

Gender and power in television fiction: an ideological textual analysis of a historical TV Series

Género y poder en la ficción televisiva: análisis textual ideológico de una serie histórica



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Abstract:

Productions carried out during the third golden age of television enjoy widespread popularity today. Within some of the TV series in this category, women who hold positions of power can occasionally be found as in the TV show analyzed in this article, which is *Vikings*. In this series, one of the main protagonists, Lagertha, amasses great admiration from the female audience. In order to know if this success corresponds to the reality of the character (her personality and the actions she takes), this study will carry out an analysis to determine the archetype of the protagonist and to develop a semiotic study of the character and her power relations with other subjects.

Keywords:

Power; TV series; gender; television; fiction.

1. Introduction

Television series have become a prioritized object of analysis within communication research, partly as a consequence of the so-called “TV bubble” and the wide range of quality series available today. Viewed from another perspective, this academic development cannot be understood without considering previous background research, such as the work entitled *Apocalípticos e integrados* (Apocalyptic and integrated), in which Eco makes a defence for the analysis of television

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Resumen:

Las producciones enmarcadas dentro de la tercera edad dorada televisiva gozan de una amplia fama en la actualidad. Dentro de las series situadas en esta categoría se pueden hallar, ocasionalmente, mujeres que ejercen puestos de poder, tal como se da en la serie a examinar en este artículo: Vikings, donde una de las principales protagonistas, Lagertha, acapara gran admiración por parte de la audiencia femenina. Este caso se examinará con el objetivo de saber si ese éxito se corresponde con la realidad del personaje (su personalidad y las acciones que ejecuta), realizando para ello un análisis que determinará el arquetipo de la protagonista y desarrollando un análisis semiótico del personaje y sus relaciones de poder con los demás sujetos.

Palabras clave:

Poder; series; género; televisión; ficción

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as a cultural object, a medium with its own characteristics that is worthy of the attention of researchers (2009: 330). In this way, interest in research of the television medium gradually began to emerge; Thus, Williams (1990) defended the study of television based on the uses and possibilities that this medium might have, thereby moving away from the deterministic positions of the moment. A growing interest in what audiences observe was followed by Morley (1996), who opted for the analysis of reception on the basis of ethnographic proposals in order to adequately understand the meanings given by viewers to television texts. For its part, in the specific field of television series, one of the pioneer works is entitled *Interacting with Dallas: cross cultural readings of American TV* (Katz and Liebes, 1990), where an analysis was conducted to see how viewers from different countries interpreted the same series in different ways.

There is a reason for this. As it became interesting to study television texts, the academic field soon became interested in knowing how they were interpreted. Using this approach, the program Vikings (History Channel, 2013-) appears to be a TV series that provides interesting reading with regard to the representation of gender and power; in this sense, one of its leading protagonists is an intrepid female warrior, who *a priori*, turns out to be an exceptional ruler. An effective government that is confirmed in interviews with the creator of the series, Michael Hirst (History Extra, 2017), or on the official production website: “respected warrior and the Queen of Kattegat [...] fiercely independent” (Vikings Cast, s/a). The character in question is Lagertha, a woman who is apparently admired by the female audience as well. Thus, as shown by the images provided by a superficial search of her name on internet, one can see several photographs of the character in which her bravery is highlighted.

Therefore, it can be observed that television series are capable of serving as role models for young women, and sometimes these role models are not as revolutionary as they appear to be. On this basis, the article aims to discuss the representation of women with power in the Canadian series Vikings from the analysis of its main female protagonist. This objective will be achieved in two ways: firstly, through an analysis of the character in question. Secondly, through verification of peoples’ perception of Lagertha on the Twitter platform, where comments made by users of the social network regarding her character will be gathered. In this way, verification will be made as to whether or not the intended image of the TV series matches the role she performs, and whether or not it also matches with the idea the public has of her.

Illustration 1. Lagertha on social networks



Source: Tumblr

2. Method

This research is based on an observation of the degree of admiration currently held by some female characters, who in some cases are perceived as role models to follow because of their strength and courage. This is the case of Lagertha, the protagonist of the Canadian production *Vikings*, a character who at first glance seems to have broken the glass ceiling because she expresses her opinion without hesitation, goes to battle with men, and leaves her husband when he cheats on her. However, are these features enough to break traditional gender roles?

