Kay Cannon's *Girlboss*. Netflix, 2017.

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1 *Girlboss* (2017), created by Kay Cannon (writer of *Pitch Perfect* and *30 Rock*), is an American comedy distributed by the streaming platform Netflix. The first and only season was released on April 21, 2017, having been canceled the following June. The show is based on Sophia Amoruso's autobiographical book *#Girlboss* (2014) and it follows a fictional Sophia (her last name was changed to Marlowe) as she begins a career as the founder of the Ebay store Nasty Gal Vintage. Talking to *The New York Times*, Kay Cannon highlighted her objectives: "I wanted to tell the story of a flawed woman that is not a fairy tale". Adding "rough edges" freed Cannon up to more "interesting storytelling". Working with Netflix and its binge-able mode of distribution (making an entire season available at the same time) allowed Cannon to feel less restricted when it came to presenting, as she put it, an "off-putting" protagonist.

2 In *We Were Feminists Once* (2016), feminist and pop culture writer Andi Zeisler states that "premium cable became the place to watch a new paradigm (…): topical, well-written shows about complex, not-always-likable, often straight-up immoral people" (97). She reminds readers that *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), for instance, "while tarnished by time", was effectively "feminist television because its characters were so polarizing, flawed, even unlikable". In fact, her argument in favor of "polarizing" and "unlikable" characters includes the need to allow women to fail as spectacularly an often as anyone else". Zeisler also adds: "we have definitely entered the age of the female antiheroes" (99), which she attributes to the emergence of new distribution and exhibition channels that offer televisual content, such as Netflix. Consequently the platform would seem to be the ideal space to house a show featuring a flawed female character.

3 However, the reviews of the series were mixed to negative, with questions rising from the lack of a strong comedic voice, to the glaring aspect of how unlikeable the protagonist was, with critics slamming the show's apparent feminist message on display due to Sophia's selfishness and rudeness. The show's strong points (such as visually inventive representations of online forum discussions) were quickly drowned under a deluge of criticisms denouncing it as having a harmful point of view when it comes to how a feminist show should present itself Zeisler sums up the criticisms surrounding *Girlboss* as the show equating capitalism with feminism. The core of Zeisler's counter-argument is easily pinpointed: "The theme of *Girlboss* is that building a blockbuster business is a feminist act". Ultimately, Zeisler claims

that "defending Sophia as a deliberately unlikeable character itself seems a little out of date", an argument that seems to not take into consideration that to portray is not to condone.

4 Writing about a similar type of character, women studies scholar Imelda Whelehan, on her chapter "Hating Hannah: Or Learning to Love (Post) Feminist Entitlement" in *Reading Lena Dunham's 'Girls'* (2017), describes *Girls*' protagonist, Hannah, in comparable fashion to how Sophia Marlowe was presented: "there is little room for audience empathy gained through Hannah learning to understand her place in the post-recessionary New York milieu" (31). Whelehan's "Hating Hannah" chapter focuses on discussing how this character from *Girls* can challenge "what has become the stock postfeminist trope"[1] (32). There is no empathy elicited by Sophia Marlowe or by her configuration as a similar trope, which may be a failing of the show's ability to accurately represent what it seeks to. One could make an argument in favor of how the shunning of Sophia Marlowe has less to do with equating capitalism with feminism, and more to do with equating Marlowe's portrayal to real-life Sophia Amoruso's message of capitalist empowerment or the actions during her tenure as CEO of Nasty Gal[2], as well as with the inherent difficulty in producing a "popular feminist text in any era", given that it will inevitably "assume a number of implicit moral responsibilities, not least the mission to represent women in a diverse and positive but realistic light" (33). In *Feminism and Pop Culture*, Zeisler does acknowledge that "feminism and pop culture will always be uneasy bedfellows". Independent from its potential quality as a television show, the issue with *Girlboss*'s feminist agenda may be that it does not have one – none of the marketing materials or in-text clues indicate such a tone – while critics seem to interpret it through precisely an imposed feminist lens.

5 Due to its flaws, or perhaps despite them, *Girlboss* would be an interesting case study for an undergraduate class dealing with female representation in media or television, specifically. It can used as a tool to discuss the shortcomings of postfeminism, the conflation between television and feminism, the problematic issues regarding capitalism and feminism, as well as navigating necessary discussions regarding the portrayal of unlikable, difficult women and other antiheroines in television, especially when it concerns the depiction of success and failure. It can also be a useful example of the thorny issues regarding adaptation

[1] In "Remaking Feminism: Or Why Is Postfeminism So Boring?" (2010), Whelehan argues that postfeminism "displays a certain schizophrenia in the way women are often portrayed as enormously successful at work and simultaneously hopelessly anxious about their intimate relationships", as well as it "equates with excessive consumption, while at the same time expressing sentiments of empowerment and female capability" (156).

[2] While *#Girlboss* the book was about building an image of Amoruso as a feminist who was also a successful business woman, she was swiftly dogged by reports of disgruntled former employees terminated over pregnancies, and other rumors, that further colored the fiasco of Nasty Gal's eventual bankruptcy.

and the nature of telling a story that has not had a definitive end. It is essential that instructors critically discuss *Girlboss*' reception, especially when it comes to contemplating whether the show espoused a feminist ideology.

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