

Expressions of Subversive Gender Roles and Sexual Desires: Reading HBO's *Game of Thrones*

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ABSTRACT

All forms of cinematic art –ranging from films to television drama-series, advertisement to daily soap shows, and the emerging trend of web-series –influence the public opinion to a great extent. More than any other source, the entertainment industry puts the lasting impact on society and culture. One such drama-series stands apart and above all others –Game of Thrones. In this paper, the focusing lens of analysis is turned towards the representation of diverse and alternative gender and sexual expressions in Game of Thrones. The present paper analyses five specific areas of transgressive and subversive desires (both in terms of gender expressions and sexual preferences) as are portrayed in Game of Thrones –Male-to-Male Same Sex Desire (Effeminate gender and gay sexuality), Female-to-Female Same Sex Desire (Masculine / butch gender and lesbian sexuality), Eunuchs / Castrated Men and their Subversive Gender Expressions, Incestuous and Other Subversive Male-to-Female Sexual Desires, and Sadomasochistic Desires. The incorporation of such transgressive acts highlights the vision of the makers of the drama-series and their liberal understanding of human gender and sexuality.

Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Sexual orientations, Desire, Transgressive and Subversive.

INTRODUCTION:

All forms of cinematic art –ranging from films to television drama-series, advertisement to daily soap shows, and the emerging trend of web-series –influence the public opinion and perspective to a great extent. More than any other source, the entertainment industry puts the gravest and lasting impact on society and culture. Apart from the Hollywood movies and television shows, the present day audience has shown a great interest and fascination for the drama-series. One such drama-series is *Game of Thrones*.

Game of Thrones is the dramatic adaptation of the fantasy novel-series *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin. The novel-series comprises seven volumes with the first coming in 1996 entitled *A Game of Thrones*. The dramatic adaptation of the novel-series is named after this first volume. Till present five volumes of the books have appeared and seven seasons of the drama adaptations have been broadcasted. The last two volumes of the novel-series and the last season of the drama-series have yet to appear.

Game of Thrones deals with almost all the important issues of human life, human nature, society, culture, politics, religion, economy, and civilization. The major concerns of humanity –ranging from gender to sexual, racial to national, ethnic to class –are expressed and represented in this drama-series. The focusing lens of analysis, in the present paper, is turned towards the representation of diverse and alternative gender and sexual expressions in *Game of Thrones*. The setting of the series is one of the important factors to analyse how the present-day notions of heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, polymorphous perversity do not work in the same way as for them as they do for the present world. At times, these concepts become insufficient to understand their societies and cultures. The present paper, by exploring the representation of subversive gender and sexual expressions in *Game of Thrones*, provides some critical inquires which can open up further

discussions for the study of this drama-series (or novel-series).

RESEARCH METHOD:

The method of analytical discussion is used for the analysis of the diverse forms of genders and sexualities in *Game of Thrones*. The drama-series is analysed by paying particular attention and focus to the representation of subversive gender roles and sexual orientations. A close-reading method is used for the exploration of the concerned issues. The major ideas and concepts of Gender Studies and Queer Theory are used for a better understanding of the alternative genders and sexualities in order to analyse the drama-series, critically.

DISCUSSION:

The present paper analyses five specific areas of transgressive and subversive desires (both in terms of gender expressions and sexual preferences) as are portrayed in *Game of Thrones* –Male-to-Male Sexual Desire (Effeminate Gender and Gay Sexuality), Female-to-Female Sexual Desire (Masculine / Butch Gender and Lesbian Sexuality), Eunuchs / Castrated Men and their Subversive Gender Expressions, Incestuous and Other Subversive Male-to-Female Sexual Desires, and Sadomasochistic Desires.

The capacity of classical film texts to connote gay and lesbian material visually while making it disappear narratively has been documented in both popular and theoretical accounts of Hollywood cinema, though few of these accounts have specifically linked the chimerical appearance of homosexuality on screen (everywhere seen but nowhere understood or nowhere seen but everywhere understood) to the formal grammar of film and, in particular, its illusionist expansions and compressions of projected space. (as cited in Wallace, 2009, p. 1)

Although the male-to-female relationships hold the central-stage in the societies of *Game of Thrones*, at times the subversive desires are expressed through different (but important) characters. The incorporation of such transgressive acts highlights the vision of the writer and the makers (producers and directors) of the drama-series and their liberal understanding of human gender and sexuality.

