

Chloe Allmand
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Dawn Dietrich
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Asexual, Transvestive Role-Projection: “You Go Girl!” Guys and *Game of Thrones*

Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace came out when I was six years old, and after many viewings I found I did not idealize Anakin Skywalker because I had a crush on him, but because I wanted to *be* him. Sixteen years later, I was a nanny of a two-year-old boy who, after watching Disney’s *Frozen*, did not profess his love for the ice queen Elsa, but would dress himself up as her, point at himself and say “Elsa.” Our scopophilia lacked the sexuality so often associated with adults’ pleasure in watching films, and we were both able to take pleasure in imagining ourselves as a film character of the opposite sex, to engage in a fantasy I dub asexual, transvestive role-projection.

In 1975, Laura Mulvey published “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and argued that a male viewer can feel pleasure when watching films in two ways: by imagining himself as the hero, and by imagining himself possessing the heroine. Though Mulvey and Freud both explained scopophilia as a largely unconscious sensation, the viewer can take a more active role in fantasy or role-projection because the viewer can consciously decide which characters he or she aspires to. Mulvey’s arguments were true for films made pre-1975, and many films made even now, but Mulvey’s arguments are not as all encompassing today, because her theories cannot account for how films and television have progressed to include more heroines who operate outside of strict gender binaries and who do not exist for the purpose of male scopophilia, or “to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (Mulvey 2088).

The other issue with Mulvey's argument in terms of contemporary film and television is her argument's inherent reliance on sexuality, specifically heterosexuality, and a failure to address the idea that a male viewer could view a heroine and not imagine possessing her sexually, but instead imagine himself as her, as Mulvey argues the male viewer imagines himself as the film's hero. I point to this possibility with the caveat that this role-projection can happen only when two circumstances exist simultaneously: when the male viewer lacks sexual attraction to the female character, because this allows the male viewer to move beyond his desire to potentially possess the female character, and when the female character acts outside of her gender's norms, making her more "masculine". Because the role-projection I am arguing for has more to do with gender fluidity than sexual orientation, even though sexuality does play a role, this form of fantasy can exist outside of a heterosexual paradigm more successfully than Mulvey's theories.

The potential for male viewers' asexual, transvestive role-projection has become increasingly common with the rise of heroines who exist outside of typical femininity, and the emergence of more young, non-sexualized heroines, like Hit Girl in *Kick Ass*, Eleven in *Stranger Things*, and Arya Stark in *Game of Thrones*, specifically the HBO series based on the books by George R.R. Martin. Because Arya is presented as devoid of femininity and sexual relationships, a male viewer can easily role-project himself onto her, and imagine himself living as she does, fighting as she does, and killing her enemies as she does. The same cannot be said for the male view of Arya's older sister, Sansa Stark, who is highly feminine and desired sexually by several of the show's male characters. I am not arguing an absolute, that all male viewers can see themselves in Arya or other non-feminine film heroines; I am arguing only for the possibility of

role-projection in a lack of sexual attraction and a break from gender binaries. In his book Dangerous Curves, Jeffrey Brown argues that “the strict categorization of traits as male or female dominating film theory ever since Laura Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ ... means that any atypical portrayals tend to be interpreted as cinematic transvestism” (44). Brown claims that the sexy and tough action heroine is not being feminine or masculine, but instead combining both feminine and masculine traits to exist outside “the very notion of stable gender identities” (45). Even though Arya is not portrayed as sexy, Brown’s argument is still relevant to her character, because understanding that Arya exists outside of a typical gender binary makes it easier to understand how a male viewer could also break the typical gender binary by identifying with a heroine instead of a hero.

