

Gender Performativity: A Study of Elizabeth's Gender Identity in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*

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Abstract: Judith Butler's "Gender performativity" starts with the deconstruction of subjectivity and denies the certainty of gender identity, and then believes that gender identity is in a state of floating flow through repeated performances. In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, a mash-up novel adapted from *Pride and Prejudice* by American screenwriter Graham Smith in 2009, the gender identity of the heroine Elizabeth is not given a static "cultural marker", but is in the process of continuous construction. Under the guide of Butler's "Gender performativity", this paper analyzes Elizabeth's performance of femininity and masculinity, and then discusses the significance of this unstable gender identity to dissolving the traditional gender norms in the patriarchal culture, so as to explore more diversified individual survival value of women.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie with a human brain needs more human brains." [6] *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* opens with a bloody scene of zombies eating human bones. Unlike in Austen's book, Mr Bennet's five daughters have become fearless warriors in the zombie outbreak, defending the countryside with their own martial arts. The postmodern mashup was No. 3 on the *New York Times* bestseller list within a week of its publication. The fusion of classics with modern pop culture fiction has thus become one of the biggest literary trends of recent years.

In recent years, this novel has attracted more and more scholars to interpret it from different angles because of its subversive nature. Chen Yuehua(2103) pointed out that "hybrid novels" such as *Zombies* are essentially the products of postmodernism. She believes that "as a dynamic trend, mashup fiction will continue to attract more and more research from different disciplines such as literary criticism and cultural sociology"[4]. Erliska(2017) used the Marxist feminist theory to analyze *The Devil Wears Prada* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. By studying how power carries out gender oppression, she pointed out that power, gender oppression and women's liberation are interrelated aspects. In addition, Soelistyarini and Ramadhanty's (2018) illustration analysis of the novel shows that the interaction of images and words gives readers a clearer understanding of how Elizabeth is materialized as a major female character. However, the research on *Zombies* mainly focuses on the perspectives of feminism, image narrative and hybrid genre, and the analysis of Elizabeth's gender identity in the novel is still very few. Therefore, this paper takes Elizabeth, the heroine of *Zombies*, as an example, analyzes the femininity and masculinity in her gender performance basing on Butler's gender performativity theory, and then discusses the

important significance of this non-solidified gender identity for eliminating the binary gender norms in the traditional patriarchal culture, and explores women's more diversified individual survival values.

1. Judith Butler and “Gender Performativity” Theory

Feminism and post-structuralism point out that gender is constructive, thus forming its characteristics of openness and uncertainty. This idea is illustrated in detail in Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Judith Butler is one of the representative figures of post-feminism. She is a pioneer of gender social constructivism. Her most famous works are *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993). In her works, she challenges the traditional concept of gender and expounds her gender performance theory. In *Gender Trouble*, she pointed out that the identities and categories that constitute “women” are neither physiological nor natural, but are generated and reproduced through discourse construction, performance and under the domination of cultural and social heterosexual requirements. This view differs from the traditional distinction between the word “sex”, which refers to the natural, biological differences between biological males and females, and “gender”, which refers to socially and culturally constructed patterns of femininity and masculinity that are related to biological sex, and concretized into the categories of “men” and “women”.

Butler argues that gender is “performative”—it is not born, but can be acted out. Butler argues that our definitions of masculinity and femininity are constructed, not innate. More controversially, however, Butler adds that our understanding of the biological differences between men and women is also socially constructed. There is no simple natural body, and the concept of “body” in our minds is the result of repeated forced references to social norms. That is, gender as a set of social norms creates the so-called subject through performance. Gender, performance and body are complementary, they are theoretically differentiated, a flow process of self-creation. Butler's theory of gender performance has had a significant impact on the development of queer theory, gender theory, and feminist criticism.

2. Performing Femininity

Beauvoir launched a series of discussions on sex and gender with her famous view that “woman is not to be born, but to become”^[1]. According to constructivism, human growth is a very complex process, due to genetic and environmental influences, gender is acquired through the construction of society. A person is not born or destined to become a man or a woman, it is the product of social interaction, with the passage of time and cultural change. As a female living in a patriarchal society, Elizabeth's thoughts are inevitably influenced and controlled by the patriarchal culture. In this environment, she passively performed the traditional female image in the patriarchal society.