Male-to-Male Sexual Desire (Effeminate Gender and Gay Sexuality):

Male-to-Male sexual desire is portrayed every now and then in the drama-series. The most significant pair of characters in this regard is Prince Renly Baratheon and his friend (partner) Ser Loras Tyrell. Renly is the youngest brother to King Robert Baratheon. Almost all the high lords and ladies of Westeros talk about and mock their friendship and relationship. Not only the high society, but common people also whisper about their transgressive desire.

Martin's source texts do indeed provide multiple strong hints indicating a sexual dimension of the relationship between Renly and Loras, which the makers of the television series have clearly extrapolated into literal depictions of sexually charged contact between the pair. (Nel, 2015, p. 205)

Not only their sexual orientations are subversive, but their gender expressions as well. Renly and Loras both are considered effeminate by other characters. Their fine ways of behaviour and manners are some of the matters of concern which attract the attention of other characters as well as the audience. Both of them are quite concerned about their looks and fineries as compared to other male figures. This characteristic of their characters is often looked down upon and becomes a means / source of their mockery at the hands of others.

In Loras's case, however, despite Loras's widely acknowledged prowess at arms, his masculinity is rendered suspect by rumors about his sexuality, making him (in Cersei's eyes) "not the sort of man for any boy to emulate." The word "sort" is telling here, indicating that there is a group or "type" of man that Loras embodies, which is inferior to the dominant chivalric ideal, despite the fact that Loras is a more competent courtier and fighter than Robert's own sons. (Nel, 2015, p. 212)

Renly and Ser Loras' conversation, while the latter shaves the hair from former's chest, is interesting to know about their sexual preferences and about the behaviour and treatment of Renly's brothers to him.

Renly: *(as Loras puts lather on Renly's chest and starts shaving off the hair)* Are you sure this won't hurt?

Loras: Only if I slip.

Renly: And you'd prefer me like this?

Loras: Mm-hmm.

Renly: If you want hairless, maybe you should find a little boy.

Loras: *(firmly)* I want you.

Renly: My brother thinks that anyone who hasn't been to war isn't a man. He treats me as if I'm a spoiled child. Oh, and you're not? Loras Tyrell, the knight of the flowers? How many wars have you fought in? Oh,

and how much did your father spend on that armor of yours?

Loras: Hold still.

Renly: All I ever hear from Robert and Stannis is how I'm not tough enough, how I squirm at the sight of blood— (Benioff, Weiss, & Kirk, 2011, *The wolf and the lion*)

After Renly's death (murder), Loras feels dejected and despaired and in order to distract his attention from this pitiable situation he begins a relationship with Olyvar at King's Landing. Olyvar works as a procurer for Petyr Baelish's brothel. Olyvar's false testimony gets Loras arrested by the High Sparrow on the various charges against him. The High Sparrow arrests Loras on his inquest (trial) on a number of charges, "Do you deny all the charges against you? Fornication. Buggery. Blasphemy. . . . You never lay with Renly Baratheon? . . . Nor any other man?" (Cogman & Podeshwa, 2015, *Unbowed, unbent, unbroken*). This specific emphasis on Loras's homoerotic activities, by the High Sparrow, illustrates how the religious leaders (religious system) view and regard homoeroticism. More than other charges the High Sparrow particularly mentions and points out this one. Olyvar's testimony against Loras follows as, "He is Ser Loras Tyrell, heir to Highgarden. I squired for him. He took a liking to me. He summoned me to his chamber the first day we met. . . . We engaged in intimate relations. . . . That night and many others. . . . She (Queen Margery) walked in on us once not long ago. She didn't seem surprised" (Cogman & Podeshwa, 2015, *Unbowed, unbent, unbroken*). As the audience comes to know eventually that Olyvar is Petyr Baelish's spy who begins a relationship with Loras on Peter Baelish's command. Lord Baelish, on the other hand, does this on the command of Cersei Lannister. They all plan to get Loras imprisoned because House Tyrell becomes a threat to Cersei's autonomous power. Loras's same-sex desire is a threat to Cersei because she is to be married to him, but she uses this opportunity and employs the High Sparrow to charge and imprison Ser Loras Tyrell on this ground.

