boys to get food for their journey. Arya led the boys north using the map that she stole and also observed the way the sun affected the trees.

Even though Arya seems to be taking the stereotypical male path of the bildungsroman, hers is a female bildungsroman. The only thing that may hinder Arya from being a woman warrior is that when she actually becomes a woman, her sexuality

may be threatened by men. As she develops physically, Arya becomes more vulnerable because in the game of thrones world most of the men view women as objects to be taken at will. Although Arya is young, she could be considered as emerging into womanhood. Her tomboyish ways make one wonder what sort of woman she will become. If her training as an assassin in Bravos with the Faceless Men is any indication, perhaps Arya could grow up to be a warrior or assassin.

Education

Labovitz's first difference of the female bildungsroman from the male bildungsroman is that the female is not educated in the classroom. Arya's education was not in the classroom but in the society of Westeros. Her capacity for vengeance makes her increasingly dangerous even though she's vulnerable because she is still a child: "Arya is consistently portrayed as a figure who watches and learns, particularly from violent acts. She is subject to the power and patronage of others, her actions producing unintended consequences....Above all, Arya's observations mean that she is tutored in violence and revenge. Her journey is one of flight and a search for reprisal" (Gjelsvik & Schubart 184). Arya's journey resembles that in a male bildungsroman and there are overlapping characteristics in all forms of bildungsroman, but the obstacles she faces are specifically female. In the fantasy world of Westeros, women were more vulnerable to rape, and society had been conditioned to view them as the 'weaker' sex whose role was to marry and have children.

Arya learns patience. She wants revenge on a number of people but it comes slowly and she waits for the right time to avenge herself. For Arya to be a child and have such patience shows the true warrior spirit in her character. For example, Arya is loyal to

her friends. She made friends with a boy named Gendry who knew her true identity as the daughter of Ned Stark. When Gendry is captured, Arya is willing to risk her life to save him even though he could reveal her true identity. Arya has many identity changes but she starts out as the daughter of a nobleman. As her narrative develops, she becomes a boy, a page, a serving girl, and a prisoner. She is known by several names, such as Arry, Squab, Cat of the Canals, and Blind Beth. All these identities put Arya on a path to grow, mature, and discover her own identity. Arya thought of herself as a wolf. She dreamed and imagined herself as the biggest and strongest wolf in the pack. She identified herself as strong and bold, leading the wolf pack because she had the heart of a warrior. Arya is also learning to be independent. She doesn't look for others to save her. She believes that she can save herself, whereas Sansa expects to be rescued. It's odd to say that Sansa and Arya are even related because they are so opposite in everything they do. This is not to say that one is better than the other, but to say that Arya is learning faster than Sansa and both are learning in the ways that characterize the female bildungsroman.

Without the support of her family, Sansa had a hard time trying to decipher whom to trust but she learned not to trust the Lannisters after they killed her father. According to the narrator, "Once she had loved Prince Joffrey with all her heart and admired and trusted his mother, the queen. They had repaid that love and trust with her father's head. Sansa would never make that mistake again" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 52). In spite of all her troubles, Sansa uses the lessons she learned in childhood to be lady-like and courteous and by doing so retains her integrity and dignity. Sansa masked her true feelings of hate and anger and put on a lady-like façade to endure all that had happened to her. Sansa is learning to keep her true feelings to herself and to tell people what they want

to hear. For example, after being beaten by Joffrey's guards and speaking to Tyrion Lannister when he asked what she prays for, Sansa says, "I pray for an end to the fighting" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 493). However, in her mind she's thinking, "I pray for Robb's victory and Joffrey's death...and for home. For Winterfell"(Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 493). Sansa was in a socially disadvantaged position. She turned her weakness into a strength by keeping her lady-like ways and using them as weapons, which is more female bildungsroman than male bildungsroman.

