

### **Kristine Larsen**

#### **The Valkyrie Reflex in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire***

One of the often-discussed highlights of George R.R. Martin's ongoing saga *A Song of Ice and Fire* has been its large number of strong female characters. From Arya Stark to Daenerys Targaryen, Brienne to Ygritte, these women play pivotal roles in shaping the history of Westeros and the other continents of the known world. One of the enduring (and curious) feminine archetypes found in Northern European/Germanic literature is that of the valkyrie. In her review of the valkyrie tradition, Helen Damico traces the roots of the famed female warrior (most widely known in modern culture through Wagner's *Ring* cycle) through numerous Indo-European cultures. In Old Norse literature there also appears a valkyrie tradition (apparently more recent in origin) in which the female warriors are "benevolent guardians" who identified heroes and pledged their undying support to them. In her seminal work, "The Valkyrie Reflex in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," Leslie Donovan identifies a number of characteristics which are both associated with the valkyrie tradition and which she applies to an analysis of female characters in Tolkien's trilogy. These traits define a rubric against which various female characters in the Martinverse will be measured.

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