Through the case of Renly Baratheon, Ser Loras Tyrell and Olyvar, the social, political, and religious intolerance of subversive sexual desires are depicted in the drama-series. Law and religion both join hands when it comes to the matters of gender and sexuality. The High Sparrow exerts the power of religious doctrine and norms, and punishes Ser Loras for his transgressive desires.

Intolerance of gay people cannot for the most part be confused with medical treatment, as in the case of lepers or the insane, or with protective surveillance, as in the case of the deaf or, in some societies, women. Moreover, hostility to gay people provides singularly revealing examples of the confusion of religious beliefs with popular prejudice. Apprehension of this confusion is fundamental to understanding many kinds of intolerance, but it is not usually possible until either the prejudice or the religious beliefs have become so attenuated that it is difficult to imagine there was ever any integral connection between them. (Boswell, 1980, p. 6)

Similarly the drama-series also portrays how the society perceives these subversive sexual acts and desires. Those engaged in such desires become the target of mockery and humiliation irrespective of their social status and position.

Another important character with subversive sexual desire is the Dornish Prince Oberyn. Prince Oberyn also hires Olyvar for his services. In Dornish society and culture, they do not discriminate between male and female when it comes to sexual matters. That is what Prince Oberyn says to Olyvar when the latter asks, "You like them both the same? Boys and girls?" (Benioff, Weiss & Graves, 2014, *Breaker of chains*). Prince Oberyn replies in this way, "When it comes to war, I fight for Dorne. When it comes to love I don't choose sides" (Benioff et al. 2014).

Although Jon Snow and Samwell Tarly's friendship is devoid of any sexual contact between them, their close concern and affection for one another is also indicative of the male-to-male desire (not sexual but still a desire). Theirs is a 'homosocial' desire as in Eve Sedgwick's terminology, "To draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire", of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, is our society, is radically disrupted" (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 1-2). Male-to-male interconnections are considered the base of society, politics, and economy. Hence these interconnections often blur the boundaries between sexual and social relationships among men. That is why Sedgwick invents a new term—'homosocial'—to discuss such relations which are both sexual and social.

Female-to-Female Sexual Desire (Butch Gender and Lesbian Sexuality):

Yara Gerjory stands at the forefront when it comes to female subversive sexual desires. Not only Yara's sexual preferences, but her gender identity is also transgressive. Her masculine physical traits and her manly behaviour are quite evident from the very beginning. In a tavern and brothel, Yara expresses her desire in women when she tries to make love to one in front of her brother Theon (who is castrated by Ramsay Bolton). Yara said, "Now,

since it's my last night ashore for a long while, I'm gonna go fuck the tits off this one" (Cogman & Mylod, 2016, The broken man).

At Meereen, when Yara and Theon meet Daenerys Targaryen they inform her that their uncle Euron is coming to her with a marriage proposal along with his Iron Fleet. Theon tells her, "The Iron Fleet isn't all that he's bringing. He also wants to give you. . . (Benioff, Weiss, & Sapochnik, 2016, Battle of the bastards). Yara completes the sentence, "His big cock, I think he said. Euron's offer is also an offer of marriage, you see. You won't get one without the other" (Benioff et al. 2016). On Daenerys' asking whether their "offer is free of any marriage demands?" (Benioff et al. 2016) Yara replies, "I never demand, but I'm up for anything, really" (Benioff et al. 2016). Here Yara in / directly articulates and expresses her sexual desire in Daenerys (and women in general).

