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# **ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT**

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Amerikanisztika  
szakirány

**2017**

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# **ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT**

**Game of Genders - A női karakterek  
jellemfejlődése a Trónok Harca című sorozatban**

**Game of Genders - The Portrayal of Female  
Characters in the Game of Thrones**

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## Abstract

Gender inequality still poses a major problem even in the 21st century, the Hollywood film industry is one of the most prominent areas where this imbalance can be observed. However, the TV series, *Game of Thrones*, provides a unique method of representation and creates the concept of genderqueer women. The purpose of my thesis is to thoroughly introduce the development of the main female characters of *Game of Thrones*, including the signs of progress, their motivation, and the outcome of the events. In my analysis, I take into account the role of women in society, social relations and the emotional impacts involved in the process of character building. The main focus of my examination lies on the impacts of feminism on arts, taking into account the main characteristics and archetypes of this artistic and political trend. To prove my thesis, I involve Judith Butler's major feminist work, *Gender Trouble*. In my paper, I am going to engage in the issues of the masculinization of female characters, the concept of gender non-conforming women and the objectification of women. Finally, I highlight the fact that the series does not only overcome the problem of gender spheres from a social perspective, but also from a linguistic consideration.

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## 1. Introduction

Although male supremacy is still present in today's society to some degree, women have achieved significant success towards equality over the history ("Modern Implications of Gender"). During the past two centuries, women's emancipation movement demolished huge restrictions, both in the economic, political and personal life (Burkett). Despite the decisive changes, gender inequalities still pose a major problem even today. One of the main fields where the distorted gender representation is the most notable is the Hollywood film industry.

The inequality of gender representation is attested by a study conducted by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego University, which revealed that only 12% of the popular films of 2014 had female protagonists. Besides, women are not only underrepresented in lead roles, but are also in secondary roles. They constitute scarcely 29% of major characters and 30% of all speaking characters. In addition to the inequality problem, the quality of female characters is also disputable. Meanwhile, the majority of male characters assumes professional roles, 58% of female characters are determined by their roles fulfilled in their private lives, acting as mothers or wives (Lang). However, the primary issue is that the media is an important influencing factor in shaping social norms. The advertisements, television programs and movies all contribute to the notion of culture. With this gender disparity, the media constantly reinforces the assumed gender roles (Lantagne). The popular TV series, Game of Thrones, creates a unique representation of women since the development of the main female characters breaks down the gender boundaries and establishes the concept of the genderqueer women.

To prove my thesis, I rely on Judith Butler's gender performance theory. My study focuses specifically on the development and position of the main female characters, who are both present

at the first and last episode of the TV series and have a significant role in the advancement of the events: Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, Sansa Stark and Arya Stark. In section 2, I am going to discuss the theoretical background and examine what aspects of the series reflect the Queer theory. Section 3 elaborates on the character development performed by the main female characters and presents how they reach the genderqueer state. Section 4 reveals how the series overcome the gender limiting nature of language. Finally, the last section concludes the main arguments of the essay.

## 2. Theoretical Background

This section provides a theoretical background to the Queer Theory, and also details how the Game of Thrones creates a unique representation of women by combining sexist and feminist elements.

### 2.1. Sexism

The popular fantasy TV series, Game of Thrones, is based on George R.R. Martin's books, The Song of Ice and Fire. As both the book and TV series are incomplete, my analysis focuses on the characters and events of the six released seasons of the TV series. Although the story takes place in a fantasy world called Westeros, the setting is strongly reminiscent of the feudal world and society of medieval Europe. The story provides a versatile insight into the values of the middle ages since it introduces characters from all ages and social positions. In order to have a better understanding of the world created by George R.R. Martin, it is necessary to get a comprehensive profile of medieval society.

The Middle Ages are defined as the period of the European history that dates from the 1000 and lasts until 1453 ("Middle Ages"). In the Middle Ages of the Western history, women were in

a subordinate position. They were considered incompetent to fulfil significant duties and were regarded as being less intelligent and weaker compared to men. Even though there were huge disparities between the poor and wealthier women regarding their social standing; overall, the majority of women still played a secondary role and were considered inferior to men (Newman). As far as women rights were concerned, women were excluded from political life and did not have the authority to decide whether to marry and have children or not (“Modern Implications of Gender”). The values of medieval society are characterized by sexism, which can be defined as "the belief that the members of one sex are less intelligent, able, skillful, etc. than the members of the other sex, especially that women are less able than men" (“Sexism”). The general attitude towards women in medieval Europe is mirrored in the society of Westeros. In the patriarchal society of Westeros, every man is sexist to some extent (Frankel pt. 3). Initially, the position of the female characters in the Game of Thrones completely reflects the sexist value system of the era. In the first episode, each of the four female characters fulfills secondary roles; to some degree, they are all subordinated to men’s power.