Sansa has been betrothed three times. She was first betrothed to Joffrey; however, she doesn't marry him. She is then betrothed to Joffrey's uncle, Tyrion Lannister. Out of the Lannisters, the only one that Sansa can trust is Tyrion, but she cannot see beyond his ugly disfigurement and dwarfism. Sansa is only thirteen years old, but as soon as she gets her period she is considered a woman in the world of Westeros. Her sexuality is immediately threatened because she is expected to be wedded and bedded as Cersei explains to her: "So now you are a woman. Do you have the least idea of what that means!" "It means that I am now fit to be wedded and bedded, said Sansa, "to bear children for the king" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 760). Despite Tyrion's physical appearance, Sansa is forced to marry him to keep the Lannisters in the battle for the iron throne. On their wedding night, Sansa is forced to get naked and lie in bed with Tyrion. However, their marriage is never consummated because Tyrion sees how fearful Sansa is and he will only accept her when she is ready to accept him (disfigurement and all). Their marriage is also never consummated because Sansa never accepts Tyrion. However, she is sexually violated because she does have to take her clothes off and get in bed with him. She had no choice in the matter and in other circumstances (had Tyrion not been a

gentleman) she would have been taken by force. If this were the male bildungsroman's wedding night, the positions would be switched. He would get to choose whomever he wanted to marry and he would get to have sex with her. In the world of Westeros, men don't get raped; men could legally rape their wives. Sansa was used as a pawn for marriages that would benefit familial alliances, while males typically did not have this issue.

Both Arya and Sansa play multiple roles in the novels and achieve a sort of female autonomy that redefines the female bildungsroman. Lazzaro-Weis says that some critics who support the idea of a female bildungsroman feel that "Women need to play multiple roles as part of the strategy to subvert the self imposed upon them from the outside and to move toward the development of an autonomous female identity" (Lazzaro-Weis 18). Sansa follows the traditional role of the female bildungsroman, which is to find her own way in the world after losing the support of her immediate family. Sansa has already been married once and engaged twice. Arya is not concerned with getting married, and it can be argued that she represents a new type of female bildungsroman. She has lost the support of her family, but her independence is taking her down a different path. She consciously does things to protect herself and makes her own decisions.

Sansa also had another identity as Alayne. LittleFinger "saves" Sansa from the Lannisters and gives her the identity of his bastard daughter, Alayne. Littlefinger tries to teach Sansa the realities of life and tells her not to trust everyone. As Sansa recalls, "You told me that life was not a song. That I would learn that one day, to my sorrow" (Martin, *A Storm of Swords*, 839). As Alayne, she becomes a mother figure by caring for and

nurturing little Lord Robert, her nephew. Little Lord Robert likes to nuzzle at her breast when they sleep and he accepts her as his mother. Sansa acknowledged her role as his mother specifically on the night he climbed into her bed. “He cuddled close and laid his head between her breasts. ‘Alayne? Are you my mother now?’ ‘I suppose I am’ she said. If a lie was kindly meant, there was no harm in it” (Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 225).

Sansa is making the best of her situation and is learning to be patient when dealing with little Lord Robert. This role as the mother figure was preparing her for actual motherhood, a role that is powerfully female. Sansa learned to lie, but to her it was only to protect herself or someone else she felt needed protection. In Sansa’s mind as long as a lie was kindly meant, it was permissible. As Alayne, Sansa is maturing. She sees herself as a maiden and is treated like one. She is given larger and more lavish living accommodations. She has her own privy, a dressing room, and a balcony. She has fine clothes and servants and her orders are recognized and obeyed by the servants. As Alayne, Sansa becomes bolder and sees herself as a brave older woman. She also gets engaged to be married (for a third time), this time, to Harold Hardyng and will again have an identity as a wife. As the wife of Tyrion Lannister, the marriage was never consummated, but the expectation of Sansa’s second marriage had been for Petyr Baelish to use her as a pawn.

Sansa embraces the role of Alayne, going as far as changing her hair color to assume this identity. As the daughter of Petyr Baelish, Sansa is learning about the fight for the game of thrones. She listens and asks questions and learns about the fight for the kingdom of the Vale.

Petyr Baelish explains about the game of thrones. “In the game of thrones, even the humblest pieces can have wills of their own. Sometimes they refuse to make the moves you’ve planned for them. Mark that well, Alayne. It’s a lesson that Cersei Lannister has yet to learn” (Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 477).