Similarly Ellaria Sand from Dorne expresses her bisexual interest in both men and women. Yara and Ellaria also show great interest in one another when they meet Daenerys Taragreyne at Dragonstone. When Yara's fleet takes Dornish army to King's Landing, on their way Yara and Ellaria grow close to one another. Ellaria tells Yara, "When we reach Sunspear, I'll treat you to a Dornish red. The best in the world. Have you ever been to Dorne?" (Cogman & Mylod, 2017, Stormborn). Yara replies, "A few times. Never stayed long" (Cogman & Mylod, 2017, Stormborn). Ellaria asks, "A boy in every port?" (Cogman & Mylod, 2017, Stormborn) to which Yara replies, "A boy, a girl. Depends on the port" (Cogman & Mylod, 2017, Stormborn) and this follows in a kissing scene between both of them, "The lesbian pairings represented by Martin and the TV series are particularly interesting here" (Nel, 2015, p. 206).

Brienne of Tarth, who serves as the Kingsguard to Renly Baratheon is another significant character who displays masculine gender behaviour despite her being a female. She is a fighter and does not like to be addressed as a lady. On the wedding of Joffrey and Margery, Cersei addresses Brienne as lady. When Brienne expresses her wishes not be addressed in that way Cersei tells her, "Lady Brienne. You're Lord Selwyn Tarth's daughter. That makes you a lady whether you want to be or not" (Martin & Graves, 2014, The lion and the rose). This example illustrates the imposition of social relations upon one's identity and gender. Likewise Arya Stark does not want to be considered a lady and shows great interests and fascination for fights and other masculine acts. When her father sees Arya with a sword, he tells her, "Little ladies shouldn't play with swords" (Benioff, Weiss, & Kirk, 2011, Lord Snow). Arya replies, "I wasn't playing. And I don't want to be a lady" (Benioff et al. 2011).

Arya also expresses her wish to be a lord of some castle and not to be a lady to any lord, when her father talks to her. She asks, "Can I be Lord of Holdfast?" (Cogman & Kirk, 2011, Cripples, bastards, and broken things). Her father replies, "You will marry a high lord and rule his castle. And your sons shall be knights and princes and lords. Hmm?" (Cogman & Kirk, 2011, Cripples, bastards, and broken things). Arya replies back, "No. That's not me" (Cogman & Kirk, 2011, Cripples, bastards, and broken things).

In this way, Brienne and Arya express masculine and butch gender roles despite their biologically female status. Whether their sexuality is also subversive or not, just like their gender roles, is still unknown because it does not get any expressions in the drama-series. But their characters break the taboos against the subversive gender roles and represent the masculine / butch identity throughout the series.

Eunuchs / Castrated Men and their Subversive Gender Expressions:

One of the most fascinating characters in the entire series is Lord Varys. His character displays subversive and mysterious gender behaviour and sexual desire (in terms that he does not feel any sexual desire at all). Lord Varys suffers castration at the hands of a priest to the Lord of Lights, as he tells to Lord Stark while sympathizing for Brandon Stark's fall, "I suffered an early mutilation myself. Some doors close forever. Others open in the most unexpected places" (Benioff, Weiss, & Kirk, 2011, The wolf and the lion). His strength lies in the wide network of spies which he employs throughout the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. He tells Lady Stark, "Knowledge is my trade, My Lady. . . . My little birds are everywhere. Even in the north. They whisper to me the strangest stories" (Benioff, Weiss, & Kirk, 2011, Lord Snow). His eunuch-status is often mocked by his fellow council members, especially Lord Baelish. This conversation between Lord Varys and Lord Baelish is very interesting and illuminating in this regard:

Lord Baelish: You look a bit lonely today. You should pay a visit to my brothel this evening. First boy is on the house.

Lord Varys: I think you're mistaking business with pleasure.

Lord Baelish: Am I? All those birds that whisper in your ear, such pretty little things. Trust me, we

accommodate all inclinations.

Lord Varys: Oh, I'm sure. Lord Redwyne likes his boys very young, I hear.

Lord Baelish: I'm a purveyor of beauty *and* discretion, both equally important.

Lord Varys: Though I suppose beauty is a subjective quality, no? Is it true that Ser Marlon of Tumblestone prefers amputees?

Lord Baelish: All desires are valid to man with a full purse.