First of all, the story opens by presenting the Stark family, and within that Sansa and Arya's characters are introduced. In social terms, the two young girls function as daughters, being a subject to their father's rule, owing him obedience and loyalty. They are shown in typical female roles, as noble young ladies, they spend their leisure time with embroidering. Sansa is appropriate to the expectations prescribed by society. She is quite a superficial character, her sole purpose is marriage, more precisely, to become a queen. The younger daughter, Arya, is a foil for Sansa, thus she represents opposing qualities which clearly emphasizes the different traits and value systems of the girls (“Foil”). Although the family depiction is harmonious, the social conventions towards women are clearly established.

Moreover, the first episode already implies the double standards that were common in Medieval Europe. Women had to face far more serious consequences for committing adultery than men (Karras ch. 4). Cersei Lannister, the queen, represents the status of wives of the era. Even though she is on the top of the social scale, she does not exert any active power. She is also subordinated to the will of a man, to his husband, King Robert Baratheon. As a wife, she must endure her husband's infidelity in silence.

In spite of that, it is not only the father or husband figure who appears in repressive roles, but also brothers can function as oppressors. Daenerys Targaryen is also an aristocrat lady, the daughter of the former king. She is one of the best examples of gender oppression and discrimination, which can manifest in numerous forms, including physical abuse and rape (Rooney). She is entirely under the control of his brother. He sees her as a commodity and uses her as a form of payment in exchange for an army. Although Daenerys expresses her displeasure with the deal, her brother ignores her will and comments: “We go home with an army. With Khal Drogo’s army. I would let his whole tribe fuck you, all 40,000 men and their horses too, if that’s what it took” (“Winter is Coming” 00:39:03-00:39:19). This case exemplifies the values of the sexist medieval society, where family ties do not matter and women are treated as objects to achieve men's purposes.

## 2.2. Feminism

As the previous section demonstrates, the TV show contains a number of sexist elements; but in fact it represents feminist values by introducing strong female characters. The feminist theory is a major category within sociology which focuses on social issues and trends that are ignored by the historically prevailing male perception. The primary principles of the feminist theory encompass issues like the discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, structural and economic

inequality, gender roles and objectification (Crossman). As far as the film industry is concerned, film theory and criticism were greatly influenced by feminism (Smelik). The feminist film theory evolved in the 1970s as a result of the 1960s woman's movement. Issues of representation are key aspects of feminist film theory and it mainly concentrates on the stereotypes of women, especially in the Hollywood film industry (Hollinger 1-7).

As a result of the feminist aspirations, a special method has been developed to examine the gender dominance in movies. The Bechdel Test serves to measure the representation of genders in films, which pays special attention to the role of women on screen. According to the definition, the Bechdel test consists of three parts which assesses whether female characters assume more than just a superficial role, the condition of the which is that “a movie has to (1) have at least two female characters (2) who talk to each other (3) about something other than a man” (Swanson). Although a number of modern fantasies do not meet the requirements of the test, the Game of Thrones actually passes the test despite the sexist elements, proving that female characters are not only assigned superficial roles, but are actually involved in the development of the events. By providing women's perspectives and revealing social inequalities, Game of Thrones displays a feminist attitude.

Despite the fact that the first episode is governed by sexist values, there are many hidden feminist references implying that the story does not align with the principles of sexism. As the plot unfolds, the boundaries between gender spheres are completely blurred, women become leaders and overcome the gender limits. For example, the series establishes a sharp contrast between the Stark sisters, which also serves to represent the fierce opposition between the sexist and feminist values. Even though the Stark sisters perform the same social role as daughters, Sansa embodies the conventions, whereas Arya disregards gender roles from the beginning. Instead of the feminine

activities, such as needlework, she excels in masculine sports. Unlike Arya, the other main female characters initially conform to the gender spheres, which presumed the idea that men and women belong to separate worlds or spheres. Women's sphere included the household, church and social visits. In contrast, men had a greater duty in the social life, such as in the field of industry, commerce or politics ("Gender"). Anyhow, as the story progresses, women become more powerful and finally they are presented in conventionally male roles. By the end of the 6th season, Cersei occupies the iron throne and becomes the ruler of Westeros, Daenerys is the leader of nations and armies, and Sansa becomes a strong and independent leader of the Northern area of the country.