First, Elizabeth cared deeply about what men said about her in social situations. When she heard Mr. Darcy say “she is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me”^[7], she felt “her blood turn cold.” Obviously, she is devastated and upset by the young man's comments about her. Later, when she knows that her old sister Jane is hurt and very unwell, she decides to go to Netherfield alone to take care of her. However, in face of unknown dangers and the attack of zombies on the road, she arms only with her ankle daggers. “Muskets and Katana swords are more effective means of protecting one's self, but they are considered unladylike; and, having no saddle in which to conceal them”^[7], she then yields to modesty. When she chooses the former between “be ladylike” and security, we can find that Elizabeth also sees herself as the object of the male gaze, and she is also deeply influenced by the patriarchal culture.

At the same time, as a woman, Elizabeth's "internalized misogyny" also shows her solidified femininity. Internalized misogyny is the behavior of women who demean women and accept gender bias in order to support men. Elizabeth "could not help rolling her eyes" and "yawning distinctly"^[5] when she heard her sister Mary ranting about "the difference between pride and vanity" at a party. Much as she admired Mary's gallantry in battle, she had always found her a little dull on such easy occasions. By commenting on Mary, Elizabeth places herself in the opposite of femininity and praises masculinity. Her statement shows the nature of "internalized misogyny".

Secondly, Elizabeth's femininity is also reflected incisively and vividly in the process of getting along with her sister Jane. Jane was the most beautiful, kindest and gentlest of the five sisters. As the closest of the sisters to Elizabeth, Jane had a profound influence on Elizabeth. Under the influence of Jane, kindness becomes the femininity of Elizabeth. On the one hand, she is kind and cares for her sister. On receiving the news of Jane's illness, Elizabeth was very anxious and went to Netherfield alone to take care of Jane. When she found Jane was still very poorly, she "would not quit her at all, till late in the evening, when she had the comfort of seeing her sleep."^[7] Obviously, she fears for Jane's health more than for her own safety. On the other hand, Elizabeth also becomes gentle and kind under Jane's persuasion. On their way to Meryton, they encounter a group of zombies, which the sisters quickly eliminate with accurate marksmanship. However, they hesitated when they saw "a long-dead female zombie stumbling out of the woods"^[7] with a baby still in her arms. Jane convinces Elizabeth to leave them alone because it is only a baby, but Elizabeth insists on her warrior creed: "A zombie baby -- no more alive than this musket in my hand."^[7] Incredibly, however, Elizabeth finally gave up on killing the female zombie and her baby. She felt "a wonderful force at work, and she vaguely remembered it from her childhood before she first went to Shaolin. It was a strange feeling; something close to shame, but not the shame of failure -- a sense of shame without the need for revenge."^[9] In fact, this is not a shame, but her heart pity. Despite Elizabeth's efforts to maintain her sense of reason and warrior creed, she is never able to overcome the inherent goodness and kindness in her heart. This is her quality as a woman, and it is also the embodiment of her femininity.

In addition, although Elizabeth describes herself as "the defender of Longbourn and the heroine of Hertfordshire"^[8], this lively and cheerful young girl still kept the vision of love in her heart. In the patriarchal society, there is something magical about love, and a man of prestige who knows how to please women will arouse passionate attachment. The women admired by those men will feel that they have become priceless. Like most girls, Elizabeth felt that "she was the proudest of all the ladies"^[7] because Wickham had chosen to sit beside her. She is shy and nervous when it comes to the men she is attracted to.

What's more, Elizabeth is depicted as a woman influenced by the traditional patriarchal view of marriage and love. In patriarchal cultures, the word "love" never means the same thing to men and women. As de Beauvoir expresses in *The Second Sex*: "A man is first a citizen, a producer, and then a husband; A woman is first a wife, and only a wife."^[1] In other words, the woman will regard her husband as the supreme value and reality, she will be reduced to nothing before him, and love will become a religion for her. Elizabeth is moved by Wickham, and gradually takes attracting his attention as her motivation for action. As soon as she entered Netherfield, she looked for Mr. Wickham among the assembled English soldiers. She was so eager to meet him that "she dressed more carefully than usual, fully expecting to conquer his heart, and convinced that the goal would be accomplished tonight."^[7] Girls influenced by the patriarchal view of marriage and love will be attracted to the light of men. In their eyes, the value of men is reflected in physical strength, wealth, cultivation, wisdom, authority, social status, and even a military uniform, as Elizabeth did. In fact, they are attracted not by the military uniform, but by the masculinity of men. As Beauvoir puts it, "Girls firstly want to identify with men; Later they gave up that hope and found a man among them

with whom they fell in love and shared their masculinity.”^[1]

3. Performing Masculinity

As Fry puts it, girls “have the freedom to transcend traditional gender roles” and “have the right to break traditional female stereotypes”^[6]. Elizabeth’s appearance, language and behavior also show obvious masculinity.