In order to answer this question and discover the faithfulness, or lack thereof, of this character to the principles assigned to her beforehand (History Extra, 2017; *Vikings Cast*, s/a), a textual analysis will be carried out following the premises set out by Hermida Bellot (2013), which allow us to uncover the archetype behind the character. In other words, the first three seasons of the series will be viewed –a total of 29 episode– with annotations of the main actions of the character that will allow us to clarify her personality in order to associate her with some of the archetypes proposed by Lynn Schmidt (2001, 2012). On the other hand, this analysis will be supplemented with an ideological analysis according to the definition of ideology by van Dijk (2000): schemes that serve to represent social groups through the delimitation of Us vs. Them. At the same time, this part will be supported by power theorists (Russell, 2017; Galbraith, 2013; Greene, 2003; Machiavelli, 1983), in order to study the actions exercised by the main character and thus establish her success or failure.

Lastly, in order to answer the question of the perception of Lagertha's position of power by followers of the TV series, a search for opinions on Twitter about the character has been carried out. In this regard, a search has been carried out manually with the Twitter Search tool by using the keywords 'Lagertha' and 'Leader' with the objective of limiting the sample to a specific end: to collect the opinions of users when they reflect on the character as a ruler. The content of the *corpus* publications was analysed using a template that allowed for qualitative coding of the data extracted from the social network. Every tweet that referred to Lagertha as leader was considered as a unit of analysis from which the links they offered –images or videos– were codified, as well as the comments they made about her.

Table 1: Analysis index card

Tweet	Image	Text	Positive	Negative	Neutral

Source: Author-created

The analysis index card has been divided into five sections: firstly, the presence or absence of the image has been identified in order to perceive the representation they make of her –as a warrior, as a mother, or in some other role–. Secondly, the entire content of the tweet has been transcribed and interpreted in its entirety in order to understand its content. Finally, the tweet in general has been compared: a rating of positive, negative or neutral is given –the latter does not disqualify the character, nor is the character praised–.

In short, the findings are divided into three areas: the first relates to the archetypal dimension of the character; the second relates to the crossroads between the theories of power and Lagertha's actions; and the third is the results of the comments

posted on the web. All of this considered will make it possible to achieve the main objective of the work: to verify whether Lagertha's character matches the public's perception of her, with the first two sections being those that allow the character to become known, and the last part gives access to the opinion of followers.

3. Lagertha: the archetype of a Viking woman in the golden age of television

Vikings narrates the legend of Ragnar Lodbrok, who represents the myth of the self-made man: an intrepid warrior who gradually rises up the social ladder thanks to his skill as a strategist. On the contrary, his wife Lagertha, who is the object of study of this work, is presented in the first scenes as a mother who takes care of the household chores. Indeed, throughout the series, Lagertha mainly assumes the role of Ragnar's lover, to whom she professes unconditional love; and if on several occasions she shows that she also possesses talent as a warrior, this side seems to have been forgotten by her closest circle when she becomes a married woman and a mother. This fact is seen, for example, when Ragnar's brother refers to her squire skills as a past occupation (1x01, "Rites of Passage").

At the same time, if the character at times shows signs of independence, her decisions are taken according to her husband's wishes, since her thirst for adventure is not satisfied until he gives his consent (1x03, "Dispossessed"). In this episode, she is seen for the first time dressed as a squire when Ragnar allows her to go on raids in England. However, the top priority stated by Lagertha is to please her husband, and in order for him to feel complete, he needs to have offspring. In this regard, as Ragnar already has the title of Count in these episodes, does not feel content because Lagertha has had a failed pregnancy; and therefore, he is reluctant toward her. That being said, after a few episodes of agony over the situation, she takes refuge in her religious beliefs and asks her gods to give Ragnar a son. Her prayers are answered: Ragnar becomes a father again, but with another woman: Aslaug, a *völva* capable of predicting the future. In the second season, Lagertha finds out from her son, Bjorn, about his father's adultery with Aslaug, an infidelity she forgives after a brief period of anger. Nevertheless, the mistress appears in the village pregnant, and after an initial shock, in a gesture that seems to be out of self-respect, she leaves Ragnar and abandons Kattegat with her son (2x01, "Brother's War"). However, in a later gathering, Lagertha affectionately greets the children of Aslaug and Ragnar, proudly telling the children that she always knew she would meet more of Ragnar's children, as the gods had told her (2x05, "Answers in Blood"). That is the reason why she shows her abandonment as proof of her love toward Ragnar, so that another woman could have the children she could not give him. At the same time, this season introduces a temporary jump of four years, during which time Lagertha climbs the social ladder thanks to another marriage to a Duke.