Lord Varys: And I heard the most awful rumor about a certain lord with a taste for fresh cadavers. Must be enormously difficult to accommodate that inclination. The logistics alone to find beautiful corpses before they rot.

Lord Baelish: Strictly speaking, such a thing would not be in accordance with the King's laws.

Lord Varys: Strictly speaking.

Lord Baelish: Tell me –does someone somewhere keep your balls in a little box? I've often wondered.

Lord Varys: Do you know I have no idea where they are. And we had been so close. But enough about me. How have you been since we last saw each other? (Benioff, Weiss, & Kirk, 2011, *The wolf and the lion*)

Another interesting conversation between Lord Varys and Petyr Baelish, which takes place at the great hall of King's Landing in front of the Iron Thrones at which both of them were looking, is equally important in this regard where Lord Baelish mocks Varys's castration. This illustrates the common perception of castrated men in the society of Westeros:

Lord Varys: I must be one of the few men in this city who doesn't want to be King.

Lord Baelish: You must be one of the few men in the city who isn't a man.

Lord Varys: Oh, you can do better than that.

Lord Baelish: When they castrated you, did they take the pillar with the stones? I've always wondered?

Lord Varys: Have you? Do you spend a lot of time wondering what's between my legs?

Lord Baelish: I picture a gash like a woman's. Is that about right?

Lord Varys: I am flattered, of course, to be pictured at all.

Lord Baelish: Must be strange for you, even after all these year—a man from another land, despised by most, feared by all,

Lord Varys: Am I? That is good to know. Do you lie awake at night fearing my gash?

Lord Baelish: But you carry on, whispering in one King's ear, and then the next. I admire you.

Lord Varys: And I admire you, Lord Baelish. A grasper from a minor house with a major talent *for befriending powerful men*—and women. (Benioff, Weiss, & Taylor, 2011, *Fire and blood*)

Lord Varys tells the story of his castration to Tyrion Lannister when they become good friends. It becomes clear through this story that it is because of the religious institution of sacrifice and offering to the gods that Lord Varys suffers castration. That's why he extremely hates priests.

Lord Varys: I was going to tell you the story of how I was cut. Do you want to hear it still?

Tyrion: I don't know. Do I?

Lord Varys: As a boy, I travelled with a troupe of actors through the free cities. One day in Myr, a certain man made my master an offer too tempting to refuse. I feared the man meant to use me as I'd heard some men used small boys. But what he wanted was far worse. He gave me a potion that made me powerless to move or speak, yet did nothing to dull my senses. With a hooked blade he sliced me, root and stem, chanting all the while. He burned my parts in a brazier. The flames turned blue and I heard a voice answer his call. I still dream of that night. Not of the sorcerer, not of his blade. I dream of the voice from the flames. Was it a god? A demon? A conjuror's trick? I don't know. But the sorcerer called and a voice answered. And ever since that day, I have hated magic and all those who practice it. But you can see why I was eager to aid in your fight against Stannis and his red priestess. A symbolic revenge of sorts. (Benioff, Weiss, & Graves, 2013, *And now his watch is ended*)

Lord Varys's character is charming and fascinating not only because he is castrated and displays subversive gender role / behaviour, but his subversive sexual desire as well. The surprising thing to note about Lord Varys is that he has never felt sexual desire for either a boy or a girl. His conversation to Prince Oberyn proves this point.

Prince Obery: My paramour Ellaria, she would find you very interesting. You should come to the brothel and meet her. We brought our own wine, not the swill they serve here. We have some lovely boys on retainer, but. . . You did like boys before? (*Lord Varys shakes his head*). Really? Girls? Hmm. I hope you won't be offended when I say I never would have guessed.

Lord Varys: Not at all. But I was never interested in girls, either.

Prince Obery: What then?

Lord Varys: Nothing.

Prince Obery: Everybody is interested in something.

Lord Varys: Not me. When I see what desire does to people, what it's done to this country, I am very glad to have no part in it. Besides, the absence of desire leaves one free to pursue other things.

Prince Obery: Such as?

