

Kelsea's Objections against Men's Stigma in Leading a Kingdom in Johansen's *The Queen of the Tearling*

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Abstract

Kelsea is a female character in a novel written by Erika Johansen entitled *The Queen of The Tearling*. When she is nineteen years old, she becomes a queen. Although she has the highest status in her kingdom, sometimes underestimated by men because she is a girl. The purpose of this research is to reveal Kelsea's objections against men's stigma in leading a kingdom. This is a qualitative research. The result of this research shows that Kelsea breaks the men's stigma saying women are weak. Kelsea argues with the general of her army because he thinks women are bad in military strategy. Moreover, Kelsea proves that she has power to dismiss her uncle from her castle because he corrupts and takes the freedom of the women who satisfy him. In addition, Kelsea sets herself equal with her Queen Guards to learn how to fight with sword and wear armor because she will do something while those men die for her. As a conclusion, Kelsea acts as a strong woman with dignity.

Keywords: politics, tearling, objections, feminism, men's stigma

INTRODUCTION

In this world, there are men and women. Men mostly work outside while women stay at home. Men lead and women follow them. Men take actions to protect women. From these phenomena, men considerably have higher status and more important roles compared to women.

In politics matter, men tend to make decisions. Women will simply agree because men believe that women have lower status. According to Millett (2000), politics is power-structured relationship; a group of people controlled by the other group. The power here belongs to men. A group of women will keep silent when men have reached a decision. This is unfair because women also have right to state their thought.

"...our society...is a patriarchy...every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands" (Millett, 2000, p. 25).

Millett also mentions T.S.Eliot's statement that the philosophy and art of our culture is "of male manufacture". It seems that men dominate this world in many areas because the center of power is on men. This matter raises women's objection because they also want to take a part in the society.

Basic patriarchal politics or social distinctions of patriarchy include temperament, role, and status (Millett, 2000). There is a prejudice of male superiority, so superior status is in the male and inferior status is in the female. The temperament contains stereotyped terms, masculine and feminine. Meanwhile, the role of women is always about infants and the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition belongs to the male (Millett, 2000).

"...aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue," and ineffectuality in the female" (Millett, 2000, p. 26). Furthermore, Tyson (2006) states that traditional gender roles put men as rational, strong, protective,

and decisive; while women are emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. Those words are the description for both sexes. Although it is not always true, people seem to believe that it is not wrong either.

Male and female have very different life experiences and cultures. They have been educated since they are babies, for example taking compliment from someone. A person says "this kid is beautiful, isn't she?", so the baby girl is educated to be beautiful. This illustration happens to a baby boy when he is complimented as handsome (Millett, 2000).

"In a society where status is dependent upon the economic, social, and educational circumstances of class, it is possible for certain females to appear to stand higher than some males" (Millett, 2000, p. 36). This statement relieves the anxiety of women about their position. Surely women have a chance to be equal to men, even higher.

In this research, I use a novel entitled *The Queen of The Tearling* written by Erika Johansen because it talks about a woman who wants equality. Kelsea, the main character, is a queen surrounded by men. Those men are her Queen Guards and soldiers. Kelsea is neither feminine nor slender; even she does not look like her mother, the late Queen Elyssa, who has perfect beauty.

Kelsea is still nineteen years old. She is too young to be a queen, but it is her right to claim the throne at this age because her mother has passed away. Since a baby, Kelsea does not live at the Keep (the castle) in order to protect her. Her uncle, Regent Thomas, always tries to kill her. Hence, her Queen Guards pick her up from a cottage in the wood to take her back to the castle. At first, Kelsea is underestimated by her Queen Guards.

The Queen Guards know that Kelsea has lived with Carlin and Barty, Kelsea's foster parents. Those men have stigma that Kelsea is as weak as her mother, Queen Elyssa. On the other hand, they do not know what Kelsea has learned with Carlin about how to be a

true queen and the knowledge about how to survive in an open area with Barty. Here, Kelsea tries to prove that she is not like what her Queen Guards think.