The Stark sisters inhabit a medieval fantasy world in *Game of Thrones*. Both girls were born at their family’s stronghold in Winterfell, where their father Lord Eddard Stark serves as Warden of the North under his longtime friend King Robert Baratheon, ruler of the seven kingdoms and protector of the realm. Sansa is the older Stark sister, beginning season 1 at age 13, making her around 19 by the most recent season 6. Arya is 11 in season 1, and around 17 in season 6. The sisters live with their father, their mother Lady Catelyn, two younger brothers Bran and Rickon, an older brother Robb, a bastard half-brother Jon Snow, their father’s ward Theon Greyjoy, and various household staff.

From the start of season 1, it is clear that male viewers can identify with Arya, or even picture themselves as her, much more easily than they can identify with Sansa. Arya breaks the gender binary in her first appearance in season 1, episode 1 “Winter is Coming”, when the viewer sees her sighing over an embroidery lesson. While the girls’ caregiver Septa Mordane

praises Sansa's detailed needlework, Arya glowers at both of them and at her own clumsy work. She then sneaks out to the yard where her brothers are practicing archery, and proceeds to shoot a bullseye right over Bran's shoulder. The Stark sisters are presented as a "tomboy" versus "girly-girl" or warrior versus maiden dichotomy, through which it becomes especially clear how a male viewer can see himself in Arya, but likely would not want to see himself in Sansa; Arya is tough where Sansa is sweet, Arya is rebellious where Sansa is demure, and most importantly in terms of the male viewer's potential role-projection in a break from the gender binary, Arya is plain where Sansa is stereotypically desirable. Throughout the series, Sansa wears fairytale-worthy gowns, wears her hair in elaborate fashions, and carries herself with a demeanor appropriate to a maiden of noble birth. By contrast, Arya wears simpler dresses or even boy's clothing, shows little to no care for her appearance, and acts much more like her rambunctious brothers than like her composed sister.

In her book Women in *Game of Thrones*: Power, Conformity and Resistance, Valerie Frankel places Arya among the series' "warrior women" and names her as "second-wave feminism's ideal: career-focused and completely independent without spouse or children, equal to 'the boys,' immune to love or softer emotions... these women have all cast aside all traces of femininity to compete with men and thrive in a man's world" (48). It is important to note that Arya does not do away with femininity just to compete with men, but because she sees no use in the feminine pursuits of embroidery, poetry, and dancing into which Sansa puts so much effort. The viewer watches Sansa in season 1 concerning herself with the latest fashions, songs of maidens rescued by handsome knights, and her new love, Prince Joffrey, to whom she has been promised. The average male viewer certainly cannot identify with Sansa's girlish idealism, nor

would he likely want to. Meanwhile, Arya is hard at work to escape her destiny of being married off and producing heirs. When Arya receives her first sword as a gift from her half-brother Jon in season 1, episode 2 “The Kingsroad”, Arya says “Sansa can keep her sewing needles. I’ve got a needle of my own.” She begins studying swordsmanship under Syrio Forel, a master swordsman or “water dancer” from Braavos. By so doing, Arya demonstrates a “masculine” work ethic and fearlessness, and mocks her gender roles by calling her sessions with Syrio her “dancing lessons” and her swordsmanship “needlework.”

These first most obvious observations of Arya as a “tomboy” and Sansa as a “girly-girl” aside, a main reason a male viewer can role-project onto Arya but not onto Sansa is the difference in the sisters’ sexualities, or lack thereof. Mulvey argues in “Visual Pleasure” that a female film character “symbolises the castration threat by her real lack of a penis” (2084). While it is overly literal to the point of absurdity for a male viewer to fear actual castration when faced with female characters in film, it does follow that the male viewer would fear loss of his masculinity if he were to role-project onto a stereotypically feminine character, like Sansa. Throughout the show’s six seasons, the audience is never made particularly aware of the fact that Arya is a girl, except through her efforts to escape this truth. Arya never so much as kisses a boy, and only demonstrates potential romantic feelings for one boy, Gendry in season 2, who views Arya more as a younger sister than as a possible love interest. No one could forget that Sansa is a girl, not only because of her ultra femininity, but also because from season 1 through season 6, she is pursued by or married to one suitor or another. Sansa is promised to Prince Joffrey almost immediately in season 1, and is delighted at first, thinking her dreams of love as she has imagined it from listening to romantic songs and stories are coming true. Though Sansa

