



Gender Performativity in Tui T. Sutherland's *Runaway*

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ABSTRACT

This article applies Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity to Tui T. Sutherland's *Runaway*. This article will analyze how female character show gender roles. Butler argues that gender is produced by "repeated acts" rather than received naturally. This article show that Foeslayer, and other female characters repeatedly perform gender performativity, showing how they are subverting the traditional female characteristics. Using qualitative method and close reading, this article identifies multiple passages, utterance, thoughts that represent gender performativity happening. The findings of this article suggest that *Runaway* portrays female as an active female, unlike the typical female stereotypes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Judith Butler argues that gender are not naturally generated, but instead it's a result of a repeated social act, Butler said that gender is a "stylized repetition of acts" that over time "produce the appearance of substance" (Butler, 1999). This mean that no one is just born "male" or "female", instead gender is gotten through repeated behaviour.

Runaway from Tui T. Sutherland shows female characters (Foeslayer, Diamond, Snowflake, etc.) in an act that challenges the typical female stereotyping. *Runaway* follows a female Nightwings, Foeslayer. She is in a diplomatic visit to the Icewings. But when there, she fell in love with the Icewings prince, Arctic. Their love grows fast, but that means their relationship now is threaten by outside circumstances. But despite that, Foeslayer didn't back down, instead she stands up against the backlash and lead everyone to run, determined to live with Arctic, no matter what.

Analysis on children's and young adult's fantasy story is plenty, specifically one that uses feminism as their base theory. McDonough analyses multiple young adults story to see how female protagonist is portrayed (McDonough, 2017). Loo have used Butler's approach to analyze the female protagonist in the series *The Hunger Games* switched between acts to survive (Loo, 2014). Wolford also have analyze some recent young adult's fantasy to find how female characters are showed to be more and more powerful nowadays than a stereotypically a passive character (Wolford, 2011). Larssen analyze *The Awakening* and *Looking for Alaska* using female agency showing that a story with an agentic women usually get punished in the plot for being an agentic women (Larssen, 2022).

But from all that analysis on children's and young adult's fantasy story, none have been done on *Runaway*. That's why this article chooses *Runaway* as a source of data, not only there have been no previous studies of Gender Performativity, and this story also shows multiple female characters doing acts that subvert the traditional female characters. This article also uses Butler's gender performativity because it will be the base theory of the analysis.

The objectives of this article are: (1) To analyze the gender performativity of Foeslayer, and other female characters in *Runaway* using Butler's gender performativity. (2) To interpret how those gender performativity portrayed each character.

2. METHODS

This article uses Qualitative research to analyze Butler's gender performativity in *Runaway*. Qualitative research is a way of researching by asking "why" and "how" rather than measuring, or counting data (Creswell, 2018). This article uses Qualitative research because this article will see how the female characters is represented in the story.

This article will use close reading for gathering data. Close reading are a careful reading in a text or passages paying attention to it's wording, structure, or any other feature to see how those aspect can create meaning (Smith, 2016). This article will use close reading to find data.

For the data this article will pick some passages from *Runaway* that show Gender Performativity. This article will examine how these passages show Gender Performativity from female characters, then this article will interpret those to see how the characters is represented.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity revolves around the idea that gender is grained through repeated acts and not innate (Butler, 1999). *Runaway* from Tui. T. Sutherland shows gender performativity through multiple female characters, each character with their own acts that represent gender performativity.

Foeslayer's defiance. At the beginning of the story Foeslayer had some arguments with her mother, Prudence. When Prudence scold her "Where have you been?... I told you the prince was coming! Didn't I say to stay put in your corner?", Foeslayer instead of submitting to be silent and obedient, she responds sharply "We're in a dome,... It doesn't have corners", which make Prudence even more angry responding "'Foeslayer, don't be a toadstool right now. I don't need your smart mouth ruining everything.'" This exchange show how female character should just be obedient to their mother. But instead, Foeslayer subverts that expectation by arguing her opinion. In Butler's point of views, Prudence is trying to enforce what's called coherent Identification, which mean that someone have to be cultivated, policed and enforced (Butler, 1999). Foeslayer act here was an act that breaks the general gender roles through her act, which aligned with Butler's gender performativity. This isn't the only time Foeslayer and Prudence argue.

Later in the story, when Foeslayer and Arctic's relationship is leaked to the public, Prudence tried to confront them "What... This... what are you?" but Foeslayer told her mother "There's no time to argue, Mother, Prince Arctic and I have fallen in love, and he's coming back to the Night Kingdom with us. But that means we have to leave right now." Prudence responded angrily "Foeslayer!... This is exactly the kind of brainless catastrophe I should have expected from you! But worse! You cannot steal the prince of the IceWings!" Foeslayer argues back "I'm not stealing him!" In this exchange we can see that Foeslayer and Prudence arguing again. In this exchange Foeslayer boldly assert her will, before her mother even manage to argue, and when her mother argues, Foeslayer argues back. This shows resistance act, rather than being quiet and just obeying her mother, Foeslayer fights back and asserts her beliefs, breaking the traditional gender role. This act supports Butler's claim that gender is obtained through acts (Butler, 1999), this and the acts previously shows that Foeslayer is subverting the traditional gender act of being quiet and obedient.