The problem comes when Kelsea stops the slavery in her kingdom, Tearling. Based on the Mort Treaty (a peace agreement) made by Queen Elyssa and the Red Queen, Tearling needs to send two hundred and fifty slaves to Mortmesne. Otherwise, the Red Queen as the queen of Mortmesne will invade Tearling. The invasion will surely come, so Kelsea plans the military strategy with her general, but the general hesitates to Kelsea's decision because she is a girl. General Bermond says that women are bad in military.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research using feminism approach. The theories used in this research are sexual politics by Kate Millett and feminism by Lois Tyson. The material object is the novel *The Queen of The Tearling* by Erika Johansen. This novel is the first series of Tearling trilogy written in 2015 and published by HarperCollins Publishers. The data are taken from this novel through literary study.

There are some procedures conducted in this research, they are: (1) identifying the topic in the novel *The Queen of The Tearling* related to feminism, (2) doing a literature review that is relevant with the research question, (3) collecting the data and reading the novel *The Queen of The Tearling* by Erika Johansen, (4) analyzing the data and explaining it according to the theory of feminism, and (5) summarizing the explanation.

DISCUSSION

What Kelsea Has Learned

Kelsea is the child of Queen Elyssa, the former Queen of Tearling. Not long after giving birth, there is information about the death of Queen Elyssa. Then, Regent Thomas,

Kelsea's uncle, leads Tearling. He always wants the throne for himself and tries to kill Kelsea when she is a baby. In order to be safe, Kelsea is moved to a secret cottage in the middle of the wood and raised by her foster parents, Carlin and Barty. When Kelsea reaches her nineteenth birthday, she will be ready to claim her throne.

Carlin is actually Queen Elyssa's former teacher and a friend of Kelsea's grandmother. Now Carlin teaches Kelsea in the cottage, so Kelsea will be a true queen with intelligence. Carlin has her private library in the cottage and it becomes Kelsea's classroom too. Carlin teaches Kelsea basic math, languages, geography, and history. If Kelsea can do her assignments before dinner, she may read one literary work and stay awake till the book is finished. Carlin is fair, but firm:

"Carlin was fair, but she was also hard. If Kelsea completed all of her schoolwork by dinnertime, her reward was to be allowed to pick a book from the library and stay up reading until she had finished" (Johansen, 2015, p. 8).

Not only Carlin, Barty teaches Kelsea as well. He used to be a Queen Guard and a botanist. Kelsea learns how to survive in an open area with Barty. He tells her the way to set a trap for rabbits, to recognize plants that can be eaten, and to defend her with a knife. Kelsea knows the wood around the cottage very well and she loves to ride a horse. She can climb the trees and hide herself with the help of her dark green cloak.

Kelsea's Temper among The Men

There are nine Queen Guards from the Keep (the castle) picking up Kelsea at the cottage. They need to take Kelsea back to the castle because Kelsea has been nineteen years old and have right to claim the throne as the heir of Tearling. At first, most of the Queen Guards do not bow to Kelsea with all their heart. The Captain of the Queen Guards, Carroll, bows very low, but there is a pause before other Queen Guards bow to her. One of them even gives only little bow:

"A moment passed before the rest bowed as well. The guard with the mace bent perhaps an inch, with the slightest perceptible dip of his chin" (Johansen, 2015, p. 5).

Hesitation towards Kelsea

Some of the Queen Guards do not believe if Kelsea is the real princess because Kelsea does not look like her mother. The real princess must have a royal jewel and a scar on her skin. Kelsea has them because she is indeed who they are looking for:

"She looks nothing like her mother," the red-bearded man replied sharply..."She has the Raleigh eyes," another guard remarked. "I would prefer to see the jewel and the scar," replied the leader, and the red-haired man nodded as well" (Johansen, 2015, p. 5).