### 2.3. Queer Theory

By presenting powerful female characters, the series takes a feminist turn. The initially weak and passive women become more active characters. They are no longer merely passive observers, but are actively involved in the shaping of events. In addition, as the story progresses, more and more new gender non-conforming female characters appear, like Brienne the warrior, who transgresses all aspects of the female gender roles. Not only does she play a masculine role, but she also differs from the social expectations in appearance by being taller and stronger than most men and having short hair and a robust physique. Her case is a perfect example of the abandonment of social conventions and the masculinization of women. She utterly denies her femininity and accommodates herself in the masculine sphere (Frankel pt. 2).

Although the analyzed four protagonists do not fit into the values of the patriarchal society, they represent a special feminist phenomenon. They are originally introduced as powerless women but they arrive at a breakpoint and undergo a character development, through which they reach a mixed-gender state. Unlike Brienne, these women keep their feminine traits. Therefore, their development does not result in the total exchange of genders, but they take up feminine and

masculine traits at the same time and reach a level where genders become completely blurred. The fact that these characters cannot be clearly classified on the basis of their gender, contradict the binary system that has been established by feminism. Therefore, the characters of the Game of Thrones represents the theory of gender performativity.

Judith Butler is an American philosopher and gender theorist. In her book, *Gender Trouble*, Butler highlights the fact that the feminist movement has made a mistake in the struggle for voting privileges, because it classified women into a category, assuming that the members of this group represent the same values and characteristics, which resulted in a binary system that separates two entirely different groups, men and women. The book calls into question the difference between sex and gender. The sociological definition interprets sex and gender as two separate concepts. Meanwhile gender is described as a social categorization depending on one's identity and behavior, sex is defined as a biological division (Crossman). However, Butler challenges the existence of the dual system created by the sharp differentiation between gender and sex. According to her theory, not only gender, but sex is also a culturally established classification since one cannot exist without the other. Butler states that "The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it" (9). She implies that it is pointless to talk about sex and gender as two independent, unrelated concepts and it makes no sense to establish categories within them and to determine one's identity as being a man or woman and being male or female (Butler 31-32). Her approach is based on the assumption that these concepts are much more complex, which cannot be divided into two sharply different categories. Butler created the concept of gender performativity, a theory that claims that identity is not predetermined or cannot be divided into genders, but is formed through the individual's acts. Nevertheless, it is not the individual who determines the actions, but it is the

actions that determine the individual. To put it another way, identity is not a fixed state, but rather a fluid concept which can transform depending on specific situations. In consequence, one cannot be clearly classified as male or female, since some situations require masculinity while others require femininity from the same person (Butler 187-93).

Butler's work is actually one of the fundamental pillars of the Queer theory, which also emphasizes the fluid nature of identity and insists that the concept of genders are just social limitations (Gauntlett 145-47). The adjective genderqueer refers to a person who “does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both or a combination of male and female genders” (“Genderqueer”). Considering the position of the main female characters, they undergo a character development in the course of the seasons which eventually lead them to a genderqueer state. These characters do not identify with exclusively masculine or feminine values. While at the beginning of the series Cersei, Sansa and Daenerys represent solely feminine values, as a result of their spiritual development they finally combine the feminine and masculine qualities, supporting the assertion that identity is not a fixed state but is rather shaped by the given situations.

Chapter 2 served as a theoretical background by providing a detailed introduction to the Queer Theory. This chapter also discussed how the Game of Thrones incorporates sexist and feminist values in order to create a unique representation of women.

### 3. Genderqueer Women

In order to prove that the main female characters represent that part of the genderqueer state where they identify with both male and female genders, in this chapter I describe the characters' starting point, the triggering event of the character development, its purpose and process.

### 3.1. Cersei Lannister

In medieval society, women were mainly attributed significant duty in the household (Newman). In social terms, the main female characters fulfil four roles in relation to men in the family life as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. However, they undergo a character development, whereupon they reach a mixed-gender state. Only after eliminating all their family relationships with men will they be able to form a new, gender non-conforming identity. When they become freed from these social roles, they cannot be classified merely as male or female, so they all transform into a mixed-gender state.