On the other hand, Snowflake, a noble Icewing, has been trained to always be perfect and to not show her emotions. Snowflake have recited "*Freeze over your anger. Never let anyone see it. Nobody wants to hear about your feelings. Calm and collected on the outside; that's all that matters*" in her mind. This passage show that Snowflake have to always stay calm and collected no matter what. Snowflake was forced to do this because of the authority. Butler mention that coherent Identification of a female must be cultivated, policed, and enforced by an authority figure (Butler, 1999). Snowflake upbringing support Butler coherent identification, by Snowflake being forced to be obedient.

But despite Snowflake being forced to be obedient, Snowflake subtly tried to break the expectation. This show when Snowflake was talking with another Icewing, Snowfox about being arranged to marry the prince "Then true love with a handsome prince just fell into your talons?... You must be the happiest dragon in the Ice Kingdom" Snowflake responded with a whiff of sarcasm in her tone "am so lucky,...He's very... charming." This shows that at the surface she looks like a proud dragon, but the slight sarcasm shows her annoyance. This echoes Butler's idea of parodic or exaggerated performances, this is where an act is an illusion to the true nature to hide the true intentions (Butler, 1999). Snowflake way of being sarcastic is her way of exaggerating performance, which is part of gender performativity. It shows that Snowflake is forced to follow the norms, but quietly she tried to resist it by doing an exaggerated act.

Snowfox created her identity as the cunning parter. This can be seen in the first time she meet Snowflake "Snowfox and Snowflake... we're either destined to be great friends or terrible enemies, aren't we?" Snowfox's way of introduction show her boldness and confidence, making sure Snowflake knows that they can be a great allies, or a great enemies if Snowflake ever cross Snowfox. Butler points out that gender is gained through repeated acts (Butler, 1999). In Butler's perspective, Snowfox created her gender through breaking the traditional

female identity through her act of being cunning. This is not the only time Snowfox is showing her cunning act.

Later on in the story Snowfox shows more of her cunning act. As in “I’ll spread a rumor among the guards that something strange might be happening tomorrow night. If they see Arctic trying to escape with the NightWings, he won’t be able to change his mind and slither back. He’ll have to keep flying.” This was her plan to ruin Arctic’s reputation by setting up a scene. This once again a repeated act that show her cunningness. Butler points out that gender is gained through repeated acts (Butler, 1999). With that repeated cunningness act Snowflake created her gender as the cunning princess, instead of a more passive princess.

Another character that shows gender performativity is Queen Diamond, the ruler of the Icewings. Queen Diamond, as a high ranking dragons can enforce gender norms, as shown in “You’re a dragon who knows how to keep her mouth shut,... Either you understand that I’m not interested in your opinions, or you don’t have any, which would be preferable. I suppose I’ll be able to tolerate your presence in my palace, so long as you make equally silent brats.” Queen Diamond said this to Snowflake. This utterance shows how Queen Diamond is a powerful dragon that can enforce gender norms. Butler’s theory support this, Butler mention that female identification are enforced by an authority figure (Butler, 1999). This affected Snowflake on how she perceives gender, and she has to be silent and obedient to be a good female.

Similarly, Prudence, the mother of Foeslayer, can also enforce gender norms to Foeslayer. This was shown in “All I can say is you’d better have dragonets fast, Foeslayer. As many as possible, so our tribe can inherit animus magic and make this whole disaster worthwhile.” This was said right after Foeslayer and Prudence argues about Foeslayer’s relationship with Arctic. While Prudence not as powerful as Queen Diamond, her authority is still higher on Foeslayer, and in turn with that utterance Prudence is trying to enforce the idea that a good female must have many children. This again supported by Butler’s theory, that female identification are enforced by an authority figure (Butler, 1999). While this might not affect Foeslayer as much, Prudence still gives the idea that if Foeslayer fail to go through with this norm, she’ll break the norm.

From all of this data, it is shown that *Runaway* show female character in a different lens, rather than the typical traditional female character. This story shows a more active female character. As shown in Foeslayer’s defiance that resist the traditional female straits in story, Snowflake’s performance to do the expected female role but secretly tries to subvert it using her facade, Snowfox’s repeated cunningness show her as a more active than a passive female character rather than follow the traditional female roles she subvert it with her cunningness, Queen Diamond and Prudence’s authority to enforce gendered rule to their respective daughter showing how their authority can affect the gendered expectation on their daughter.

4. CONCLUSION

This article shows that *Runaway*’s female characters show gender performative acts, subverting the traditional female characteristic. By using Butler’s gender performativity this article shows that Foeslayer, Snowflake, Snowfox, Queen Diamond, and Prudence execute behaviors that defy the expectation of a female character. From this article we can see that female character is more diverse in the young adult story. This article only analyzes one story, other than *Runaway*, Tui T. Sutherland has more novels that are similar to this story, and there hasn’t been much analysis on it. Future research analyzing the other story from Tui T. Sutherland may help deepen the understanding of young adult story and may pull more interest in stories from Tui T. Sutherland.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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