To some extent, a person’s external image reflects his/her age, interests, tastes, occupation and even personality traits. Elizabeth’s subversive external image is mainly reflected in her physical features, which distinguishes her from other women and makes her an independent and free image. Darcy was deeply impressed by his first encounter with Elizabeth. He described Elizabeth as follows: “She was not pretty”, but he found “her black eyes very attractive, and her skill in swordsmanship so excellent that her whole face showed extraordinary intelligence.”^[7] Although he found her figure unsatisfactory, he had to admit that she was light and her arm muscles were surprisingly strong. Clearly, Elizabeth’s strong physique was contrary to the traditions imposed on women by the patriarchal society.

At the same time, Elizabeth’s decision to walk three miles alone to Netherfield to take care of her sister Jane, despite the zombies, breaks the patriarchal society’s expectations and requirements for female. Upon arrival at Netherfield, “she was ushered into the breakfast room, where everyone was gathered except Jane, and her appearance really surprised everyone”^[7]. The conversation between Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst proves how strange and astonishing Elizabeth seemed to them:

“In a word, she is good for nothing, except that she is well trained in fighting. I shall never forget how she looked this morning. She looked like a savage.”

“Yes, Louisa. Why should she have to run around at such a dangerous time when her sister has a cold? Look at her hair, untidy and untidy!”

“Yes, and her petticoat; Did you see her petticoat? I'm sure the mud on it was six feet high, and still has a piece of zombie meat on it.”

From the perspective of feminism, the dialogue between Caroline and Mrs. Hurst reflects the “normal” image that women should present in the patriarchal society at that time. Butler’s performative theory states that gender as a social norm creates subjectivity through performance. Therefore, the norms, performance, and subjectivity are intertwined and interact with each other. Can gender be acted out by dress? The answer is yes. Men and women tend to dress in different but specific styles and colors, based not on basic demands on our bodies but on socially constructed gender norms. Society expects women to dress neatly, elegant and attractive, and Elizabeth came to Netherfield with an almost “wild” image. In fact, she challenged traditional gender norms through her performance.

Secondly, Elizabeth’s most obvious masculinity is her courage and excellent martial arts. In the novel, Elizabeth always refers to herself as “a warrior”, and her father even calls her “my best warrior”. In fact, names or labels play a crucial role in social gender construction because “naming is both a boundary setting and a norm inculcation”^[3], which Butler demonstrates with the concept of “inquiry”. Elizabeth, who is labeled as a warrior, blurs her gender identity as a woman. The best proof of her bravery is that she has fought many battles against zombies like a warrior. For example, when Elizabeth encountered a zombie on her way to Netherfield, she reached for her short sword as fast as she can and succeeded in defeating three by herself. “She kicked him right in the head, and there was a splash of crumbly skin and bone.”^[2] Finally, “she took her dagger, cut off the head of her last opponent, held it in her hand by the hair, and sent out a roar of triumph that echoed for a mile around.”^[7] The male-centered patriarchal culture believes that war is the domain of men but

not for women. Elizabeth subverts traditional gender norms with her great martial arts and great courage. By performing valiantly physically, Elizabeth breaks the traditional association between masculinity and bravery, and reveals her masculinity.

In addition, Elizabeth's struggle for the autonomy of marriage is the concentrated embodiment of her masculinity, but also a strong resistance to the patriarchal concept of marriage and love. "Marriage has always been a completely different thing for men and women. As we see, women have never formed a hierarchy, exchanging and contracting equally with the male hierarchy."^[1] In the patriarchal society, women's freedom of choice in marriage has been greatly restricted, and marriage has become the reason for their existence. They are forced to accept the marriage contract arranged by their parents, as if marriage is the only way for them to live a happy and stable life. "Girls seem to be absolutely passive under such circumstances."^[1] As a woman living in the patriarchal society, Elizabeth also faced the trouble of being arranged by her mother to marry. However, she has struggled for her marital autonomy.