Cersei Lannister embodies all the four roles, she is a daughter, sister, wife and a mother. In the first episode, the wife role is in the main focus. She is the queen, King Robert Baratheon's wife. Cersei fails the wife role by having an unhappy, insincere marriage. Her husband is openly unfaithful, meanwhile Cersei secretly has an incestuous relationship with her own brother. Though Cersei used to have sincere feelings for Robert, their marriage was doomed to failure from the very beginning, because Robert was never able to forget his dead lover, Lyanna Stark, and her memory poisoned their whole relationship. This unhappy marriage results in Cersei abandoning her social role as a wife by having her husband killed.

Although Cersei does not respect the sanctity of the bond of marriage, she is very loyal to the Lannister family, to her children, brother and father. Nevertheless, these family ties also function as limits. Even though Cersei is an adult woman, paternal oppression is still present in her life. Her father, Tywin Lannister, is a protective but also a repressive factor since he forces his will on her. This is exemplified by arranged marriages. Tywin wants to compel his daughter into marriage twice, first to Robert Baratheon, when Cersei was just a young girl, and after the king's death to Loras Tyrell. Cersei expresses her rejection; yet, his father responds that “You’re my

daughter! You will do as I command and you will marry Loras Tyrell and put an end to the disgusting rumors about you once and for all” (“Kissed by Fire” 00:55:31-00:55:42). This example illustrates the oppressive nature of the father-daughter relationship. In spite of all, after his father's death, Cersei quits another social role and ceases to be a daughter.

There is also a family bond between Cersei and her two brothers, Jamie and Tyrion. Eventually, she fails the sister role as well. She does not consider her dwarf brother, Tyrion, a family member and later she even wants to have him killed. As for Jamie, they commit incest, exceeding the limits of the concept of siblings. Thus, neither case is a true sibling relationship.

Cersei is most authentic in her role as a mother. As a widow, she represents the only shelter of her children (Frankel pt. 2). Her main motivation is the acquisition of power, her aim is to ensure his son's accession to the Iron Throne, and to gain control over the realm. Although her children are from Jamie and thus they are not entitled to the crown, Cersei uses manipulation and intrigue to make his son the king after Robert's death. Although Cersei loves her son, obtaining power remains the dominant motivation. She wants to exercise power through his son. However, Cersei's lenient nurturing results in Joffrey getting out of her control (Frankel pt. 2). Anyhow, the triggering event in Cersei's life is when her womanliness is humiliated, her hair was cut short against her will, and she had to walk through the city naked as a punishment. That is, the violation of her gender role results in her transformation, where her genderqueer development begins. Her primary concern is no longer to protect his son, but to take revenge and get the control into her own hands. All in all, Cersei loses her last female role when Myrcella is poisoned, and Tommen commits suicide as a consequence of her actions. Thus, she is even willing to sacrifice her motherhood to achieve her aim after her femininity has been humiliated and eventually she is the one who drives her son to

commit suicide. This already foreshadows the masculinization, which has been induced by the abandonment of all the female roles.

Cersei constantly rebels against gender barriers, she makes several references to gender constraints asserting that she would be more suitable for governance than her husband despite being a woman. “I should wear the armor and you the gown” (“A Golden Crown” 00:03:05-00:03:08). Her husband does not respond but slaps her on the face and this scene symbolizes the oppression of women's aspirations: men use their physical superiority in order to silence women. Some of the typical gender stereotypes imply that women should never be in control, they should be obedient and do what they are told (Brewer). Cersei completely violates these gender stereotypes. She leaves her position as a woman and eventually fulfils men's role. She becomes a ruler, the leader of an empire, breaking the tradition of male leadership. Cersei can only accomplish her goal to acquire power when all the influencing men relations disappear from her life. By the time she crowns herself, her husband, father and children are dead and his brother has just returned from an expedition. The inclusion of male traits is not only reflected in the change of role, but there are external features as well. Although Cersei does not voluntarily had her hair cut, it has also contributed to the development of a masculine character. In the history, hair became associated with femininity (Fabry), and thus by cutting her hair, she has been deprived from a part of her womanhood. Unlike Brienne, Cersei does not undergo a total masculinization, most importantly, she does not reject her sex and she continues to wear dresses. Thus Cersei does not completely change genders, but by blending male and female characteristics she achieves a genderqueer state.