In this set of episodes, Bjorn learns of the assault on her father's lands, and Lagertha, in a seductive manner, tries to get the support of her new husband and his men to go forth and help Ragnar. The request is rejected. Confronted with this refusal and her husband's obvious jealousy, Lagertha goes to assist Ragnar without permission. This action costs her a beating on her return by her husband's men, who later try to humiliate her in a public act, an event in which he ends up being killed by Lagertha, who consequently obtains the position of Countess. However, it is later discovered that Lagertha had additional support in carrying out the plan: Einar, a member of a powerful family from her new county will later demand the enjoyment of her body in exchange for helping her. Lagertha later denies the promise, and after she does some flirting,

she rejects him as a lover (2x08, “Boneless”). After this action, she decides to return with Ragnar to loot England in order to soothe his thirst for revenge against the English king. Nevertheless, Lagertha’s decision to leave her newly acquired County will have consequences.

In the third season, Lagertha is divested of power by the man she trusted most, Kalf, her right hand man. At that moment, she asks Ragnar for help, and as she helped him at one time, she asks him to join once again and throw the usurper off her land. On the contrary, he does not consider that fact relevant, and goes with her to the County, but to ask Kalf to join them on a new mission to Paris. A betrayal for which she is visibly upset; in spite of this, she reappears and goes with them toward the new lands: France. The first raid turns out to be a disaster for the Vikings, and in the conflict, she is saved by Kalf, with whom she is later married.

What do all of these facts about the character say? In order to reflect on her role in the TV series, it is interesting to observe the archetype, defined as a “model that is imitated to the point of ubiquity and an almost subconscious recognition” (Penman and Cloud, 2018: 111). Thus, after examining dozens of Russian short stories, Propp observed that the great majority of the characters were developed according to similar schemes and with similar narrative structures: functions. These are understood as “the actions of a character defined from the point of view of his or her significance in the development of the plot” (2001: 33). That is to say, consistent and permanent elements that constitute their personality (2001: 34). Some functions and paths of the characters were later re-examined from the perspective of the mythical narrative pattern by Campbell, who said that archetypes populate the collective unconscious: “In all the inhabited world, in all times and circumstances, the myths of men have flourished; they have been the living inspiration of everything that may have arisen from the activities of the human body and mind” (2013: 11).

It is interesting to note that in this collective narrative substratum, the female figure can be the hero who overcomes her personal limitations (2013: 26). However, the heroine’s destiny in this case is “to become the consort of an immortal being” (2013: 112), a destiny impossible to reject if she wishes to find peace. On the other hand, it is common throughout the story to find the jealous witch, who portrays the bad mother (2013: 64), or protective figures such as the attentive old lady or the fairy godmother, who protect the hero and advise him or her on their mission (2013: 72). In any case, the main female figure has generally been the Universal Mother, and the encounter with her by the hero at his height is her reward for winning: “women, in the graphic language of mythology, represent the totality of what can be known” (2013: 110).

According to data inferred from the TV series, the archetype of the matriarch prevails in Lagertha. Thus, with her role as mother and wife, her family comes first, as she demonstrates on several occasions by granting greater privilege to the position of her husband or son. In addition, according to Lynn Schmidt, the ultimate belief in this archetype is: “Always make time for your partner” (2012:10). She performs this function, always putting her husband first; an example is when she waits for Ragnar when the village is under attack, endangering her life and that of her children. On the other hand, this does not mean that she neglects her offspring, as she does not cease to care for her daughter until her death in the first season, and with respect to Bjorn, she is always by his side advising and watching over him.

