

Breaking The Shackles Of Gender In George R.R.Martin's A Game Of Thrones

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ABSTRACT

In the Literal sense, the term gender means the natural difference between men and women. In Literature it mainly talks about the individuals estimated by people on the basis of gender and how they define by their identity. The feminist theorist Judith Butler formulated the existing understandings of gender. The American Philosopher Judith Butler marks a comment about gender is performative. Gender played a vital role in AGame of Thrones. There are lots of women characters in the novel. The paper examined one of the characters in the novel named Arya Stark. She has adopted masculine traits by rejecting femininity. Arya Stark serves as successful examples to demonstrate the access to feminity is not restricted to gender. The objective of the article is to analyze the role of matriarchy. In order to accomplish this objective, the concept of Judith Butler Theory of Gender Performativity is applied. The character has performed masculine action but maintained her femininity.

A Game of Thrones is based on the series A Song of Ice and Fire. It is a fictional book reveals the story about several noble houses fought for the Iron Throne. The novel was written by the American author George R.R. Martin in 1996 and it was adapted by HBO in 2011. The plot revolves around the mythological continent of the Westeros and Essos. The continent was bounded by water, with the exception of the North. The five families mentioned in the novel are the Lannisters, the Starks, the Baratheons, the Targaryens and the Boltons. Each claims to the throne and they were able to justify for the position of king in the kingdom. There are some social issues that are told perfectly by Martin in his book and one of the issues is gender.

Gender is considered as the major problem in the novel though power played a significant role in identity. Themen and women characters were projected as various dominant characters in the novel.

They lived in a patriarchal society. The roles of women and men are decided by the rulers. Females are married for the purpose of political gain. Arya Stark goes against these gender roles that are designed by the society for women. She executed masculine actions but retains her femininity.

As Judith Butler mentioned in *Gender Trouble*, gender is a role that self acts. "It is a construction, not an essential part of one's identity, gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. Butler states this as Gender Performativity". A man can embody the feminine, just as a woman can embody the masculine. These are the choices made by the individual rather than biologically determined.

A *Game of Thrones* may be condemned for the portrait of women because of the fully revealed prostitution and sex but the character Arya Stark is different from this perspective. Gender construction in Westeros becomes more apparent with the character of Arya Stark. She is the prominent character in *A Game of Thrones*. As an adolescent girl, Arya witnessed the brutal death of her father who was killed by cruel king Joffrey. Later on, Arya's elder brother Robb and also her mother Catelyn Stark were brutally murdered in feast held in their honor. Witnessing all those incidents, Arya decides to take revenge on each and everyone responsible for the killings.

After her father's death, Arya disguised herself as a male. She cut her hair short like a boy and objected herself as new identity of the lumpen boy Arry, and started to inquired about revenge. She found comfort with her new identity. Arya Stark opposed the stereotypes of growing girls. She hated singing, dancing or needlework, putting on pretty dresses and behaving as a proper young noble lady. She rather trained with a sword or a crossbow, does not bothered being dirty while playing with the boys of a lower status. She is often mistaken as a boy by the people who are coming to meet her father. Caroline Spector mentioned Arya's "willingness to throw off her gender demonstrates her understandings of the workings of power in her world."

Arya found comfort with her older half –brother, Jon Snow. Her relationship with him is more solid than that with her other true siblings. Jon supported her in many circumstances whereas Arya also secured him against insults. Jon truly understood her and before departure he gave her a sword. Arya's aptitude marked a valuable presence when her half-brother Jon gave her a sword. Jon transgressed societal norms with this gift. The sword allowed Arya to flourish into her warrior identity. She spent her life to the utmost experience with her sword. This sentence clearly stated that the sword made her to feel masculinity in her.

Syrio Forel is a sword master, who teached Arya to fight and to pursue her goals without giving up, taking his lessons to heart and she constantly strived to improve herself. In those days men used to learn swordplay, so Syrio referred Arya as a male because she is learning swordplay, something that is traditionally masculine. There are great words by Syrio Forel to Arya Stark, "There is only one god, and His name is Death. And there is only one thing we say to Death: 'not today'." Connell (2000) believed

that “Masculinities are not only considered by the biological body but also from the states of mind of attitudes can be the social practices of individuals who are contrasted to this is defined as ‘woman’.”