### 3.2. Daenerys Targaryen

In addition to Cersei, Daenerys Targaryen is perhaps one of the most versatile characters in the TV series, as she is shown in a plenitude of roles. From an objectified victim she develops into

a warrior. Moreover, throughout the story she keeps changing roles; for example, she is portrayed as a lover, mother and warrior (Frankel pt. 2), demonstrating how fluid the concept of identity is. In the first scene, Daenerys is introduced in the sister role. She is completely under the rule of his brother, Viserys. Although Daenerys occasionally expresses her displeasure, her brother completely ignores her. Viserys' only motivation is to regain control over Westeros and he is ready to sacrifice even his sister for the cause. Their relationship represents the objectification of women, Viserys does not hesitate to sell his own sister in return for an army.

Nonetheless, this is one of the turning points in Daenerys' life, because when she is placed under the rule of his husband, Khal Drogo, she starts developing a more powerful personality. The ferocity of the Dothraki group awakens her fire and she starts defining herself as the leader's wife, appropriating the rank of Khaleesi. This new title empowers Daenerys to take action against her brother's abusive behavior. Daenerys has silently endured Viserys' offensive treatment, but when her brother offends her new identity and slaps her, she firmly opposes his repression: "I am a Khaleesi of the Dothraki! I am the wife of the great Khal and I carry his son inside me. The next time you raise a hand to me will be the last time you have hands" ("Cripples, Bastards" 00:36:42-00:36:57). This is the first time when Daenerys obstinately confronts his brother. Viserys finds himself in a completely new situation, the gender roles are reversed, his sister has gained power over him. Daenerys is finally released from the abusive sibling relationship when his husband kills Viserys. Even so, Daenerys is not yet an active agent, she only changes one female role for another.

The wedding is the moment that transfers the power over Daenerys from Viserys to Khal Drogo (Frankel pt. 2). Daenerys is not only objectified by her brother, but at first she is mistreated by his husband as well. As Daenerys takes on the Khaleesi identity, she gains more self-confidence and strength. This is the first example of the personality formation of Daenerys. She is not a weak

and oppressed girl anymore, she identifies herself as the wife of the ruler of warriors. The first occasion when she quits the role of the sex object is when she contradicts Khal Drogo during a sexual intercourse. She is no longer an inactive sufferer, but she becomes an active participant. Henceforth, the repressive man and repressed woman relationship disappears. All in all, the circumstances and her new social position form a slightly stronger personality from Daenerys. Anyhow, she still does not consider herself an independent individual, but is positioned as a man's wife. In other words, her identity is still related to a man.

The subordination is also indicated by the Drogo's behavior, he vows that he will acquire the iron throne to Daenerys and to their son. Yet, he does not say that it will be a joint effort, it will be him, Khal Drogo, who does the action; meanwhile Daenerys becomes a passive observer again (Frankel pt. 2). Therefore Daenerys is not acting independently, but is waiting for a solution from a man. The breakpoint in Daenerys' life is the loss of his son and husband. The development toward a genderqueer state begins when she puts an end to her husband's life. After failing both the mother and the wife roles, a new identity begins to emerge that combines both masculine and feminine traits. Daenerys symbolically goes through a rebirth, she lies next to her husband on the funeral pyre. When the fire extinguished, Daenerys comes out from the ashes. In literature and mythology, fire is the symbol of rebirth. The phoenix burns in its own flame to be reborn from the ashes. Besides, in the Easter culture, the phoenix represents peace ("Phoenix"). Like the phoenix, Daenerys burns in her own flame. The flames shape her new identity, and after her rebirth, she herself becomes a symbol of peace, since her primary objective is the abolition of slavery, creating equality and maintaining peace by building an army.

The Dothraki clan leaves Daenerys after her husband's death. Daenerys' advisor, Jorah Mormont, states: "The Dothraki follow only the strong" ("Fire and Blood" 00:23:20-00:23:23).

Consequently, Daenerys does not inherit the control from her husband but attains the respect of the clan for herself. Two Dothraki clans acknowledge her power and kneel before Daenerys after she walks out from the flames. She is no longer a weak and oppressed woman who needs men's protection, she is reborn as a powerful warrior who becomes the leader of nations. Just like Cersei, Daenerys also abandons the female roles and occupies a position which previously could have only been filled by men. In spite of that, she does not undergo a complete masculinization, as in terms of appearance, she retains her feminine look. Daenerys' case is even more complex because she is portrayed in a mother role, although in a non-traditional sense. After their liberation, the slaves start to salute Daenerys and call her Mysha, in other words mother. In this sense, the slaves consider Daenerys to be their mother because they owe her their new and free lives. In addition, her feminine side is further strengthened by the fact that she is called the Mother of Dragons, hence she does not entirely give up her feminine identity, but fulfils feminine and masculine roles at the same time. Thus, male and female traits are completely blurred in Daenerys' identity, so she also represents the genderqueer state.