becomes disenchanted with Joffrey soon enough after discovering his true, sadistic nature, she is still betrothed to him in season 2, episode 7 “A Man Without Honor”, when Sansa gets her first period and is therefore officially ready to be wed to Joffrey, who is now king. The scene is not subtle; Sansa wakes up from a fevered sleep, and she and the viewer see the blood on Sansa’s bed. In a panic, realizing that she will now be forced to wed Joffrey, Sansa desperately tries to destroy the evidence by attacking her sheets and mattress with a knife to cut out the stain. Sansa is 14 when she “flowers,” and even though the series follows Arya until she is about 17, the viewer never sees her cross this metaphorical bridge into womanhood. It is logical to assume that Arya does not get her period because of poor nutrition, high stress, or other basic biological reasons, but regardless of why the viewer does not see Arya’s flowering as they see Sansa’s, Arya’s lack of “moonblood” makes it even easier for a male viewer to forget that Arya is, like Sansa, a young woman. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for a male viewer to see himself as Sansa after witnessing her dramatic entrance to womanhood, but since Arya’s only bleeding is from scrapes and cuts earned by running through forests and engaging in sword fights, like a boy, the male viewer can still see himself as her.

While it is clearly important to consider how a male viewer sees female characters when considering the possibility of role-projection, it is also prudent to examine how a show’s male characters see the heroines. If a heroine is constantly coveted by the male characters, and lives under a hungry, sexual male gaze, as Sansa does, a male viewer is unlikely to be able to, or want to, imagine himself as her. If a heroine has no sexual relationships, and instead has fatherly or brotherly men around her, then the male viewer again avoids the castration fear Mulvey pointed to. After Prince Joffrey has Arya and Sansa’s father Lord Eddard executed for treason in season

1, episode 9 “Baelor”, Sansa is trapped with her betrothed, his mother Cersei Lannister, and the rest of the Lannisters and their guard in King’s Landing. Arya, however, escapes and, with help from her father’s friend Yoren, is able to disguise herself as a boy and take the name Arry. In season 1, episode 10 “Fire and Blood”, which begins immediately after Lord Eddard’s public execution, for which Arya and Yoren were in the crowd, Yoren drags Arya away and says “You’ll keep your mouth shut, boy” to which Arya protests “I’m not a boy!” Yoren responds with “You’re not a smart boy, is that what you’re trying to say? Do you want to live, boy?” Arya falls silent, and Yoren proceeds to slice off her hair with a knife. In this moment, it becomes clear to the viewer and to Arya that if Arya wants to live, and avoid potential rape or imprisonment, she not only needs to hide her identity, but also hide the fact that she is a girl. Yoren works for the Nights Watch, of which Arya’s half-brother Jon is a sworn brother. The ancient order of soldiers protects the seven kingdoms from the horrors that lie in the North beyond The Wall, a 300 mile long structure that separates the seven kingdoms from the wild lands. Arya, now Arry, joins Yoren as he shepherds a group of new recruits to the Night’s Watch fortress Castle Black, with the intent of seeing Arya safely home to Winterfell on the way. Medievalist Jane Tolmie articulates fantasy heroines as “at their best when rising above external conditions that are against them in gender-based ways. They dress up as men to escape restraints on their freedom, run away from abusive fathers, escape unwanted marriages, avoid, avert or survive rape, or take up arms” (148). The only part of Tolmie’s description that does not apply to Arya is the abusive father; Arya does escape any potential forced marriages, avoids rape, and takes up arms, which she does with much more skill than many of the young men in the caravan on the way to The Wall, which makes her all the more impressive and conducive to a male viewer’s role-projection.