In contrast, forgiveness for infidelity would not be possible for the matriarch if not for the archetype present in Lagertha: mysticism. She is a spiritual woman. Her gods guide her along the way: she feels that the gods have a written destiny

for her and she confidently accepts the fate that they have prepared for her. This aspect of her character shows empathy and understanding that is evident at the moment when she is influenced by her mythology, which explains her sympathy towards Aslaug. In this way, her mythological beliefs help her overcome the trauma of separation: the gods had already told her that she would never be a mother again, so her destiny and that of Ragnar were separated. However, another archetype is present in Lagertha, a sexualised character in a certain way: the seductive muse. This archetype comes to light in her relationship with other men, especially men with power, or those who help her to achieve it, because she knows she is attractive, and she uses it when necessary to achieve her objectives. Thus, without doing the dirty work for her, she uses her appearance on several occasions to achieve a higher position on the social scale.

It is interesting to note that this character might be misleading, as it could be categorized by certain actions she carries out as an Amazon woman. However, there is one fact that completely eliminates this possibility: to allow, on Ragnar's orders, the killing of the young daughters of King Horik (2x10, "The Lord's Prayer"). This action would never have been allowed by an Amazon woman, putting a man's orders first and allowing the weak and helpless to die. Rather, it seems that the production has bestowed some superficial traits of self-sufficiency to Lagertha in order to entice the female audience. Consequently, three archetypes coexist in Lagertha, two of them with more force: the matriarch and the mystic, with the seductive muse being a third that becomes known at specific moments. In this way, the character never abandons her assigned role as mother and wife. Thus, even when she is separated from Ragnar, he remains in her mind and heart. This manifest love causes her not to hesitate abandoning her newly acquired role of governess to help him with his government: an action that costs her the loss of command of her own lands.

3.1. Leadership and gender: can female Vikings govern?

"Power is only given to those who are prepared to lower themselves to pick it up"
Ragnar (3x01, "Mercenary").

As Galbraith points out, "history is written through the exercise of power, as well as its sources and the instruments that impose it" (2013: 106). Along this line, Russell (2017) points out that among man's infinite ambitions, the main ones are the desire for power and glory. It is a fact that power, along with glory, continues to be humanity's highest aspiration and greatest reward (2017:15), whereby every man may be tempted to try to achieve it. Thus, it can be inferred that this arises from an asymmetrical relationship between people. Furthermore, as Greene states: "Power is a social game. To learn how to play and play well, you have to study and understand people" (2007: 24). For that reason, as it is important to know the appropriate techniques for its use, it is also just as important to know the people on whom it is exercised, because "to be able to recognize the different types of people and act accordingly is fundamental" (2007: 180). Accordingly, we will now reflect on the techniques and implications of Lagertha's actions in the TV series when she exercises or attempts to exercise power.

In a historical period in which the only options were to conquer or to be conquered, Machiavelli's political lessons can be useful in understanding the relationships of dominance and their possibilities for success. For this reason, a Machiavellian reading of Lagertha's tactics is carried out to exercise power and determine its effectiveness, or failure, in the convulsed

lands that she has had to govern. Thus, following Machiavelli (1983), a territory can be conquered given two characteristics: virtue or fortune. While fortune, representative of the feminine, is the randomness of destiny, virtue is the set of qualities of the subject that are opposed to the forces of destiny. In other words, virtue includes those skills that make a man great. Qualities that need not be honourable, since whether he is honourable or not, he would be justified by the end he pursues. Lagertha, in this case, ascends twice on the social scale thanks to her marriages with two dukes: Ragnar, and later Sigvard. Accordingly, fortune smiled on her twice; however, fortune can become capricious, and if her first marriage was a reason to feel proud (2x03, "Treachery"), her second husband on the contrary abused her. Hence, after coming to Ragnar's aid without her husband's permission (2x04, "Eye for an Eye"), the situation led to her being abused. For that reason, she decided to kill her husband with the help of a member of one of the wealthiest families in her county, Einar (2x06, "Unforgiven"). However, that help had a price: her body, a debt she refused to pay (2x08, "Boneless").