### 3.3. Sansa Stark

Just like Daenerys, Sansa also appears in three roles throughout the series. In the first episode, Sansa is presented in the daughter and sister roles; whereas, later she can be seen in the wife's position twice. At the beginning of the story, Sansa embodies the flawless noble lady who always behaves properly. As a young girl, she can be easily influenced, she still has not developed a firm personality, and she often imitates the women around her. Even so, her mother is not her role model, but she wants to be like the queen. For example, first she wears her hair like Cersei and later she mimics Margery's hairstyle (Frankel pt. 2). Concerning her relationship with his father, she is partly responsible for her father's death as she is the one who convinces Eddard Stark to

plead guilty. The beheading of Eddard is a major breakpoint for Sansa, not only does she lose her father, but she also discovers Joffrey's true personality. Upon losing the daughter role, she comes under the control of Joffrey and Cersei, who slowly kill her spirit. (Franke pt. 2). Still, she refuses to act against the oppression and passively endures the humiliation and suffering.

As a sister, Sansa lies to protect her lover, Joffrey, against her sister. Thus, love is more important for her than family ties. Moreover, after her father's beheading, she becomes totally disconnected from her siblings. She is the older daughter, but she is more vulnerable than her younger sister. Sansa abandons the sister role, when Rob is killed and believes her brothers, Bran and Rickon, dead, and loses Arya as well.

Sansa is an extremely naive person, her only purpose is to become a queen. She mentions it several times: "I'd be queen someday... It's the only thing I've ever wanted" ("Winter is Coming" 00:40:13-00:40:21). Ironically, her biggest dream causes her the most suffering. Although arranged marriages were commonplace at that time, especially among the nobility (Frankel pt. 2), Sansa is forced into two marriages against her will. First, she has to marry Tyrion Lannister; but she does not fulfil her role as a wife, as their marriage is never consummated by a wedding night since her husband is in love with another woman. Men's influence is constantly present in Sansa's life. When she escapes from King's Landing, Petyr Baelish controls her, and he is the one who pressures Sansa to stay with the Bolton family and marry Ramsay Bolton. Henceforth, her second marriage is neither her own choice. These marriages make Sansa overcome her naivety. Ramsay tortures Sansa both mentally and physically, he wants to break her emerging personality.

Though, Sansa reaches her breakpoint as a result of this torture, she becomes emotionally and mentally strengthened. Sansa's main motivation is to get her home back. When she finds an

opportunity to escape, she goes to her only male relative alive, to Jon Snow; to put it another way, she continues to seek men's protection. She first stands up against gender limits and quits the female role, when she expresses that she has as much right to participate in the logistics of the battle as men have. The first time that she is not presented in a passive role and confronts her oppressor is when she threatens her husband, Ramsay: "You're going to die tomorrow, Lord Bolton. Sleep well" ("Battle of Bastards" 00:14:53-00:15:00). She completely abandons her girlish shyness and naivety when she has Ramsay tied to a chair in the barn and feeds him to the dogs. Gender roles are totally reversed, just like in the case of Daenerys and Vierys. Men are no longer the oppressor, they become powerless; meanwhile, women have the decision over men's fate.

Although Sansa is the one who has retained the most of her feminine identity, she also denied her gender. Sansa negates her womanhood first, when she is trying to conceal that she is menstruating, thus she tries to escape the roles of mother and wife. This already foreshadows the ensuing course of events, since it is always her femininity that gets her in trouble. She only becomes truly strong and reaches the genderqueer state when she first acts alone and stops seeking male protection. Her first independent act is when she summons the knights of the valley to battle, with this act, she stops being the victim in need, and becomes a powerful identity who saves the lives of men on the battlefield.

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the main female characters. Furthermore, it introduced the process and triggering events of the character developments by which these women reach the genderqueer state.

## 4. Language and Gender

Chapter 4 raises the question of gender markedness in language and explains how the TV series establishes the concept of gender neutrality in a linguistic level.