This phenomena show that Kelsea has not obtained the respect and trust from her Queen Guards. Thus, Kelsea wants to prove to them that she is better than what they think. The first thing Kelsea does is riding a horse. She feels tired and hurt because they all ride horses in a very long period. However, Kelsea is disappointed because all men ride male horses, but she is provided with a female horse:

"Why did they bring me a mare, when you all ride stallions?" "We didn't know if you'd be able to ride, Lady," he replied, and this time there was no mistaking the mockery in his voice. "We didn't know if you could control a stallion" (Johansen, 2015, p. 20).

The man's statement refers to humiliation. Kelsea knows that the Queen Guards think she is weak. She hides her pain and continues to ride the horse:

"But how could she win the loyalty of any of these men? They probably thought her weak. Perhaps they thought all women so...Now the tips of her fingers were numb, her palms raw and reddened from the rough leather of the reins" (Johansen, 2015, p. 17-18).

When they stop riding, Carroll orders Lazarus, one of the Queen Guards, to take care of Kelsea's horse, but Kelsea rejects it

because she wants to do it by herself. This rejection shows that Kelsea is independent. She is able and willing to do it. On the other hand, Kelsea becomes angry when Lazarus lets her decide the name of the horse:

"You're the Queen, Lady. Her name is whatever you choose,... "Her name, please." Kelsea's temper kindled. The men all thought so badly of her. Why?" (Johansen, 2015, p. 20).

Kelsea forces Lazarus to speak. Finally Lazarus tells Kelsea that he usually calls that female horse May. Here, Lazarus plays with Kelsea's temper. Kelsea gets annoyed with Lazarus' prejudice:

"What the hell did you think I was doing out there in the woods all these years?" "Playing with dolls, Lady. Putting up your hair. Trying on dresses, perhaps." "Do I look like a girl's girl to you, Lazarus?" Kelsea felt her voice rising" (Johansen, 2015, p. 20-21).

Helping To Set Up A Tent

In the middle of the journey to the castle, Kelsea camps with the Queen Guards. They all have specific jobs to do based on Carroll's command. Kelsea feels useless and she wants to help. She knows that she is about to be a queen, but it is not completely right to do nothing:

"...the rest of the Guard, who were also going about their various tasks. She noticed the youngest guard pulling the makings of her tent from his saddlebags...She'd never felt more useless" (Johansen, 2015, p. 27-28).

Eventually Kelsea offers a help to set up a tent with Pen, one of the Queen Guards, which is friendly. Pen is the youngest among the Queen Guards and he is friendly to Kelsea. Although Kelsea has the highest status among those men, she still has to push them to state what she wants. Sometimes Kelsea does it with force. She wants to break the stigma saying she is weak.

The struggles for convincing her Queen Guards work on Kelsea. She gets an appreciation from Carroll, her captain

because she is not like what he thinks before. Carroll is sure that she will be a true queen, not like the former Queen Elyssa. Carroll says this statement before leaving them all because they need to be separate:

"Lady, I think you're made of much stronger stuff than you appear. You strike me as one who might make a real queen one day, but you're marked for death, and so are those who follow you" (Johansen, 2015, p. 31).

Being Hangover

Next, Kelsea meets Fetch on the journey to the castle. Fetch is a thief but he belongs to the good side because he hates Regent Thomas, Kelsea's uncle who corrupts. Fetch and his companions doubt that Kelsea can lead the kingdom properly. Kelsea needs to pass a test from Fetch:

"We wanted to see what sort of queen you look to be." "Why not just give me a test, then?...I've had too much mead to take an examination" (Johansen, 2015, p. 80).

Being hangover, Kelsea can answer Fetch's question well. Kelsea drinks ale, a kind of beer, with Fetch and his companions. She also plays cards with them. Here, Kelsea proves that she is not a fool. One of those men gives a compliment:

"She's not drunk," Morgan disagreed. "She's lost her legs, but there's nothing wrong with her wits" (Johansen, 2015, p. 82).