As such, this implies that Lagertha obtained power through fortune, which smiled on her three times, and finally allowed her to acquire direct command. However, if she wanted to consolidate her position in accordance with Machiavelli's advice, she had to consider the following questions: "the conqueror who wants to secure his new domains must respect two things: first, the line of succession of the former prince must be extinguished" (1983: 10); second, the support of the people must be sought and there must not be a person in the territory as strong as her. Thus, Lagertha did not act wisely: she left Einar - nephew of the former duke - with a desire for revenge, and more importantly, she left him in a position from which he can take strategic action against her.

Having said that, of the two possible ways to acquire a territory, Lagertha has done it through conquest, and if an inherited territory requires less maintenance effort (1983: 8), one that is conquered will require a period of assimilation (1983: 10). At the same time, one of the most primordial rules of a newly acquired land is to reside there, but Lagertha chooses to abandon it to intervene in Ragnar's conflicts (2x07, "Blood Eagle"). On the other hand, obtaining the support of the people, as well as preventing a person as strong as the leader from being in the territory, turn out to be one of the primordial acts (1983: 12), and although the first part is successfully achieved, in the second one she has left behind a powerful and resentful man. Thus, in line with Machiavelli it is never advisable to avoid a war, because during the avoidance period the other side will be getting stronger (1983: 14). In this way, Lagertha orders her trustworthy man, Kalf, with the murder of Einar; an action that only worsens her own position as Countess. In this regard, she has left behind two men with a lot of power (3x01, "Mercenary").

According to the advice from Machiavelli seen above, a newly acquired county should not have such trusted men placed in this type of work, because even though it is essential to be loved, it is much safer to be feared (1983: 78). This condition is not met by Lagertha, who has allowed her trusted man to join with Einar in her absence, thereby seizing her county. As such, the prudence of the ruler, exposed by Machiavelli (1983: 112) as a basic quality, is a characteristic that does not occur in the case of Lagertha, because while she was not hated by her people, nor was she loved because of the little time she spent on her lands, and the conspiracy materialized in a short time. In agreement with the author, territories acquired through fortune are easier to obtain and equally more difficult to maintain: her territory was gained through the circumstance of the duke's family and lost because of her inability to foresee dangers. In short, Lagertha is fortunate but lacks virtue.

There is also a fundamental characteristic of power, which is to be recognized by others as such (Galbraith, 2013). In this case, when Lagertha proposes her help as an ally to Ragnar it has to be done through a false name, Ingstad, in order for him to accept a meeting. Despite the fact that he needs alliances to defeat his enemy, she will need to conceal her identity under the simulation of belonging to the male sex, because as she later tells him, she knew he would not have accepted or spoken to her in any other way (2x07, "Blood Eagle"). Thus, according to Valcárcel (1998), rather than one's own ability to exercise power, non-official profiles are required that are even more valued than skills. In this way, even though he appreciates Lagertha's qualities as a warrior, Ragnar's intuition tells him that an accomplice of his own sex is more valued. For the same reason, the mocking tone that Ragnar adopts when he approaches her as "countess" and her consent to that attitude reflect the little respect she has for her own position.

For this reason, Lagertha makes use of inexplicit power for the most part, or in other words, power based on indirect influence; and when she makes use of explicit power, she exercises it without the complete investiture, because her decisions have to be ratified by another person (1998: 116). To use one example to illustrate this point, when Allied King Horik became impatient with her for not having the ships ready, Bjorn's intervention was necessary to define the time frame she had set (2x08, "Boneless"). This lack of respect for her position would later result in a lack of interest in helping her recover her usurped lands; because when she asks for help, Ragnar asks if her lands are really so important to her (3x05, "The Usurper"). In this way, it is understood that taking away a woman's position of power is not as vital as taking it away from a man –it must be remembered that when Ragnar's lands were taken from him, he became furious, and she came to his aid–. Thus, even his own son suggests to her that she is behaving excessively. After this, even though she threatened to leave, she stayed by Ragnar's side along with the usurper himself who joined them on the expeditions (3x06, "Born Again"). In other words, if according to Galbraith (2013) a person with true power is the one who is able to obtain acceptance of his or her own opinions, Lagertha, who has to adapt to the beliefs of others, is a person with limited power.