Gender inequality is not only present in the social engagement but it is also reflected in the language to some degree. English is a natural gender language, which means that most personal nouns are gender-neutral, so they can designate males and females too. The third person singular pronoun takes two gendered forms, the masculine and feminine forms: he and she. An asymmetry can be observed regarding the markedness of most languages, meaning that the general use of the masculine form is much more common than the use of the feminine one.

This is also true of the English language, since in cases, when the sex of the subject is unknown or irrelevant, the generic “he” is used. In other words, the masculine form is not restricted to denote only men and the generic he is applied even in the cases of mixed gendered groups (Stahlberg et al. 165-69). In contrast, the feminine form cannot be used generically, it only functions to denote women (Hellinger and Bussman 9-10). Sczesny et al. claims that language and its gender disproportions reflect the social gender inequalities. The fact that the masculine form can be applicable to all humans reinforces the existence of the gender hierarchy, according to which men constitute the more dominant gender and they are assigned higher status and more authority than women (Ridgeway and Correll 522-23).

According to Vervecken et al., linguistic forms highly affect children's perception about professional and occupational performance. Research shows that typically male job descriptions written in generic masculine form has a negative impact on girl's evaluation and consider women less competent for the job, while gender-unmarked forms result in a positive perception and makes

the job more attractive and preferential for them (208). Thus, the language itself is an influencing factor in the perception of women about themselves and their role in society. Different methods have been developed in order to create a gender-fair language. For example, neutralization that substitutes the masculine form with a gender-unmarked form, or feminization, which is the replacement of the masculine form with the feminine counterpart. Although these approaches aim to produce a gender balance in the language use and thereby would reduce gender stereotyping and discrimination, it is complicated to reform the linguistic traditions (Sczesny et al.).

Not only does the Game of Thrones overcome the gender roles and stereotypes, but it also surmounts the language barriers by introducing the character of Arya Stark. Although Arya appears in the fewest roles compared to the aforementioned protagonists, yet her character is the most complex because she is the only character who manages to realize the complete genderless state. Considering her roles, she is presented as a daughter and as a sister. Nonetheless, there are several references to her nonconformity which imply that she does not fit into the female roles assigned in the series. Arya's character exemplifies how people are subject to social conventions from birth and how their genders define and limit the roles awaiting them in life. Thus, this socially constructed binary system has a great role in defining people's identity from an early age. Whereas Arya is unskillful in most female activities, she excels in masculine sports, such as in archery or fencing. As a child, Arya was less exposed to the gender roles and that is why she keeps pushing the limits of gender spheres. Her father, Eddard Stark, is the one who constantly emphasizes the importance of gender norms. For instance, when he discovers Arya's sword he remarks: "Little ladies shouldn't play with swords" ("Lord Snow" 00:13:06-00:13:10). In response, Arya declares that she does not want to be a lady. This is the first time when she confronts her father and denies her sex. An even more decisive moment is when she asks her father about the future, whether she

can become a knight and her father replies by referring to the gender roles: "You will marry a high Lord and rule his castle. And your sons shall be knights and princes and lords" ("Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things" 00:24:01-00:24:13). Thus, Eddard assigns a passive female role to his daughter. Even so, Arya's aim is to become a warrior, but her father's repressive forces constantly remind her the gender roles. Consequently, even harmonious father-daughter relations involve paternal oppression.

Despite belonging to a large family and having five siblings, Arya is an outsider as a sister. She and her sister, Sansa, are complete opposites. Whereas Sansa adapts to the social standards, Arya constantly rebels against them. Their dissimilar personalities are illustrated by their werewolves, Sansa's wolf is called Lady, whilst Arya names hers Nymeria, after a famous warrior queen of Westeros (Frankel pt. 2). While Sansa's wolf is obedient and tame, Nymeria is wild and protective, she even attacks Prince Joffrey when he was fighting against Arya. The characteristics of the wolves serve to indicate the high contrast between the personalities and values of the girls. Arya is a feisty character; while Sansa is a gentle lady. In addition, there are other elements that point out Arya's outsider character; for example, it is not her sole sister, Sansa, or her brothers who are much closer to her in age, with whom Arya has the closest relationship with, but it is Jon Snow. Jon himself is an outsider too, since he is a bastard and he cannot properly fit into the family. He is the first person to encourage Arya to transgress the gender boundaries by giving her a sword that they name Needle, making a parody of the feminine duties (Frankel pt. 2). When the Stark family lines up to receive the king in the first episode, Arya is the only one who is missing, she arrives late with an armor helmet on her head which foreshadows her nonconformity. After her father's execution, Arya is separated from her siblings, so she can only rely on herself despite being a child.