(*Lord Varys looks at the Iron Throne and so does Prince Obery following his lead*) (Cogman & Sakharov, 2014, The laws of gods and men)

Another important character who suffers the same sort of fate as Lord Varys is Theon Grejoy. Ramsay Bolton brutally and forcefully castrates Theon, just as Lord Varys has faced. After castration, Theon's character changes to a great extent. His transformation from Theon to Reek (the name which Ramsay gives him) is quite drastic. After the removal of his male parts, Theon's behaviour changes to a great extent. He becomes more submissive and weak. The earlier Theon is lost due to this transformation.

The army of Unsullied is a whole group of people who go through castration which is one of the conditions of their recruitment to the army. But here the castration does not result in submissiveness and weakness, on the contrary the Unsullied are the toughest and strongest fighters throughout the Seven Kingdoms. So the stereotype, that castrated men become weak, is deconstructed. They are castrated with the motive that they do not feel lust or any sexual desire which may bind them to women, families and hence to tender feelings. Their castration also disables them to rape the women of the places which they conquer. Without any ties to women, families, and relatives, the Unsullied souldiers become more ferocious, loyal, greedless, lustless, and profitable to Daenerys' motives and wishes. Ser Jorah Mormont explains to Daenerys how Unsullied would be best for her, "But the Unsullied are not men. They do not rape. They do not put cities to the sword unless they're ordered to do so. If you buy them, the only men they'll kill are those you want dead" (Benioff, Weiss & Benioff, 2013, Walk of punishment).

Incestuous and Other Subversive Male-to-Female Sexual Desires:

Not only the subversive homosexual relationships are presented in *Game of Thrones* but subversive forms of heterosexual affairs as well. The institution of prostitution and brothels find abundance recognition and acceptance in the world of *Game of Thrones*. Petyr Baelish establishes brothels throughout the King's Landing and rises from the lower class to the upper one with the income of these brothels. Mostly the prostitutes come from the lower classes of society. Young girls have to sell their bodies for the entertainment of all –high lords, knights, squires, soldiers, and peasants as well. The character-development of Ros, who is one of the important prostitutes, is closely followed in the drama-series.

Incestuous desire in almost all its forms –father-daughter, brother-sister, etc. –is expressed and represented in the series, "There are, of course, other examples of alternative sexualities in Martin's novels as well as in *Game of Thrones* including incest (between Jaime and Cersei) and polyamory (Elia Martell) (*GoT* 9 Bran 2: 70–71; *SoS* 39 Tyrion 5: 433) which offer a counterpoint to Renly and Loras's affair" (Nel, 2015, p. 206). The incestuous desire between father-daughters is represented through the character of Craster, as Dolorous Edd tells Jon Snow and Samwell Tarly when they went there.

Samwell: (nodding towards the girls at Craster's place) Are those girls?

Dolorous Edd: Craster's daughters.

Samwell: I haven't seen a girl in six months.

Dolorous Edd: I'd keep on not seeing them if I were you.

Grenn: What, he don't like people messing with his daughters?

Dolorous Edd: He don't like people messing with his wives. He marries his daughters, and they give him more daughters. And on and on it goes.

Samwell: That's foul.

Grenn: It's beyond foul.

Dolorous Edd: All the other wildlings for a hundred leagues disappeared. Craster's still here. He must be

doing something right.

Jon Snow: What happens to the boys?

Samwell: Hmm?

Jon Snow: He marries his daughters. What does he do with his sons? (Benioff, Weiss, & Taylor, 2012, The North remembers)

Craster's character is that of a taboo breaker as he does not acknowledge the taboo against incest and infanticide (as he lets his male children die). But at the same time, he expresses and represents subversive desire. Incestuous relationships are unacceptable in the mainstream societies, but beyond The Wall the norms of the Seven Kingdoms do not hold much support.