If Arya is “at her best” as a fantasy heroine for dressing as a male and escaping potential rape, then by extension, Sansa must be a fantasy heroine at her worst. After Sansa is cast aside by Prince Joffrey and instead forced to marry Joffrey’s uncle Tyrion, she manages to escape from King’s Landing only to be forced into another marriage: to Northman Lord Bolton’s bastard son, Ramsay Snow. Sansa then finds herself in one of *Thrones*’ most controversial scenes. In season 5, episode 6 “Unbent, Unbowed, Unbroken”, Sansa’s new husband rapes her on their wedding night, and forces Theon Greyjoy to watch. The viewer sees Ramsay rip Sansa’s dress and force Sansa down onto the bed, then only hears Sansa’s sobs as the camera moves back to Theon, who is also crying. While the scene is disturbing to watch, and elicited fan outrage and many articles questioning whether the scene was necessary, this scene in itself demonstrates that a male viewer is unlikely to imagine himself as Sansa. As Theon watches and tears up, he feels obvious sympathy for Sansa, but cannot feel empathy for her, just as the male viewer cannot. If Sansa had been, as Tolmie puts it, “at her best” as a fantasy heroine, Sansa would have dressed as a man, made a daring escape, and avoided being raped. Of course, given the circumstances, this would have been impossible. Unlike Arya, Sansa had no one to help her escape, and at 18 years old with very feminine features, Sansa would have had a much more difficult time passing for a man than Arya did passing for a boy when she was 11.

Not only did Sansa have no male figure to look out for her and save her as Arya did with Yoren, but Sansa’s mentor Petyr “Littlefinger” Baelish was the one who set up the marriage between Sansa and Ramsay. The way the Stark sisters are seen by their male mentors throughout the show is another way of understanding the possibility for the male viewer’s role-projection. Even the girls’ father, Lord Eddard, views Arya and Sansa very differently. At the same time that

Eddard allows Sansa to be promised to prince Joffrey when she is only 13, he is setting up swordplay lessons for Arya and laughing at her antics as she chases cats around the castle to become more agile. Because Sansa longs to be a princess and one day a queen, and is at first enamored by her match with Joffrey, even though Eddard is concerned that 13 is too young he allows the match to move forward. He allows, and even encourages both of his daughters to be themselves. Even though he attempts to guide Arya gently towards being a lady, it is clear he appreciates her rebellious spirit. In season 1, episode 4 “Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things”, Lord Eddard encounters Arya in a castle hallway, where she is practicing standing on one foot to improve her balance for her “dancing.” Arya asks her father: “Can I be lord of a Holdfast?” He smiles, shakes his head and says, “You will marry a high lord, and rule his castle. Your sons shall be knights, and princes, and lords.” Arya smiles back, and says firmly but pleasantly, “No. That’s not me.” Instead of reminding her of her duty as a lady of the noble house of Stark, Eddard just shakes his head again and allows Arya to resume her “dancing.” Although Eddard loves his daughters equally, he views them differently; Sansa is a lady through and through, and will make House Stark proud with her marriage and her future sons, while Arya is a rebel whose boyish ways are becoming more concerning to Eddard as she gets older. Even though Eddard hopes Arya will become a true lady one day, his view of Arya is still preferable to a male viewer than Eddard’s view of Sansa. A male viewer would have difficulty imagining himself as a daughter of perfect ladylike ambition, and could more easily see himself as a rebel under a doting father’s guiding hand.