The breakpoint in her life is her parent's death, after witnessing their execution her only motive is vengeance; she prepares a list of those people she seeks revenge on.

The genderqueer development is the most visible in Arya's case. She is the only character who utterly experiences both the male and female spheres, since she is the only one who is addressed as he and she at the story. Although the other female characters take up masculine traits, linguistically they remain denoted by the feminine third person singular pronoun; that is, they do not manage to overcome the gender barriers grammatically. Arya is outraged when she is being called a boy; however, when she is in the female role, she desires the male sphere and is chided for her boyish nature. Nonetheless, when she is forced into the male roles, she cannot identify with that either. When Arya is disguised as a boy to escape from King's Landing, the other boys taunts her: "He looks like a girl" ("Fire and Blood" 00:38:52-00:35:53). From this point, Arya is being referred to as he, so she must fulfill the male roles and expectations; anyhow, as the above quote illustrates, she does not comply this role properly. Therefore, when she is a girl, she is scolded for her boyishness, whereas; when she is a boy, the girly features cause her difficulty. She is not feminine enough to be a girl, but not masculine enough to be a boy. Although Arya's resembles Brienne's character the most, she does not wish to exchange her gender as Brienne, but she cannot identify with any of the genders.

Without the social roles and family ties Arya can become anyone, she has unlimited possibilities (Frankel pt. 2). By seeking the help of the faceless men, Arya begins to develop her own, genderless identity. Her aim is to become no one; in other words, she refuses to be categorized either as she or he and denies the burden of social expectations associated with them, as these gendered grammatical form inevitably entail the culturally established gender roles (Vervecken et al. 208). In the House of Black and White, the faces symbolize the potentials inherent in humans

and show all the opportunities who one could become without the socially established prejudices and discrimination based on one's gender. For Arya to become no one, must give up her past and identity; therefore she throws her belongings into the sea. Whereas in Daenerys' case, fire is the symbol of rebirth, Arya's spiritual purification is illustrated by water. Water in this sense is a reference to Baptism. The literal meaning of the word, Baptism, is the immersion in water. This religion universally represents the beginning of a new life and the renunciation of old habits ("Baptism"). Arya wants to become someone, whose identity is not limited by society and gender traditions. Having renounced her old personality, she can put on other faces, which represents her quest for identity. In the end, her master, the faceless men, declares: "Finally a girl is no one" ("The Broken Man" 00:56:20-00:56:22). Therefore, Arya managed to overcome the gender barriers linguistically too. She no longer can be categorized as she or he, Arya became no one by abandoning her socially constructed identity. She replies declaring that she is Arya Stark from Winterfell; thus, she reassumes her name and re-defines herself, but she no longer conforms to a predestined role; it is herself who controls her own fate regardless of genders.

This chapter detailed that in addition to the social roles, language also entails gender stereotypes and discrimination. Besides, it presented how the show succeeded in dealing with linguistic gender barriers through the character of Arya Stark.

## 5. Conclusion

All in all, although women's movements have brought forth significant changes, absolute equality have not been achieved. The Hollywood film industry is one such sector, where sex disparity is the most evident. Nonetheless, the Game of Thrones is a groundbreaking artwork with its unique mode of representation that creates the concept of genderqueer women. Relying on the

Queer Theory, the TV show emphasizes the faults of the binary system that has been established by feminism. It also presents the restrictive quality of male-female relationships and demonstrates the fluid nature of identity, which is limited by the socially constructed gender roles. The four female protagonists: Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targaryen, Sansa and Arya Stark go through a character development and eventually take up both female and male traits and fulfil male roles in a patriarchal society. Moreover, the character of Arya Stark abolishes the restrictive language barriers by becoming no one. The work redefines sexuality, which culminates in Arya Stark demolishing and reinterpreting her own gender. In my thesis, I highlighted the fact that a seemingly mainstream genre provides a nuanced approach to a deep-rooted social issue. The finite length of the essay limits the further investigation of the topic; however, the Game of Thrones propounds other theoretical problems related to gender studies, such as the topic of castration, eunuch identity, homosexuality, asexuality or aberration. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the TV series is a great representation of the game of genders.

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