With respect to her abilities as a squire, Ehrenreich (2000) states that masculine traits are associated with war, and even though in various ancient cultures, such as that of Mesopotamia, the gods representing bloodshed and depredation were of the feminine gender, from classical times to the present day, "the association of masculinity with violence and of femininity with non-violence have become dogma" (2000: 155). The Viking era narrated by this TV series is based on equality of admission to the battlefield as the only quality required, regardless of sex, skill and strength. In this sense, Lagertha, and later Porunn, are the main warriors who occupy the battlefields. However, in one of the battles Porunn is seriously injured, after which she has a scar on her face that leaves her very self-conscious, so she decides to go into exile, leaving her daughter and her husband behind (3x08, "To the Gates"). This situation is exemplified by the case of Aphrodite, in which fierce goddesses began to be represented as beautiful and seductive (Ehrenreich, 2000). In the TV series, while the men wounded in battle show their wounds without shame, in the case of a woman, this loss of beauty has led to exile. As with modern standards, it seems that in addition to the skills of the warrior, the attractiveness of warrior women is also observed.

In short, even though Lagertha sometimes has the title of governess, she is not considered as such; and if she has the capacity to act on the battlefield, so valued in her village, these qualities do not have strategic value, which is reserved for Ragnar and his son.

3.2. Historical Debate

Is the image of Viking women portrayed in this fictional series realistic? Regarding this point, historian San José Beltrán specifies that the story of Lagertha comes from a saga, which was written at the end of the Viking Era, and in the same way that female squires appeared, so did magical elements such as dragons (2014: 150). For this reason, although the character may have existed, it is nourished more by mythological elements than by real ones. Moreover, Beltrán clarifies that women warriors are part of the myth since they did not participate in looting, nor did they govern, in general (2014: 153); and although they knew how to use weapons, their role in society was to carry out household affairs and to transmit popular culture to their children (2014: 155).

However, this is not a view of the role of women in society as seen in the rest of Europe, as women had complete freedom if they wanted divorce, and they were able to participate in public debates (through their husband's voice). Likewise, respect for women was a value that was highly considered in Viking villages. As an example, rape was one of the few crimes that were punishable by death (2014: 155). Therefore, the TV series has taken elements of the myth and westernised her role, making the character a lover, and endowing her with certain warrior traits that make it seem that gender roles have been suspended. However, these features are still in force in this production and maintain the importance of the character in aspects related to love. The importance placed on the romantic aspect usually constitutes the strong nucleus of female characters in mass culture (Bernárdez Rodal, 2015). Thus, in *Vikings* this support continues to be fulfilled; as such, the weight of Lagertha's plot falls mainly on her being Ragnar Lodbrok's wife. In this case, the apparent leadership granted to her has been called into question because through the interpretation of the text, it has been proven that she lacks the necessary virtue for the task.

3.3. Lagertha, My Queen?

According to Machor and Goldstein (2001), the tradition of reception studies resides in the understanding of how audiences read and recreate narratives coming from different cultural formats: literary works, cinema, television, etc. In Spain, several projects have had an interest in studying audiences using this approach. In this sense, using a couple of examples, some light has been shed on the identity construction of minors through fictional content (Pindado, 2006; Menéndez Menéndez, Figueras-Maz and Núñez Angulo, 2017), or on the construction of cultural identities (Repoll; 2004; Huertas, Reguero and Sagarzazu, 2010). Nevertheless, the examination of characters who may serve as role models for their followers is also of interest, and with this in mind, tweets containing the keywords Lagertha and leader have been compiled. A filter has allowed for the compilation of a total of thirty-nine messages¹:

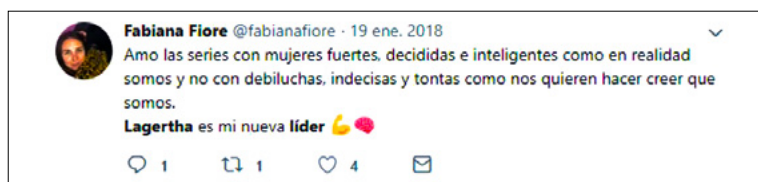
Table 2: Results

Tweet	Image	Text	Positive	Negative	Neutrol
39	7	39	34	0	5

Source: Author-created

¹ This corresponds to a period of five years (2013-2018) from the emission of the first season in Spain to the fourth.