Teachers

In conjunction with Labovitz’s definition of the female bildungsroman, one can see how Sansa and Arya fall into this category. In the category of education, both Sansa and Arya came from a noble family, so they were educated and could read at a time when many people couldn’t. Their informal education was gained on their journey to return home to Winterfell. Both Arya and Sansa learned to function in society and had varied experiences. Sansa was moved around like a pawn in a game of chess. One of her teachers was Cersei, who told her what was a woman’s role, her source of power, and what it takes to be a queen. “The only way to keep your people loyal is to make certain they fear you more than they do the enemy” (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 848). To Cersei, a woman’s power was between her legs. Littlefinger was another teacher for Sansa who taught her about the power of manipulation.

Unlike Sansa, Arya moved on her own and sometimes she was captured and held against her will and her experiences contributed to her growth and development. She had many teachers, one of whom was Syrio Forel, who trained her to fight. Another one of Arya’s teachers was The Hound, who recognized Arya’s warrior spirit and taught her how to kill more precisely by aiming for the heart. The other teacher for Arya was the kindly priest who served the Many-Faced-God. He tried to teach Arya how to be obedient or be punished. There was no room for pride while serving in the temple of the Many-

Faced-God. The priest told Arya that this god required her whole self. “Before you drink from the cold cup, you must offer up all you are to Him of Many Faces. Your body. Your soul. Yourself. If you cannot bring yourself to do that, you must leave this place” (Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 452). The priest reminded Arya that to walk the path of the servant of the Many-Faced-God, she needed to have uncommon strength in her body and soul and a strong heart. He also reinforced in her mind that all men must die. Arya’s time in the temple reinforces the tendencies to view her story as more of a male bildungsroman.

Journey & Independence

Labovitz’s female protagonist goes on a journey, experiences freedom, and independence. Both Sansa and Arya traveled to other regions as part of their experience, with Arya mixing with classes of people other than the noble class to which they belonged. They made their own decisions, not always knowing if these decisions were right or where they would lead. They were mistreated, used and abused, and in Arya’s case experienced hunger and deprivation. All these experiences were new to the girls but contributed to their growth and development. Sansa was childlike before her journey started, but she matured over time and took advantage of the experiences offered. Sansa tended to be stoic when violence was impersonal to her. For instance, before her journey started, she had seen a young knight killed in a tournament. This was the first time she had seen a man die but she didn’t cry because the man had no meaning in her life. Had the man been a member of her family, she would have resorted to tears because her love for her family was strong. Sansa was patient and had to wait to escape from the Lannisters. During this time she grew stronger and her survival instincts kicked in. She

was still unsure of whom she could trust, but she knew she had to do something to escape from the Lannisters. An opportunity to escape presented itself when Sansa received an anonymous note offering to help her return home to Winterfell. She was unsure of what to do, thinking it could be a trick, but she had no one to advise her. However, she showed courage and decided to sneak out of the castle and take her chances with whoever had sent the note. Rather she thought that she should take the chance since this might be her only opportunity to escape than wait to see how much more pain Joffrey would inflict on her. She prayed to her gods and went out to meet the sender of the note that resulted in her escape from the Lannisters, but it did not bring her home.

In comparison, the journey in the male bildungsroman can be different. Bran is the younger brother of Sansa and Arya Stark, and also went on a journey. Bran's dream was to be a knight in the king's guard, which meant that he would have no wife or children. Instead, Bran's journey took him in search of himself. In his dreams he is constantly told that he had to find his third eye and he learns that he is a shape changer. When Winterfell is captured, Bran goes on a journey not only to escape death but also to find his identity. "He remembered who he was all too well, Bran the boy, Bran the broken. *Better Bran the beastling*" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 959). Although Bran doesn't realize his dream of becoming a knight will never happen because he is pushed from a tower and paralyzed. He still has the freedom to consider himself a knight even if it is only in his mind, whereas a female couldn't aspire to the class of knighthood. Bran emerges more powerful as his journey progresses.

