

Kimberly Feher

Dr. King

English 6650

7 December 2016

### Stark Trauma: How Loss Leads to Maturation for Arya Stark

Anyone who watches the HBO show *Game of Thrones* would probably openly scoff at the idea that it is actually a coming-of-age story, and I can't blame them. The showrunners, David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, have taken George R.R. Martin's saga of Westeros and sexed it up, bloodied it up, and overall created what any viewer expects of an HBO show, yet the skeleton of Martin's fantasy series is a traditional *bildungsroman* that follows Arya Stark, from childhood to adulthood. Eric Tribunella analyzes the path to maturation through trauma in his book *Melancholia and Maturation*. He argues that the common narrative for youth entails "the loss of [a] loved object, and his or her subsequent maturation through the experience of loving and losing it" (Tribunella xi). In Tribunella's book, he defines maturation as embodying the characteristics of sobriety (seriousness) [and] responsibility (having good judgement)" (xxi-xxii). I will be using Tribunella's theory to analyze Arya Stark's experiences of trauma through her childhood and extrapolate if she will gain maturation after her tribulations are done or if she will give in to her childish impulses and fall victim to George R.R. Martin's scythe.

Arya begins her journey in Winterfell as a slightly sulky, innocent young Lady in Training who would rather learn swordsmanship than to sew. George. R. R. Martin introduces

Arya's struggle with identity immediately. Martin illustrates Arya's distaste with gender norms expected of a high born lady by giving voice to her inner thoughts: "It wasn't fair . . . It hurt that the one thing Arya could do better than her sister was ride a horse" (*Game* 71). Arya lashes out at her older sister because she feels unable to meet the expectations that her parents have for her. She is not a natural seamstress, poet, linguist, musician, or dancer, and her insecurity leads her to vehement anger and resentment. Arya lashes out when Sansa—her sister—draws attention to her crooked stitches, yet she does so out of the her want to be herself instead of her need to fit in. Arya thirsts for empowerment to become her own woman, yet it is not until the end of her traumatic journey that she realizes that empowerment comes from within.

Arya's identity crisis is the first instance of trauma in her life. She experiences trauma in the form of judgment from her sister, Septa Mordane, Arya's teacher and nurse, and Catlyn Stark, Arya's mother, who all consider Arya's behavior characteristics to be improperly gendered. Yet her desire to become her own woman outweighs the need to conform to traditional gender roles and leaves her with frustration and anxieties. Tribunella discusses the trauma associated with "(im)proper gender and sexuality" (19). In Arya's case, her inverted gender norms cause tension between herself and the ladies in her family because of her refusal to conform. Her nonconformity eventually leads to the murder of her friend Mycah and the loss of her direwolf, Nymeria. Arya's emotional reaction to these losses errs on the side of anger and thirst for vengeance instead of guilt which is the emotion "central to the operation of the conscience and the making of a mature adult" (Tribunella 21). Though the losses and subsequent emotional reactions lead Arya to some of the changes specified in Tribunella's maturation theory, most notably sobriety, she has not yet experienced true melancholia.