Stopping Slave Shipment

When Kelsea succeeds to arrive at the Keep (the castle), Kelsea directly asks her Queen Guards to stop the slave shipment. In order to avoid the invasion from the Red Queen (Mortmesne's Queen), Tearling must send two hundred and fifty slaves to Mortmesne. The people of Tearling will be safe from war, but they suffer for losing their family. Kelsea has made a clear decision to give freedom for her people:

"There will be no more shipments to Mortmesne!" the Queen shouted, and the

crowd answered in another incoherent roar”
“(Johansen, 2015, p. 127).

The people of Tearing are grateful, but the Overseer of the Census, Arlen Thorne, impolitely debates with Kelsea. Kelsea shouts to Arlen Thorne and explains that she cares with her people’s safety. She will think about the coming invasion later. Arlen Thorne warns Kelsea and he doubts that Kelsea is the true heir of Tearling:

“The Queen of the Tearling has been dead these many years,” Thorne announced. “If you claim to be the uncrowned princess, this kingdom will require better proof than your word” (Johansen, 2015, p. 124).

Kelsea wins the debate because Arlen Thorne is ordered to let go the people of Tearling from the cages of slaves. Before this, those people are put in cages to send to Mortmesne. This time, the cages are being opened and burned:

“Kelsea had never seen fire so hungry; flames spread over the floor of the cage and then began, improbably, to climb the iron bars. A burst of heat blew across the lawn, scattering the few people who had ventured too close to the cage. It was like being in front of a lit oven” (Johansen, 2015, p. 134).

Dismissing Regent Thomas

The quick action of Kelsea after being crowned is dismissing Regent Thomas, her uncle. Although he is the only family she has, she takes him away. Regent Thomas is evil and bad. He corrupts and never thinks about the prosperity of the kingdom. All he wants is satisfaction for him.

Regent Thomas is absolutely a man, but he cannot refuse Kelsea’s decision and stay in the castle. Kelsea’s position as a queen is higher than a regent. The family relation does not disturb Kelsea to do what is right:

“...he had the same deep green, almond-shaped eyes as her own. A true blood relation, and the only one she had left...This man wasn’t a relation, her mind insisted, not

if she didn’t want him to be” (Johansen, 2015, p. 163).

Kelsea has more intelligence than Regent Thomas. It can be seen when Kelsea understands Mort language and speaks to one of Regent Thomas’ women. Kelsea breaks the stigma that men are smarter than women. Here, Kelsea is smarter than her uncle:

“The Regent stared at Marguerite with a bewildered expression, and Kelsea shook her head, disgusted; he didn’t even speak Mort” (Johansen, 2015, p. 241)

Preparation for The Coming Invasion

The Red Queen will invade Tearling soon because Kelsea stops the slave shipment. Actually Kelsea has dilemma between the freedom of her people or avoiding invasion. There is also no guarantee if Kelsea will win the war against the Red Queen.

Thus, Kelsea prepares for the coming invasion by improving self-defense. Kelsea is good with a knife but she wants to master a sword. Kelsea warns all her Guards to be ready for the Red Queen’s invasion. The people of Tearling will be evacuated if Mortmesne army comes. On the other hand, Lazarus, one of Kelsea’s Guards, promises her to protect Kelsea no matter what. He dedicates his soul for Kelsea:

“Then I vow to guard you against death.” Kelsea blinked...She had won a guard. Only one, but he was the most important” (Johansen, 2015, p. 117).

Lazarus is a strong and loyal man. When he says he wants to protect Kelsea, it means his position is superior. Kelsea needs protection because she is a woman. In contrast, Lazarus’s dedication is done because Kelsea is above him. Kelsea is his queen, so Lazarus works for Kelsea in terms of protecting. Still, Kelsea gets a higher status than Lazarus.