After her father’s death, Sansa’s closest male mentor is Sandor “the Hound” Clegane, Joffrey’s sworn sword. The Hound does not openly offer Sansa guidance, but serves as her

steadfast protector from Joffrey. In season 1, episode 10 “Fire and Blood”, Joffrey forces Sansa to accompany him to the battlements, and look at her father’s head on a spike. Joffrey then boasts that he is going to kill Sansa’s brother Robb, and bring her his head as well, to which Sansa snaps back “Or perhaps he will bring me yours.” Joffrey then has his knight Ser Meryn smack Sansa in the face. Joffrey turns from her, and Sansa sees an opportunity to push him from the battlements. She steps toward him, but the Hound subtly stops her, says “Come here, girl,” and in a rare moment of tenderness, wipes the blood from Sansa’s lip with his handkerchief. In season 2, episode 1 “The North Remembers”, Sansa attends Joffrey’s birthday celebration, at which Joffrey attempts to make a man drink himself to death with wine. Sansa cries out, “You can’t!” and Joffrey immediately becomes angry with her for contradicting him. The Hound, standing at Joffrey’s shoulder, diffuses the situation by saying, “The girl is right. What a man sows on his name day, he reaps all year.” The Hound does not gallantly leap to Sansa’s aid, and strike Joffrey down for threatening her, but still, hardly noticeably, protects her. In season 2, episode 6 “The Old Gods and the New”, the Hound saves Sansa from rape during a riot in King’s Landing. He finds her in an alleyway, kills her three assailants with his sword, then picks Sansa up and carries her over his shoulder back to the castle. He leaves her with her handmaidens and says, “The Little Bird is bleeding. Someone take her back to her cage.” The Hound never names himself Sansa’s defender, which is possibly because as Joffrey’s sworn sword, to do so would be to disobey the crown; however, the Hound comes to Sansa’s rescue time and again while she is under the Lannister’s control. In terms of role-projection, the male viewer would likely not want to be seen the way the Hound sees Sansa, as a maiden to be protected. For a male viewer to see

himself as a damsel in distress, as Sansa is so often depicted to be, would be a threat to the male viewer's masculinity.

The male viewer would presumably prefer to be seen as the Hound sees Arya, perhaps not at the beginning of their journey together, but by the end. The Hound is one of the first to land himself on Arya's list of people she vows to kill, after the Hound kills Arya's friend Mycah after a tussle with Prince Joffrey. After a battle in King's Landing, the Hound deserts his duty as a member of the Kingsguard, and takes to the road. He encounters Arya, who has since broken away from the caravan of boys on their way to the Wall, and is alone in the wilderness, still disguised as a boy. The Hound sees Arya as an opportunity, and captures her to take her to her aunt who lives in the Vale, with the hope that Arya's aunt will pay ransom for her niece. The Hound does not treat Arya with the same kindness as he treated Sansa, but he is not cruel to Arya either; rather, the Hound recognizes Arya as a fellow outcast, and comes to regard her almost as an equal, particularly when he learns of her skill with a sword. In season 4, episode 7 "Mockingbird", the Hound and Arya encounter a gravely injured farmer. As a mercy, the Hound runs the farmer through with a dagger, then turns to Arya and says, "That's where the heart is. That's how you kill a man." While the Hound tried to help Sansa stay out of Joffrey's way and ease the suffering he knew he could not eradicate entirely, the Hound recognizes the fighter in Arya, and helps her hone her skills rather than discouraging her from the masculine pursuit of combat. In season 4, episode 10 "The Children", the Hound is seemingly mortally wounded after a battle with Brienne of Tarth. Brienne, a woman knight, swore to Arya's mother Lady Catelyn that the Stark girls would be protected, whatever Brienne may have to do or how far she must search for the girls. When Brienne finds Arya and the Hound, Brienne and the Hound fight while

Arya hides. Brienne knocks the Hound down the mountainside, presumably to his death, and proceeds to search for Arya, who finds the Hound, still alive, but barely. “Big bitch saved you,” he says to Arya, who replies, “I don’t need saving.” The Hound concedes that to be true, but still mocks Arya by answering, “No, not you. You’re a real killer with your water dancing.” He asks Arya if she remembers where the heart is; she nods, but makes no move towards him. The Hound then proceeds to try goading Arya into killing him, by reminding her how he killed Mycah, by saying he should have raped Sansa when he had the chance, by pointing out that now is Arya’s chance to finally check him off her kill list, as she has promised him she will. Instead, Arya takes the Hound’s money bag, and marches away without a word or a glance back, leaving the Hound shouting after her: “Kill me, kill me, kill me!” This scene is another moment in the series where the viewer can forget entirely that Arya is a young girl. She has wished for the Hound’s death, planned to kill him herself, and now that she has him at her mercy she does not appear delighted, only stoically satisfied. Arya is the anti-damsel, and operates outside of the gender binary; therefore, the male viewer can project his identity onto her.