In his incest and infanticide, then, Craster appears not only other—judged beyond the pale by the black brothers even Martin has dubbed “a bunch of scum” (Ippolito)—but in league with the Others; his lordship seems to set him at odds with the mores and the very survival of Westeros. What's more, he would seem to fill this role of taboo- breaker and unholy lord insofar as he exists beyond, or even prior to, the foundational prohibitions of civilization itself. (DeCoste, 2015, p. 229)

Brother-sister incestuous desire, on the other hand, is represented by Targaryen dynasty that follows the tradition of wedding brothers and sisters in order to keep the bloodline pure. But in the case of Cersei and Jamie Lannister, it is not the bloodline which matters, but their mutual attraction and affection for one another. When Lord Stark questions Cersei for her relationship with her brother Jamie, she uses Targaryen tradition to justify her relationship with Jamie, “Targaryens wed brothers and sisters for 300 years to keep bloodlines pure. Jamie and I are more than brother and sister. We shared a womb. Came to this world together, we belong together” (Benioff, Weiss, & Minahan, 2011, You win or you die).

In the eighth episode of season fifth, Jamie articulates his love and desire for Cersei to Lord Edmure Tully who was his hostage, while attacking the Riverrun, “I love Cersei. You can laugh at that if you want. You can sneer. Doesn't matter. She needs me. And to get back to her, I need to take Riverrun. I'll send for your baby boy. And I'll launch him into Riverrun with a catapult. Because you don't matter to me, Lord Edmure. Your son doesn't matter to me. The people in the castle don't matter to me. Only Cersei. And if I have to slaughter who ever lived to get back to her, that's what I'll do” (Benioff, Weiss, & Mylod, 2016, No one).

When Jamie brings back the dead body of Myrcella, Cersei feels dejected and torn apart. She suffers through a nervous breakdown. In order to console her, Jamie gives expression to their love and affection.

Cersei: You told me yourself when father died. You said we had to stay together. You said people would try to tear us apart, take what's ours. That was a prophecy, too. I didn't listen to you and everything you said came true.

Jamie: Fuck prophecy. Fuck fate. Fuck everyone who isn't us. We're the only ones who matter, the only ones in this world. And everything they've taken from us, we're going to take back and more. We're going to take everything there is. (Benioff, Weiss, & Podeshwa, 2016, The red woman)

There is another scene, when Cersei returns from the dungeon of the Sept of Baelor, where she gets imprisoned by the High Sparrow, she tells Jamie that they both will destroy their enemies because they both are the two people who matter, “We've always been together. We'll always be together. We're the only two people in the world” (Cogman & Bender, 2016, Blood of my blood). Both these scenes are followed by intimate sexual contact between both of them.

When Brienne states that she is not interested in “foul rumours,” Jaime is uncharacteristically compassionate, stating: “I don't blame him, and I don't blame you either. We don't get to choose who we love.” He seems here to be comparing Brienne's love for Renly to his own incestuous relationship with his twin sister Cersei, and perhaps even Renly's sexuality to his own incest. (Nel, 2015, p. 213)

Sadomasochistic Desires:

The expression and representation of sadistic and masochistic desires are displayed by different characters throughout the series. The Mad King Aerys II Targaryen rejoices in burning the people alive. Cersei Lannister and her eldest son Joffrey Baratheon both love to torture people. The sadistic ways to gratify their desire (sexual or otherwise) is quite remarkable feature of their characters. Joffrey loves to torment animals and people. When Tyrion sends two whores to Joffrey's chamber to distract his attention from his wild sadistic ways, Joffrey makes one of the whore torture the other in the most fatal ways.

Joffrey: (to Ros) Could you hit her? (Ros starts hitting the other one softly on the back). My uncle sent you?
 Ros: Yes, Your Grace. He choose us himself.
 Joffrey: Hmm. (Removing his leather belt and handing it over to Ros). Use this. (Ros starts hitting the other one with the belt). Harder. I said harder. He'd want me to get his money's worth. (Joffrey hands over a club / cudgel to Ros to use for penetrating the other one).
 Ros: Your Grace, too much pain will spoil the pleasure.
 The Other Whore: Please, please, please, Your Grace.
 Ros: Your Grace, if your Uncle finds out—
 Joffrey: Oh, I want him to find out. You will bring her to his chamber when you're finished and show him what you've done. Or the same thing will happen to you. Begin. (When Ros thrusts the club inside the other whore). Harder. (Taylor & Petrarca, 2012, Garden of bones)

When Lady Olenna and Margaery invite Sansa for dining with them and in order to investigate whether Joffrey is a nice person, Sansa tells them, "He's a monster" (Taylor & Minahan, 2013, Dark wings, dark words). Margaery also acknowledges Renly's homoerotic and Joffrey's sadistic desires after his death when she says to her grandmother, "One of my husbands preferred the company of men and was stabbed through the heart. Another was happiest torturing animals and was poisoned at our wedding feast" (Benioff, Weiss & Graves, 2014, Breaker of chains).