Identity

Another characteristic of Labovitz's female protagonist is finding her identity before marriage. It can be argued that neither girl found her identity before getting married. As far as identity, Arya did not marry and is still searching for her identity; however, maybe she didn't need a husband to find her identity, since she is already self-sufficient. In reality, Arya had no desire for marriage as noted when the priest in the temple asked her what she wanted. "Or if it is marriage and children you desire, tell me, and we shall find a husband for you. Some honest apprentice boy, a rich old man, a seafarer, whatever you desire. She wanted none of that. Wordless, she shook her head" (Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 453). Sansa, however, did get married, but her first marriage was never consummated, so it can be argued that she is still searching for her own identity before she actually fulfills her marriage vows.

Spiritual Quest

Labovitz addresses the spiritual quest or philosophical journey of life and death that is experienced by the female protagonist. Sansa was not on a quest but she believed in the seven gods that were worshipped in Winterfell and prayed to them to rescue her and return her to her family. Arya was on a journey of life and death. She was greatly influenced by her time in the temple of the Many-Faced-God. Arya's primary motivation in life was revenge upon the people who had done her wrong.

She had already learned from The Hound a more precise way to kill and the priest of the Many-Faced-God tried to teach her to be disciplined when deciding whom to kill according to the philosophy of the Many-Faced-God. Arya challenged the priest to teach her how to see a liar so no secret would be safe from her. She also wanted to learn how to rule her own face, so she could lie. She also learned from the priest a different view of death seeing that it isn't necessarily the worst thing.

Death is not the worst thing, the kindly man replied. It is His gift to us, an end to want and pain. On the day that we are born the Many-Faced-God sends each of us a dark angel to walk through life beside us. When our sins and our sufferings grow too great to be borne, the angel takes us by the hand to lead us to the night-lands, where the stars burn ever bright (Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 449).

In Winterfell, people were afraid to die, but Arya is learning that even though all men and women must die, death is only the beginning.

Another Labovitz trait is the multiple roles played by the female protagonist. Both girls went through different roles. Sansa's roles were more of a sexual nature. She was frequently being used sexually by different people to increase that person's chances to rule on the iron throne. Cersei Lannister could be considered as a female role model for Sansa. Cersei's idea of a woman's role defied the common beliefs of the times that women were the "gentle sex." Cersei wanted power and wasn't afraid to kill to get it. Arya, on the other hand, doesn't really discover her sexuality as a young girl or "woman" and her role models could be Brienne of Tarth, Asha Greyjoy or Daenerys Targaryen. These three women were cast more in the role of woman warriors. Arya's roles were more of a fighting nature. She was aggressive, courageous, and smart. Her main role was that of a warrior and Arya's primary motivation in life was revenge.

Memories

The female protagonist retrieves her memories of lost childhood. Both girls remembered the lessons they learned, reflected on their childhood continuously, and used this reflection for their journey to self-development. Sansa often reflected on her life in Winterfell, which was sometimes of a childish nature. Sansa remembered her family and how happy she had been with them. Many of her thoughts were of old childhood stories of magic and she remembered the songs of knights and fair ladies. At one point in her journey, it happened to be snowing and it brought back memories of Winterfell and brought her outside to build castles in the snow. It's ironic that Sansa would choose to build castles in the snow when technically her life is always in danger. Building snow castles is such a childlike thing to do and it brings her to a happier time in her life but that is no longer her life. As Sansa grows older and became Alayne, she put these memories aside and focused all her attention on her survival. On the other hand, Arya thought often of her house sigil, the wolf. When she was young she had a direwolf as a pet and she used these memories to be bold and strong when her enemies were beating her. She thought of the fighting skills she learned and she used these to survive. Arya's childhood memories were of her family, especially of her brother Jon who had given her a sword, Needle, when she was very young. Needle represented everything Arya thought of when she thought of home. It was her family, her people, old Nan stories, and it was Jon Snow's smile. Needle was a part of her that she would never give up because it represented her childhood memories.