Imagining being looked at how the heroine is looked at by the other characters is a crucial part of potential role-projection, and it is very unlikely that a male viewer would want to be looked at the way Petyr “Littlefinger” Baelish looks at Sansa. Littlefinger serves on the king’s council as master of coin, and so is present in the show from the beginning, but has little to do with Sansa until season 4. Littlefinger grew up with Sansa’s mother Lady Catelyn, and Catelyn’s sister Lysa, who through her marriage to the now deceased Jon Arryn, holds the Vale. After colluding in the murder of King Joffrey, Littlefinger takes Sansa with him and sails for the Vale, where he marries Lysa to gain control of her domain. Although Lysa loved Littlefinger when she

was a girl, and desired to marry him instead of Jon Arryn, Littlefinger always loved Sansa's mother Catelyn. Since Catelyn was murdered in season 3, and since Sansa has become a grown woman, Littlefinger's attention has turned to her. Although he is married to Lysa, Littlefinger kisses Sansa in the courtyard of the Vale in season 4, episode 7 "Mockingbird". While it would be unsettling for a heterosexual male viewer to picture himself as Sansa in the scene, being coveted and kissed by an older man, the kiss is especially disturbing given that it directly follows Littlefinger saying, "In a better world, one where love can overcome strength and duty, you could have been my child." For a male to imagine himself as a hero or heroine, he has to first and foremost want to be that hero or heroine, and given how Sansa is used and looked at by men, especially Littlefinger, no one, especially the male viewer, would want to be her.

By contrast, the male viewer would presumably very much want to be Arya if it means having her relationship with Jaqen H'ghar. The two first meet in season 1, when both are in Yoren's caravan to the Wall, Jaqen masquerading as a captured criminal. Jaqen is actually a member of an ancient order of assassins, the Faceless Men, who reside in the House of Black and White in Braavos. Jaqen takes an interest in Arya after she saves his life on the road, and offers to train her as his apprentice and help her leave behind her identity to become "no one." Arya goes to Braavos after she leaves the Hound to die, and begins her training to become one of the Faceless Men. By the end of season 6, it has become clear that Arya could never be "no one," and kill people based on who the Many Faced God, the God of the Faceless Men, deems ready to die. Arya has her own agenda, her own kill list, and values her identity as a Stark too much to abandon it. Even though she has sworn an oath to the Many Faced God, Jaqen allows Arya to leave Braavos in season 6, episode 8 "No One". In an interview with Access Hollywood, actor

Tom Wlaschiha who plays Jaqen explained that letting Arya go back to Winterfell was always Jaqen's intention: "He didn't train her to become a Faceless Man and stay in the House of Black and White in Braavos forever. I think that the Faceless Men, they certainly have an interest [in] what's going on in Westeros, otherwise why would he [have] just shown up out of the blue, in Season 2 and picked Arya and offered her to train her?" (Bundel). In their climactic scene together, Jaqen says to Arya, "Finally, a girl is no one," to which she responds, "A girl is Arya Stark of Winterfell, and I'm going home." Arya has her sword drawn on Jaqen, and a moment passes as he appraises her, but then he smiles just slightly, and nods. She has passed his test.

While Sansa is either protected or lusted after by the men who serve as her mentors, Arya proves herself her mentors' equals, and gains their approval through her resilience. For the male viewer, imagining himself as Arya would be desirable, because her relationships with her male mentors are similar to those of young heroes, vastly different from Sansa's mentors who always treat her as the damsel in distress.