Another important character with sadistic desire is Ramsay Bolton. He also loves to torture and torment others. The way he tortures Theon Grejoy and ultimately castrates him is one of the vilest things he did. Not only that, he also loves watching his dogs (hounds) tearing apart the people he wants them to. He throws his step mother, along with her baby boy, in front of his hounds after killing his father.

Ser Meryn Trant is another figure whose pedophilia and sadistic sexual desire get manifested when he visits the free city of Braavos in the ninth and tenth episodes of season fifth. He visits a brothel and asks for the youngest girls available. He brutally whips the young girls and derives pleasure from their pain and endurance. He particularly likes those girls who exhibit masochistic tolerance power as happens in the case of Arya when she visits him in disguised form. Although Arya displays masochistic tendencies while she goes through a lot of troubles and turmoil, especially her treatment at The House of Black and White in Braavos where she gets beaten, thrashed, and stroked harshly and hardly, but she does not endure them because she likes it. It becomes just a part of her training and not a pleasure in its own.

CONCLUSION:

In this way the drama-series *Game of Thrones* represents alternative gender roles and sexual desires through different characters. The representation of such desires, which are considered perverse and subversive, provides the audience an opportunity to know about such desires and roles closely. The most normal considered persons sometimes display quite strange and abnormal desires. There exist diverse desires and modes of attaining pleasure and gratification not only in same-sex (homosexual) relationships, but also in opposite-sex (heterosexual) ones. The recognition and acceptance of diverse forms of sexual pleasure and gratification in the world of *Game of Thrones* is a remarkable feature of the drama-series. It not only represents the different gender roles and sexual orientations, but also how these roles, expressions, and orientations are looked upon by society, political system, law, and religion. Social norms are mostly formulated and manipulated by religious institutions or the institution of law and politics. Whereas the law and politics are the puppets in the hands of Kings, Queens, High Lords and Ladies, the religious system is autonomous to some extent. That is what one can observe in the case of High Sparrow and his Militant faith—a revival of old system where religious leaders take the commands of law and justice in their hands. Neither the law and political, nor the religious system show any mercy and soft corner to the diverse gender and sexual expressions.

Thankfully, the drama-series represents alternative gender roles and sexual desires through such characters who are almost devoid of any extreme ill-will and other vices. Renly and Loras both are kind, honest, considerate, and sensible persons. They never show any sign of cruelty as compared to the other characters of the series. Similarly Yara, Ellaria, Brienne, and Arya fight for justice and honour. Lord Varys has devoted his life for the welfare of the realm. What he tries to do is to provide a better ruler to the Seven Kingdoms so that the poor and the downtrodden may live a peaceful life. Daenerys Targaryen utilizes the army of Unsullied to restore peace and justice, to abolish slavery and for other social reforms in Astapor, Yunkai, and Meereen. Theon Grejoy also fights for justice and repents for his wrongdoings.

When these characters and their roles (motives) are compared to other characters of the series, it becomes quite

clear that the vision of the producers and directors of the series is to represent such gender and sexual roles in neutral terms. Some characters with alternative and subversive gender roles and sexual orientations are portrayed in positive ways such as Renly, Loras, Yara, Brienne, Arya, Varys, Theon and the Unsullied army, others in negative ways like Ellaria Sand, Meryn Trant and Craster. These characters are just like others. Their gender roles and sexual orientations do not determine their characters, nature, and personality altogether. Gender expressions and sexual preferences are represented to be a personal matter of one's choices. Overall, the drama-series provide a good stage where almost all the issues of our society, culture, politics, and civilization are touched upon including the burning issue of diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations.

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