Labovitz describes the female protagonist as searching for her sense of self and her rightful place in society. Arya's search for self started with the death of her beloved father and continued as her journey progressed. Her search for self was really challenged while she worked in the temple of the Many-Faced-God. In the temple she was identified as "No One" and that was how she referred to herself. She was proud of her name as Arya Stark but had to give up all the material items that linked her to Arya if she wanted to stay in the temple of the Many-Faced-God. Arya is still searching for her identity but it is difficult. The priest in the temple told Arya that she needed a hard and strong heart to serve the Many-Faced-God. She argued verbally that she was strong but thought in her mind that she had a hole where her heart should be. Eventually she relinquished all things Arya except her sword, Needle, the one thing she didn't give up. Nevertheless, she accepted the role of a servant in the temple. Both Arya and Sansa's search for self depended on which identity they were using in order to survive.

Using Labovitz as a guide, one can see how Arya challenged society even as a child when she rebelled against society's views of what was a woman's role. She rejected the lessons she was taught as a (child to be lady-like) and she would not acknowledge the role. "My mother's a lady and my sister, but I never was" (Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 298). At times, Arya took on the role of a boy and dissociated herself from womanhood. She felt that women were just as important as men, but she knew that being a woman in Westeros was dangerous.

She did not conform to the prevailing view of a woman's role at the time. Arya's persona was more aligned with the men of that time. In the fantasy world of Westeros there are not many men who want the stereotypical role of a woman. We do not see the men wanting to sing, or use a needle or thread. Therefore, there was no need for a male to challenge society. It was strictly females challenging what society thought a woman's role should be.

Shedding

According to Labovitz, the female protagonist goes through a shedding process. Both Sansa and Arya had to get rid of the things that hindered their growth and development. Sansa needed to shed her childlike ways and when she took on the role of mother to little Lord Robert, she let go of her childlike dreams of love songs and romance. She cared for Robert as if he were her own son. Arya shed her femininity when she accepted the role of a boy. She didn't mind being identified as a boy because it was safer to be a young boy than it was for a young girl in the world of Westeros. In addition, Arya shed her role as the daughter of a nobleman. She lived on the streets scrounging for food as best she could. She was dirty, hungry, and could not be recognized as being Eddard Stark's daughter.

Conclusion

As the genre of the female bildungsroman is evolving, one could consider the following as possible attributes of a 21st century female bildungsroman in literature:

- The protagonist of the female bildungsroman feels equal to men
- She is not constrained by her sexuality and has a sense of sexual freedom and at times uses her sexuality as a weapon
- Her journey may lead to marriage, a career, or a combination of both

- She has many female role models
- She also values freedom and independence
- She experiences sense of self at a young age and knows or has an idea of what she wants in life
- She is willing to fight for equality and challenge the status quo
- She can find her sense of self without going on a journey, but a journey can help her
- She is educated formally and through experiences
- The modern female bildungsroman does not let others define her; she defines herself
- She possesses a strong character and shows courage, dignity, and integrity
- She believes in love but love is not the answer to all her wants and needs
- She has a sense of empowerment that is based on that of the women who have already paved the way
- The female can often exhibit characteristics of the male; however those characteristics are distinctly hers

The girls in Game of Thrones represent the diversity of the female bildungsroman. Both Sansa and Arya experience emotional and intellectual maturity. They had to make decisions for themselves and were forced to be strong to survive. They stopped dreaming of home and had to concentrate on the path that life was taking them. Sansa got life lessons in the power struggle for the iron throne. Arya's mind was inquisitive and she continuously sought knowledge by asking questions. The girls changed identities many times and they learned to fit into the roles in which they had been placed. As part of their

growth and development, several men influenced the girls. The Hound and Syrio Forel influenced Arya; these men taught Arya how to survive in Westeros. LittleFinger taught Sansa and she learned that she had to play the game of thrones in order to not be a pawn used by others. They traveled different paths, but both girls grew, developed, and learned. Despite life not being fair to them as women, they did not let this stop them. One can only speculate where the road will take them, but one can easily imagine Sansa as a queen and Arya as a female warrior.