Arya training with Syrio marked one among the crucial foundation for her sword- fighting abilities. It is in her life experiences after her initial training gave her the platform to utilize these lessons. Her relationship with Syrio coagulate Arya’s eventual journey to Braavos to seek a position. Arya behaved like a boy and engaged in actions that are not considered for women. These activities are considered as tomboyish. She is avoiding the role of women in the society where she lived. Jeyne mentioned Arya as Horseface, and neigh whenever she came near. Arya is strong- willed, inflexible and independent. Arya’s strength is that she does not seek advice from anybody. This made her to stand unique among others. Judith Butler states, that being born male or female does not determine behavior. Instead people learn to behave in particular ways to fit into society.

The Judith Butler comment on these gender constructs and affirms that the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that the man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily a female one.

Arya is painted as a halt to her older sister Sansa. Sansa presents the more traditional feminine characteristics. Sansa is very excited about her marriage with Prince. But Arya does not have great impact of her sister’s marriage because she does not have good opinion about him. They both seemed to be very parallel to each other .their ideas differed from each and every point of view.

Arya rejects her female stereotypes to seize more control over her life than her sister Sansa. Arya befriends with Mycah, the butcher’s boy to ride south from Winterfell to King’s Landing. Sansa and Prince Jeoffrey enjoyed in the garden and by the incident they observed Arya practicing with stick along with Mycah in the jungle. Jeoffrey had a plan to admire his future wife by harassing Mycah, the butcher’s boy. Arya was unable to accept this treatment. She fought with Prince Jeoffrey, the crown prince of King’s landing to protect the Butcher’s boy. Then Arya is accused of beating Jeoffrey and after the trial, she had a long conversation with his father. Arya’s father Ned Stark obsessed how her daughter goes against the feminist expectations and he is worried at the end of their conversation.

Arya wholeheartedly admits her identity as she perceived as a crucial gadget of endurance. Ned Stark supports Arya in many things and her words inspired her to become a warrior. She correlates conventional girlhood as weakness and inadequacy so she executed the tomboy role in order to reach her goals. Arya is very strong to seek revenge. Her tomboy identity made her to overcome in dangerous circumstances. Judith Halberstam (1995, 5-6) states that, “Tomboyism generally describes an extended childhood period of female masculinity. Tomboyism is quiet common for girls and does not generally give rise to parental fears. Because comparable cross-identification behaviors in boys do often give rise to quite hysterical responses, we tend to believe that female gender deviance is much more tolerated than male gendered deviance. Tomboyism tends to be associated with a “natural” desire for the greater

freedoms and motilities enjoyed by boys. Very often it is read as a sign of independence and self-motivation, and tomboyism may be even encouraged to the extent that it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of a girl identity”.

Arya Stark broke the classical gender roles because she had an opinion that it would make her less significant fighter. She wished to be a single minded to avenge the people who murdered her family members. Arya saw the man within her with power to protect as well as to attack. She considered her femininity as a wall that burdened and also holds back her to be feminine naturally. As Arya Stark says in *A Game of Thrones* “A bruise is a lesson..., and each lesson makes us better.” Arya’s character cut down things like stitching, marriage and family-centered women. She boldly rejected those options and became a role model of an empowered woman.

Gender stereotypes in the novel revealed that women are a weak creature and responsible for household works. Women were treated like an object more than a creature. Furthermore, women become the target of the greatest victim if their kingdom is lost in battle. Meanwhile, Arya Stark is different from this perspective commonly experienced in the novel. Her character revealed her own individual strengths and weaknesses, but always against the patriarchal society where she lived. She tried to change the way that society thinks about gender. She performed masculine actions but retained her femininity. Arya’s character is ambivalently feminist. Her actions moulded by her own aspirations, freedom, and identity. She is projected as a progressive and self-assessed character in the novel. She does not lose her femininity in any circumstances.

Arya always believed in her and did everything to follow her passion. She was capable of doing anything because of her boldness and the sense of independence. She went always on her own way, right from the beginning. She was a born rebel. She made her own rules and followed her own principles. Nobody can deny Arya’s survival instinct. She witnessed her own father’s beheading and overcame from the circumstances. She survived all the life-taking tests. She overcomes all the circumstances because of her strong will power. She kept learning which led towards her life’s mission. Arya is strong-willed, independent, and her motivation made her to survive in all circumstances.

Life is tough; constantly it throws surprises and even though it may get overwhelming, one should not give up. Arya taught how to fight, to take revenge and how to survive on her own without family and friends. Arya’s character has shown how important it is to accept ourselves. Those who accept her with strengths and vulnerabilities can face any challenges in daily life. Arya reminds that no matter how things get worse, it is important to not give up because there is always light at the end.

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