Debating with General Bermond

General Bermond is the leader of Tearling army. He gives orders to others. He

is used to taking care of battles without an agreement from the former Queen Elyssa. Now is different because Kelsea leads the kingdom as the queen of Tearling. Kelsea is preparing for the coming invasion, so she discusses the military strategy with General Bermond. But he underestimates Kelsea because he thinks women are bad in military stuff:

“Forgive me, Majesty. But as I told your mother many times, women haven’t the gift for military planning. She always left these matters to us” (Johansen, 2015, p. 282).

General Bermond suggests Kelsea to send slaves in order to avoid the invasion from the Red Queen. Kelsea becomes angry because General Bermond cannot understand her decision to stop the suffering of people. It is true that people will suffer more if there is an invasion, but at least they can gather with their family by not being separated.

Kelsea acts bravely and she shows her capability to make General Bermond do what she wants. It means Kelsea, as a woman, takes control against a man. She finally gives an order to General Bermond and convinces him that she is his queen:

“General Genot is not the king of Mortmesne, any more than you are the king of the Tearling, Bermond...I will ship no more slaves, not even you. Resign yourself to that fact, and let’s move forward” (Johansen, 2015, p. 282-283).

Armor and Sword for Kelsea

Kelsea wears armor as long as she goes back to the castle from the cottage in the wood. The function of this armor is to protect and hide her identity. Kelsea is used to wearing dark green cloak, but she often wears armor everywhere, including in her coronation. She does not like the weight of the armor and it is not comfortable either, but it is necessary:

“I need my own armor, and soon. A silly queen I’ll look when I’ve been slowly flattened into a man...God granted me a

small enough helping of femininity. I’d like to keep what I have” (Johansen, 2015, p. 153).

When she has become a queen, she asks Fell, an arms master who is responsible to make such thing, to create Kelsea’s armor with her size. Fell feels surprised because it is very rare for a woman to wear armor. Once again, Kelsea has broken this man’s stigma:

“Only appearance, Lady, but appearance in a queen is important. For you to wield a sword, it’s...not queenly...And it might take a while to find a blacksmith who’ll make armor for a woman” (Johansen, 2015, p. 230).

Moreover, Kelsea orders a sword to wield. She also learns how to fight with Venner, an arms master that oversees training. Kelsea is not like women in general who are feminine. Kelsea wants to be equal with men and fighting together with them against the Red Queen.

Being a Fake Soldier

After Kelsea commands to forbid any slave shipment, Arlen Thorne secretly builds cages to send slaves to Mortmesne. He has an agreement with the Red Queen. With the help of a magical necklace, Kelsea knows Thorne’s plan. Kelsea tells this to her Guards but no one believes her in the beginning:

“Thorne. He’s made a deal behind my back, and he’s on the way to Mortmesne with a shipment of Tear...Dammit, Lazarus, I know!...Don’t even think about trying to stop me, Lazarus” (Johansen, 2015, p. 349).

Kelsea’s Guards chase Arlen Thorne together with Kelsea. Kelsea cuts her hair very short and wears army dress in order not to look like a queen. The appearance of Kelsea looks masculine. Kelsea rules to do this although her Guards feel reluctant. They do not believe Kelsea’s vision through her necklace. The way Kelsea tracks Thorne’s direction is also by using her magical necklace:

“...the sapphire began to pull Kelsea along. There was no other way to describe it; the thing exerted physical force, as though a

string were tied beneath her rib cage” (Johansen, 2015, p. 357).

This scene proves that Kelsea’s orders will always be a must for her Guards, a woman leading men. She has a crucial status as the queen, so the hesitation coming from her Guards will be no problem as long as they do what is told.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it can be concluded that Kelsea has higher status than the men around

her. Her position as a queen allows her to make decisions to lead her kingdom. Kelsea has more intelligence than her uncle because Kelsea is educated well as long as she is being away from the castle. Kelsea is a strong woman who likes to learn how to fight with a sword and she is good enough with a knife. To defend herself, she wears armor. This proves that Kelsea is not weak and passive like women in general. Here, Kelsea shows aggression, intelligence, and force against men. She breaks men’s stigma by stating her objections.

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