In *Game of Thrones*, both Arya and Sansa go through many role changes and experiences. Many of these are peculiar to them as women. While there is plenty of overlap in all forms of bildungsroman, the obstacles faced by the female in her bildungsroman is different. As a representative of a female protagonist, Sansa was originally expected to submit to the will of her parents, especially in regard to marriage. She was powerless in choosing her mate and that's how she was engaged to Joffrey. Sansa's dream of marriage to Joffrey is shattered and she has no clue where her journey will take her. She has to face the realization that her security is gone and she doesn't know what the future holds for her. Joffrey's power over Sansa could have destroyed her. Having endured both physical and emotional abuse, she could have given in to despair and accepted her hopeless position. However, Sansa finds her inner strength, overcomes many obstacles, and turns herself into a new woman determined to survive. She doesn't let the roles available to women deter her from learning and growing.

What she lacked in physical strength, she made up in inner strength which she used to guide her choices. Sansa finds her maternal instincts, one of the few choices for women.

Even though she embraces her role as a mother figure, she is still looking for educational opportunities. Sansa was interested in how political power was gained and used, and she learned all she could from LittleFinger.

The girls' experiences were more of being used as pawns while the boys were more in danger of being killed. Arya's journey brought her in to contact with new ideas and mentors. She worked in different jobs and developed several friendships. Arya felt the need to rise above the limits placed on females. She was able to see a different side of life that would not have been possible if she had never left home. Despite being encouraged at a young age to embrace female pursuits, she was more interested in the male role. Arya's attitude to marriage was that it wasn't for her. She wanted to do what society considered the important work, which was normally done by men. Arya found freedom to act and think like a male, which is something she always had wanted. There was no one to condemn her actions or force her to stay in a prescribed female role. The girls' journey was more of discovery of new identities and the boys' journey was more of fulfillment of existing identities. Neither of the boys had an expectation of getting married, but for the girls this was expected. The girls were more threatened sexually because rape was prominent and an imminent danger to them.

The girls changed roles several times based on what roles society offered to them while the boys remained in their own roles. The lessons the girls learned would not have been possible without their journey. Their lives would have been relegated to a strictly feminine role. Their journeys gave them the opportunity to pursue other roles and to gain insight into Westeros society. Arya's journey was the gateway for her to pursue a dream of having the ability to do the same things as males. Sansa's journey brought out a

strength in her that she most likely didn't know she possessed. Although they lost the support of their families, what they gained in self discovery and identity was invaluable. Sansa and Arya Stark are dynamic and complex characters. Both grew and developed over the course of their journey and exemplified the traits of differing bildungsromans. One can only speculate on how their journey will end as their narrative is still being written.

References

Estes, Clarissa Pinkola. *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. New York: Ballantine, 1992. Print.

Frankel, Valerie Estelle. *Women in Game of Thrones: Power Conformity and Resistance*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2014. Print.

Gjelsvik, Anne & Schubart, Rikke. *Women of Ice and Fire*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print.

Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988. Print.

Lazzaro-Weis, Carol. "The Female Bildungsroman: Calling it into Question". *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 2, No.1 (Winter 1990). Print.

Maier, Sarah E. "Portraits of the Girl-Child: Female *Bildungsroman* in Victorian Fiction". *Literature Compass*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (Jan 2007). Print.

Martin, George R. R. *A Dance with Dragons*. New York: Bantam, 2011. Print. A Song of Ice and Fire.

---. *A Feast for Crows*. New York: Bantam, 2005. Print. A Song of Ice and Fire.

---. *A Storm of Swords*. New York: Bantam, 2000. Print. A Song of Ice and Fire.

---. *A Clash of Kings*. New York: Bantam, 1999. Print. A Song of Ice and Fire.

---. *A Game of Thrones*. New York: Bantam, 1996. Print. A Song of Ice and Fire.

Pearson, Carol S. *Awakening the Heroes Within*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991. Print.

Spector, Caroline. "Power and Feminism in Westeros". *Beyond the Wall: Exploring George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*. Dallas: BenBella Books, 2012. Print.

Voloshin, Beverly R. "The Limits of Domesticity: The Female Bildungsroman in

America 1820-1870". *Women's Studies*, Vol. 10 (1984). Print.

VITA

The author was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in English Writing from Loyola University in 2013. She joined the University of New Orleans English graduate program to pursue a M.A. in English with a concentration in American Literature. She will graduate in May 2017.