When Elizabeth's engagement with Darcy is blocked by Lady Catherine, she defies the threat and fights with Lady Catherine to defend her marriage autonomy. Lady Catherine warns Elizabeth to give up her engagement to Mr. Darcy, because she does not think Elizabeth is worthy of her nephew, Mr. Darcy, either in position or wealth. However, Elizabeth is not timorous in the face of Lady Catherine's threat. "If there is no other objection to my marrying your nephew," ^[7] she replied firmly, "I shall not give it up because I know that his mother and aunt wish him to marry Miss de Bourgh."^[7] After a few minutes of fighting, Elizabeth won. Then she said, "For the rest of your life, you will remember that you were beaten by a girl you despised." In fact, Elizabeth's duel with Lady Catherine is also her duel with the patriarchal concept of marriage and love. Her victory gives her the right to marry whom she likes, rather than being forced to comply with an engagement arranged by her mother. Elizabeth's performance also makes Darcy more admire her, which means the true sense of the autonomy of marriage.

4. The Significance of Elizabeth's Gender Performativity

Although Elizabeth's character is not perfect at beginning, she gradually becomes perfect because of her own experience and the help of others. Elizabeth is a woman of strong will. This is one of her strengths, but at the same time, she is aggressive, abrupt, and impulsive. Masculinity account for a large proportion of her personality. Experience is a good teacher, and she can learn from it. She absorbs some female traits such as consideration, gentleness, and patience. These feminine characteristics help her to improve her personality.

Besides, the patriarchal society forms the tradition conception for women that obeying their male leadership completely, and relying their whole lives on men are a kind of life principle. Therefore, in Elizabeth's life, she is clearly aware of this cruel fact but she never gives in to this difficult situation. Elizabeth autonomously chooses her own husband based on love, from which she overturns the passive position of women on marriage in patriarchal society. As a representative of a rebellious and indomitable image during the patriarchal society, her attitude towards the oppression of sex are easily read out through the novel. Facing with the marriage arranged by her mother, her rebellious spirit and courage are clearly and vividly displayed to the readers.

According to Woolf, the ideal gender identity for human being is androgyny, because it eliminates the spiritual differences between men and women. Elizabeth's androgynous characteristics, especially the masculine part, make her an independent and complete character. Therefore, it can be said that Elizabeth made efforts to dissolve the gender norms of the patriarchal society, and she has complete the construction of androgyny.

What's more, Judith Butler overthrows the traditional idea of gender in *Gender Trouble* by

proffering that gender does not describes something that is rather it refers to a process, a series of acts. Gender, no longer expressed as a being by Elizabeth, but is denaturalized as the repeated stylization of body, a series of repeated acts within a highly regulatory structure that congeal over time to make gender the appearance of a natural of being. By rethinking gender in the way of gender performativity, the opportunity of blurring the so-called gender boundary is made theoretically and practically possible by Elizabeth's repeated gendered acts. Moreover, the understanding and construction of multiple gender identities can be enhanced by underpinning our gender-doings to the Butler's interpretation of gender.

By rethinking gender as a series of process rather than a being fixed by one's sex, people can actually be freed from the mindset in which they are born to be men or women. Those conceptions of so-called "real men" and "real women" will thus be collapsed. The violence of gender norms is felt not only by Elizabeth. People in patriarchal society are all trying to gain their cultural intelligibility by obeying rules made by heterosexual matrix in which sex, gender and desire are naturalized into a causal relation. Under this circumstance, some have been excluded and oppressed by this heterosexual society in which gender has been so taken for granted at the same time that it has been violently policed for their illegitimate and illegible genders. However, with the great help of gender performativity, Elizabeth realizes the construction of androgynous identity, dissolving the antagonistic relationship between men and women to a certain extent, and providing the possibility for the construction of diverse gender identity.

5. Conclusion

Elizabeth's performance of femininity and masculinity in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* confirms Judith Butler's view that "gender is constructive". Elizabeth, who is both male and female, has become a "female model" in the patriarchal society and has lived out her own life value. In order to preserve gender integrity, all people, regardless of whether they are biologically female or male, should be both feminine and masculine. Sex and gender are socially constructed, as are femininity and masculinity. Therefore, it is up to us to break traditional gender norms and complete the construction and reconstruction of gender identity. It has made it possible for thousands of people with "gender troubles" to make peace with themselves, like Elizabeth Bennet, a girl who doesn't care about getting dirt on her clothes.

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