
Gender Roles In Literature

Gender roles determine the way males and females think, interact, speak and dress within the context of society. Examples include how men are meant to work and provide a stable income for their families, meanwhile women are meant to raise kids and do household chores such as the cooking and cleaning. The incorporation of gender roles in today's contemporary society can be seen in many different forms, such as literature. For instance, the tragic story of two star-crossed lovers referring to Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare as well as a famous poem by Maria Jastrzebska called "Warrior Woman". By using gender roles, Romeo and Juliet can advance the plot and the poem "Warrior Woman" can focus on the theme of the empowerment of women.

The first way these pieces of literature advance the plot and focus on the empowerment of women is through the characters actions. In Romeo and Juliet, the character who challenged gender roles the most is Juliet. She does so, by disobeying her father. In the play, Lord Capulet decided that she would marry Paris, however she refuses to because first of all, she was already married to Romeo and also because she doesn't even love him. She is clearly challenging gender roles here since it wasn't normal for women to go against their fathers wishes and stand up for themselves. This advances the plot since after being forced to marry Paris, she goes to Friar Lawrence to seek advice and this is when she is given the potion to look dead so that she would not have to go through with the marriage. Similarly, relating back to "Warrior Woman", gender roles are defied by the writer except this time, to focus on the empowerment of women, a major theme. Although gender roles state that women should stay relatively quiet and do as they're told, in this poem to challenge them, the writer does the opposite. She lets her voice out and stands up for not only her, but every woman alive. She writes about how she has previously been treated unfairly and how that is going to stop. This relates to the empowerment of women since Jastrzebska is writing this poem so that she can raise awareness about this subject and so that she can get other women to do the same as her.

Next, because these people are not following traditional gender roles, there are many repercussions, for example the reactions of the community and society. Like previously stated, Juliet decides to go against her father's wishes of marrying Paris. He was extremely angry because this had never really been done before by women during that time period. He yelled, cursed at her and threatened to disown her. Since she is supposed to follow Capulet's orders, and she does the opposite, she is clearly defying traditional gender roles. Capulet's reaction to Juliet helps to advance the plot because later Juliet decides to ask Nurse what she should. Instead of being on Juliet's side, this time she says to marry Paris instead. This was a major turning point in the story since Juliet did not expect Nurse to go against her wishes. She was by her side her whole life, but this time Juliet was let down. In the poem, "Warrior Woman", the idea of gender roles and society's reactions is pretty clear. The writer of the poem specifically mentions two kinds of people. She mentions "the men in grey suits" referring to businessmen who do not believe a woman can do as good of a job as them as well as, "the ones in white coats who don't even believe I exist" referring to doctors who test medicine on men even when it is meant for women. It is clear that the author is saying that men do not believe in women and what they are capable of. They think that women are not as good as them or sometimes do not even notice them because they are not as important. This poem and society's reactions to it

help focus on the empowerment of women since these reactions are what help women to fight for equality. This being something that still happens to this day is what is pushing women to continue standing up for their rights and empowering themselves and others to do the same.

Finally, gender roles in both pieces of literature help to either advance the plot or focus on the empowerment of women through the style of literature or diction. *Romeo and Juliet* is written in early modern English, meaning that it is a very old story. That is why even though Juliet is challenging the female gender role, Shakespeare cannot make it as obvious. It would be a very anachronistic idea to make it extremely obvious that she was doing so. Although Capulet clearly has a reaction to Juliet's actions, it is not clear that what she's doing is what she's doing. This idea of Juliet breaking gender roles came from people that recently read the play, in specific, most likely a feminist and their view on it. However, with that being said, even though it was only recently discovered that Juliet was doing this, the way it is portrayed in the play is still very strong. This idea of Juliet breaking gender roles is most likely alien to Shakespeare. At the same time, "Warrior Woman" delivers the theme of the empowerment of women by using gender roles and it is delivered strongly with the use of first person. The usage of first person in this poem makes it so powerful since the author adds her own personal feelings and experiences to help empower other women. She tries to be relatable to other so that they can unite to end the concept of gender roles.

To conclude, gender roles are used in both pieces of literature, *Romeo and Juliet* and "Warrior Woman". The concept of gender roles should not even be existent since in this day and age, no women should need to act the way their gender roles determine them to.