Sansa finally has her revenge against her estranged husband Ramsay, and indeed her first triumph after six seasons of being constantly beaten down, in season 6, episode 9 "Battle of the Bastards". Ramsay and Sansa's half-brother Jon Snow are battling for the Starks' home, Winterfell. Jon's army is losing badly when the knights of the Vale ride in to their rescue at the last possible moment, to help defeat Ramsay's army. Sansa was able to secure assistance from the knights of the Vale through Littlefinger, Lord of the Vale; without Sansa's help, Jon would have lost the battle, and lost Winterfell. Jon's army captures Ramsay, and Sansa faces him in the stable where Ramsay keeps his hunting dogs, who he had been starving for a week so they would be more vicious than usual. Ramsay tells Sansa, "You can't kill me. I'm part of you now." Sansa

shows much the same level emotion as Arya showed when she faced the Hound as he lay dying. Sansa replies, “Your words will disappear, your name will disappear, your house will disappear. All memory of you will disappear.” As Ramsay’s hounds converge on him, and begin eating him as he sits chained to a chair, Sansa remains long enough to be sure Ramsay is going to die. She then walks from the stable, with just a trace of a smile on her lips. Even though in this moment, Sansa has finally transcended her role as the show’s whipping girl, it would still be undesirable for a male viewer to see himself as her. The strategies that led to her triumph were distinctly feminine; she used her sexual hold on Littlefinger to persuade him to come to Winterfell’s aid, and while she lets Ramsay die a horrible death, she does not dirty her own hands.

In season 6, episode 10 “The Winds of Winter”, Arya is able to avenge the death of her mother and brother Robb by killing Walder Frey, the man responsible for their murders at the Red Wedding in season 3. Using her training from Jaqen H’ghar, Arya disguises herself as a serving girl and sneaks into Walder Frey’s stronghold at the Twins. She stands beside Walder as he eats, and he asks her to call his sons to him. Arya says that his sons are already here, and gestures to the pie Walder is eating; Arya has murdered Walder’s sons and baked them into a pie, a reference to an old myth the Stark children heard from their nurse. She then removes her mask to reveal her true face and says to Walder, “My name is Arya Stark. I want you to know that the last thing you’re going to see is a Stark smiling down at you as you die.” Walder tries to flee, but Arya grabs him by his hair and slits his throat; she holds him as he bleeds to death. Arya’s revenge is more masculine and therefore more relatable to a male viewer than Sansa’s revenge in two ways: first, Arya kills Walder with her own hands, instead of allowing him to die as Sansa allowed Ramsay to die; second, Arya kills Walder to avenge her family, while Sansa lets Ramsay

die to avenge herself. Although selfishness is in itself often considered a feminine quality, what is more important is that Sansa seeks revenge on Ramsay for raping her, an act that few male viewers could empathize with. Arya's desire to kill Walder to avenge her brother and mother has nothing to do with the fact that Arya is a girl, which makes it possible for the male viewer to imagine himself as her, and take more pleasure in killing Walder Frey than in killing Ramsay Snow.

Ultimately, asexual, transvestive role-projection from a male viewer is most possible when the heroine transcends the gender binary, so that sexuality and gender norms can be forgotten. All the qualities that are admirable in Arya Stark have nothing to do with the fact that she is a girl, so a male viewer can go beyond identifying with her to actually consciously imagining himself as her. While Sansa finally escapes her role as the fairytale maiden incapable of fending for herself, her strategies to rise to revenge are stereotypically feminine, leading to a lack of role-projection, especially consciously, from the male viewer. Though a male viewer can certainly feel admiration or respect for heroines in film, for the male viewer to want to be the heroine, she must operate outside traditional constructs of femininity, and become a warrior, schemer, revenge-seeker; in short, she must become something other than a "she."

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