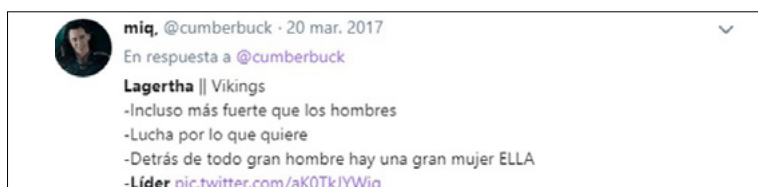
In a study on the media competence of Spaniards in relation to traditional mass media, Lazo and Grandío point out that “it is necessary to emphasize the lack of empowerment among the Spanish audience: the lack of a critical attitude in the reception process” (2013: 127). In other words, the audience examined grasped the messages in a linear manner without critically filtering out whether the television broadcast was adequate: “The profile of the citizen regarding the reception and audience aspects is that of someone who is unaware of any defence mechanism against improper messages broadcast in the audiovisual media” (2013: 127). In this particular case, in the context of social networks and at the micro-level, the data indicated by Lazo and Grandío are reinforced. So much so that none of the users consulted have critically examined the traits of a ruler that they attribute to Lagertha. As an example, different women users spoke of her as a role model because of her strength and personality:



Source: twitter



Source: twitter



Source: twitter

In addition, it should be noted that all the positive tweets on the leadership of the protagonist are from women with the exception of four men who qualify her as the leader of the TV series –one of them expressly mentions that she is above the male character, Ragnar–. On the other hand, the neutral tweets are from four men, who mention the term leader in relation to another male character, and to Lagertha with expressions of affection. In this section, a tweet from a woman user bears mentioning, as she states her idea of participating in the feminist strike on March 8 (8M) by carrying a sign with the protagonists of the show:



Source: twitter

In this respect, she attributes to Lagertha the gifts of a warrior, and to Aslaug, the later wife of Ragnar, she ascribes the quality of a leader. However, Aslaug's leadership is called into question in several episodes. More than anything else, she plays the role of mother, and she even abandons her entire village in order to keep herself and her children safe when the village was under attack.

4. Conclusions

In 2007, Galán Fajardo affirmed that in spite of small advances in the representation of women on the screen, they continued to be represented using the same stereotypes “often associated with the world of emotion, passivity, maternity and sexuality” (2007: 45). Contrarily, men continued to be attributed with the qualities of reason, leadership and action. More than a decade after that research was carried out, has the situation changed? What role does a woman leader play in fiction? There have certainly been some positive advances, as pointed out by Tous-Rovirosa and Aran-Ramspott (2017) with the cases of the Danish series *Borgen* (Danmarks radio, 2010-2013) and the American series entitled *Madam Secretary* (CBS, 2014-); However, “despite the greater prominence of female characters, a construction of values persists in political series that associates female characters with a sphere that is more private than public” (2017: 686).

In reviewing the historical *Vikings* TV series, which uses a format that has intermingled history with mythological elements, the female character is the archetype of a matriarch. She is a “leader” with conservative traits who will not hesitate to abandon her task in order to help her husband, or use her body to seduce others for the purpose of achieving her goals. Likewise, the matriarch in this case fails to gain followers, so she cannot even be considered a leader: her word is constantly questioned, especially by men, and she considers this to be normal without demanding respect for her apparent position. Therefore, eleven years after the publication by Galán Fajardo, the values of passivity, maternity and sexuality are still found in women's roles.

These traits stand out in a character that is admired by the female audience, as indicated by the results. This audience considers Lagertha to be a strong and resolute woman. In this respect, it is not surprising that the followers have interpreted this: the production has endowed her with some abilities of a good warrior that make her appear to be self-sufficient, but is that enough? The fact that a woman sometimes knows how to use weapons does not put her on the same level as male warriors; that she uses her body as a sexual lure to achieve her objectives, or that she is always questioned, does in fact prove that she is in a position of inequality. In short, despite its innovative style, *Vikings* retains conventional traits and depicts women as unfit to govern.

Finally, it should be added that due to the size of the sample and the nature of the approach, the data from this study should be viewed with caution, since they do not allow for conclusions to be generalized. Nevertheless, they are considered to be an interesting starting point for more ambitious objectives with regard to the representation of female characters who exercise power, and their acceptance by audiences.

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